

LIVING BOTTLES.

"What will you have for dessert?" asked my friend with whom I was dining at a cafe in the old City of Mexico.

From where we sat I looked out upon a sea of waving palms and tropical plants. The great leaves of the banana, with their rich green tints changing to darker hues, moved listlessly in the evening breeze that stirred and rustled the pointed cocoa leaves in close imitation of falling rain. Richly-colored lizards darted about among the foliage, gorgeous insects filled the air, while, far away, a fitting background to the picture, rose the deep blue outlines of the distant mountains. The scene was dessert enough for me, and I said so.

"Ah! you want something light and esthetic," laughed my companion, and whispering something in Spanish to the waiter, the latter darted off; returning some minutes later, he placed before me the strangest dessert it was ever my good-fortune to see.

At first I supposed it was a dish of white currants. The objects were round, but of a clear amber hue, as if drops or globules of this beautiful substance had been moulded into ornamental shapes. Each globule seemed to have a stem, and looking at my friend enquiringly, I found that he took one by this portion and ate it as he would a grape.

I did the same, and found that instead of fruit I had eaten a little morsel of honey, quite delicious, and certainly served in a tempting way.

Looking closer, I now discovered that the honey-balls were animals, none less, in fact, than the famous Mexican delicacy, the honey-ant, known to science under the title of *Myrmecocystus Mexicanus*.

"Yes," replied my friend in answer to a question, "what you thought a fruit is nothing but an ant gorged with honey. Some people object to them, but I leave it to you, as to which is the worse, eating one of these gourmands that is insensible to pain, or devouring an oyster raw immediately after it has been torn from the shell and tortured with lemon-juice and condiments? It's merely a matter of taste, and I prefer the ant and its honey."

My readers will ask, how did it happen that so many ants contained such an over-supply of honey, and in the explanation we find one of the most remarkable as well as curious features of animal life.

The honey-ants are found from Southern Mexico as far north as Colorado, and are easily recognized by the tall mound-like structures or nests that they erect.

They are like the owl, almost entirely nocturnal, carrying on their out-door work at night, although their domestic duties underground are probably not neglected during the day. As soon as the darkness comes on, they sally out of their subterranean cities, and wander about, climbing bushes and trees in search of the food of their choice, which, curiously enough, is honey.

This will occur to you as an exceptional case among ants, as they generally, perhaps, as a rule, feed upon material that can be stored up; but here where the food is liquid you would assume that it could not be laid by for a rainy day, so to speak, for the simple reason that the ants have no tanks, flasks, or bottles to hold the supply, nor the ingenuity to make them. Let us not say, however, that they have not sufficient intelligence to find a substitute, as they certainly have, and we find it in the curious desert set before us in the City of Mexico.

If we examine one of these ants, we shall find that the abdomen, or rear larger portion, is protected by ten plates or bands that are movable, and as they are connected or underlaid by a very delicate membrane almost like rubber, they can be stretched apart to a wonderful degree, allowing the abdomen to assume the appearance of a balloon four or five times its normal size. The ants also have a crop that is capable of great distention, and governed by sets of powerful muscles; in other respects they resemble ordinary ants.

Now by some arrangement, whether by agreement taking their turn, or by force, is not known, certain ants are selected by the others as living bottles; in other words, they are obliged to receive the supply brought in by the rest, and retain it. When the foraging ants return, they have their crops filled with honey, and proceed directly to the bottles.

Placing their mouths in contact with that of the unfortunate living receptacle, by contraction of the muscles mentioned, the contents of the crop are forced out and into the bottle. Ant after ant unloads in this way, until the elasticity of the recipient is tested to the utmost, and it can receive or hold no more.

The insect is then absolutely helpless. The crop and abdomen have expanded until it resembles an amber-hued sac, as we have seen, the size of a currant, the head and limbs having almost disappeared, hanging upon the side like a stem, while the other organs within the little creature are so pressed out of shape that it is with the greatest difficulty they are traced.

Loaded down in this way, and surfeited with sweets, the bottles are naturally powerless, and that this is appreciated by the others is evident from an examination of their nests, when it will be found that the honey-bearers are given a separate room and there tended with the greatest care. They are, perhaps, placed there before being filled, or carried in later; but in any case, they are found together in a separate apartment, hanging from the roof, to which they cling with their limbs, and appearing like ripe fruit suspended from invisible vines.

This, then, is the pantry, or store-room, of the honey-ants, and here is kept what

the house upside down, and leave her to right it."

"But what can a fellow do? If I had as many nice things as you have, I don't suppose I'd be quite so anxious for a general tear around."

"Maybe it is because we never have 'tear rounds,' as you call them, that we have the other things," replied Tom.

Well, as I said, they were having a royal time all by themselves. Mamma had given them permission to use her "colors," and some remarkable work was being done.

"I am going to paint a portrait of Martin Luther," Tom announced.

"Martin Luther!" exclaimed Fred, from the other side of the table. "Who is he, and what do you know about him?"

"Oh, I know quite a good deal about him. In the first place, you remember that Sunday you stayed at home from church with the mumps? It was away back in October, it was November, the tenth of November. Well, Sunday was the eleventh, but the day was the tenth."

"What under the sun are you talking about? Your story is like a rail fence."

"Why," said Tom, laughing at his own blunders, "you know that Martin Luther was born four hundred years ago, and his birthday was the tenth of November; and as the eleventh was the Sabbath, they concluded to have a service all about him that

to be a very strong one, and very—oh, well! if you had read all about him, you would know how to paint his portrait. Oh, he was a grand man! I am glad I got hold of those books. I told Professor Marsh that I was reading D'Aubigne, and he said he wished every boy would read it."

"What did Martin Luther do?" asked Katrine, adding a little carmine to the paint upon her palette.

"It would take a week to tell what he did. It took that old fellow who wrote those books about a dozen volumes to get it all in; and you expect me to put it into one sentence. He thought things were going wrong in the Church and he set himself against the wrong practices and began a reform. This book is called the *History of the Reformation*, and it tells all about how Luther stood up against the Pope, and how, even when his life was in danger, he never flinched. Oh, he was a grand character!"

The children worked on silently for a time. Presently Tom exclaimed:

"This picture looks like father! And, come to think of it, I believe he looks like Luther. Don't you remember, Fred, that day when Mr. Smith told him he would lose trade if he didn't vote for Mr. Wood, how father stood up and said, 'I can better afford to lose trade than to sully my conscience!'"

"I think my father is as good as your Luther, and when I am grown up I mean to write a dozen books about him."

Loyal little Katrine!

I have told you this bit of a story, hoping it may direct the attention of some of the boys and girls to this same *History of the Reformation*, written by this D'Aubigne.—*The Pansy*.

"SAYING A GOOD THING."

Thirty years ago Matthew B— was graduated from one of our principal colleges. A brilliant success in life was prophesied for him by his teachers, fellow-students and acquaintances. He was, they acknowledged, thorough as a scholar, possessed a strong logical mind and keen wit; was honest, earnest, and by birth and training a gentleman. Yet when he left the college, not a friend came to shake his hand and to wish him good fortune.

B— had a keen eye for the frailties of other people, and a gift for sarcasm. He delighted to "give a quiet cut," as he called it, to the man he liked best; to thrust some sharp witticism into a hidden defect or weakness, and watch the victim writhe in impotent misery.

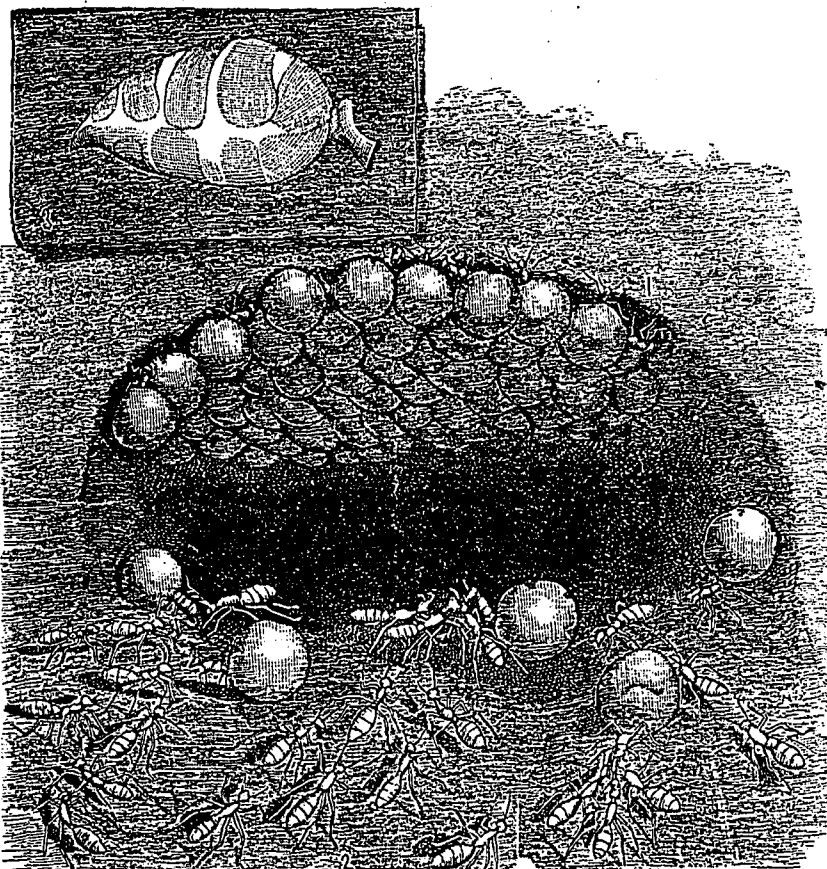
He really did not appreciate the pain he gave in the enjoyment of saying "a good thing." But he left college without a friend. He went into the ministry with the most sincere purpose. His sermons were powerful, his appeals earnest. But personally he became obnoxious to one congregation after another, until finally he was obliged to give up the charge of a church altogether. He then became a teacher.

No man was more competent for the work, as far as knowledge went, but his satirical gibes made him detested by his pupils. He died a year ago, a poor, lonely, embittered man. Whatever affection or feeling lay unsatisfied in his breast had been thwarted by the habit of sarcasm, which drove all love and friendship from him.

In the arsenal at Venice there is still preserved a small golden key, which bears the name of the Key of Death. It was an instrument invented in the fifteenth century by an Algerine named Tebaldo. It hung at his girdle, and while toying carelessly with it, he would turn the handle, when a needle of exquisite fineness was shot from it, which would bury itself unfelt in the flesh of the person whom he wished to kill. The needle was tipped with a deadly poison. It was not until Tebaldo's victims could be counted by the score that his secret was discovered.

The young man who sets out in life with a keen wit, a poor opinion of human nature, and a delight in saying a good thing at anybody's cost, will soon find that he wields as cruel and deadly a weapon as this famous Key of Death, which will not only wound others, but poison his own life and leave him to a solitary, miserable old age.—*Youth's Companion*.

BE ALWAYS displeased at what thou art, if thou desire to attain to what thou art not; for where thou hast pleased thyself there thou abidest.—*Quarles*.



1. Store-house, and ants clinging to the wall. 2. Filling a living bottle. 3. Abdomen of honey-ant, showing the plates.

corresponds to the winter store of other animals. When the other ants are hungry they proceed to this room, and lick off the drops of honey that by muscular contraction are forced out by the patient and never hungry living bottle.

The nests of the honey-ant are eagerly sought after by the native Mexicans, and the store-houses pillaged of the bottles that are served as delicacies by them.—*Youth's Companion*.

THE YOUNG ARTISTS.

The Flandreau children were having a royal time. Mamma Flandreau had been obliged to go out, leaving them to themselves for a couple of hours. With some children I have known, being left to themselves would mean a general upturning and overturning of whatever the house contained. Not so with the Flandreaus. Said Tom one day:

"What's the fun of turning things topsy-turvy. We only have to put things to rights again, and that's no fun!"

"Oh, I never put things back!" said young Ames. "Mother always does that." "I don't make my mother wait on me," said Tom. "I would be ashamed to turn

day. In a great many churches the minister gave a little account of his life, and that is the way I got interested, by hearing Doctor Brown preach. Then I found a lot of books in the library, ever so many volumes, and I have been reading them. I've seen the books there before, but I always thought they were dry. I tell you I was mistaken that time! They are anything but dry! They read like a story, and an awfully fascinating one too. I sat up one night until midnight reading."

"What is the name of this wonderful book, or rather books?"

D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*. You see Doctor Brown mentioned the name of the book in his sermon, and I remembered where I had seen it; and the first thing I did after I came from church was to get the books, and if you'll believe it, I couldn't let them alone!"

Katrine sat upon a high stool, very busy mixing colors. She was intent upon pouring out a few drops of oil, but manifested her interest in Tom's talk by saying:

"But how can you paint Martin Luther's picture, unless you have something to tell you how he looked?"

"Oh, I am going to paint him just as I imagined he looked. I think he would have to be very grand. His face would have