

THE SATURDAY READER.

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TRANSLATED FOR THE "SATURDAY READER" FROM THE FRENCH OF PAUL FEVAL.

A SHORT RAMBLE IN JUNE.

AT this pleasant, sunny season of the year, when nature looks her loveliest—when the grass looks the greenest and the trees the gayest, clad in their new leaves and bright flowers, and the happy songsters of our woods are hymning forth their sweetest tunes—who can content himself with remaining in town, all hot and dusty as it is. Who does not feel impelled to wander forth into the green fields and shady groves of our glorious land; and there, far from the busy haunts of men, admire the wonderful works of creation, and adore their great Creator's name? This year, especially, when from one end of Canada to the other, all is excitement, and in every street of every city, town and village, armed men are hurrying to and fro; brave men, eager to hurl back the threatening foe, and ready and willing to sacrifice their lives for their country and their country's Queen; and when, from across the wide Atlantic come reports of wars and rumours of wars—when, perhaps, before this, "red battle has stamp'd his foot, and nations felt the shock," how soothing and refreshing it is to withdraw awhile from the toil and turmoil of life to some shady nook, in a retired wood, there to watch the performances of the insect hosts instead of gazing at the evolutions and exercises of military men—there, in quiet, to read the great and wondrous Book of Nature, instead of the exciting and oftentimes false, extras and telegrams.

Let us go where, instead of the gay coats of the infantry and artillery, we will see the splendid coloring of the butterflies and beetles, instead of being deafened and stunned by the warlike airs of military bands—by the rattling of musketry and the roaring of artillery—our spirits will be lulled to rest by the sweet singing of birds, and the gentle, soothing hum of insects; and on our return we will not be less backward in doing battle for our God and for our Queen; because we have been examining creatures that are curiously and wonderfully made, and have been gazing up through nature unto nature's God—who is also the god of battles. We will start, then, on our ramble and doubtless we will find—

"'Tis sweet to muse upon his skill displayed,
Infinite skill in all that he has made—
To trace, in nature's most minute design,
The signature and stamp of power Divine!
Contrivance intricate, express'd with ease,
Where unassisted sight no beauty sees;
The shapely limb, the lubricated joint,
Within the small dimensions of a point;
Muscle and nerve miraculously spun—
His mighty work; who speaks—and it is done!"

The first insect that we spy is a beetle lying quietly under the shelter of a log, seeking to sleep off the effects of its last night's debauch: this is the well known May-beetle, which also

rejoices in the high sounding and classical cognomen of *Phyllophaga quercina*. It is very common at this season of the year, and may be easily recognised, being of a chestnut brown color, smooth but finely punctured; each wing case has two or three slightly elevated longitudinal lines; the breast is clothed with a coating of yellowish down: the knobs of its antennæ contain three leaf-like joints: its average length is nine-tenths of an inch. It flies during the night, from the middle of May to the end of June, with a dull, humming sound, and when it sees a light will enter houses; when near this centre of attraction they appear to become immediately dazzled and bewildered, fly around the candle in a most ferocious manner—in their blind fury dashing themselves against every obstacle in the way of their mad career—hence they have obtained the name of "dors," that is, "darters," and have given rise to the expression "as blind as a beetle." In its perfect state it is very destructive to the leaves of trees, both fruit and forest, so that in some years they do serious damage. The cockchafer of Europe is nearly allied to this insect—this latter sometimes appears in vast numbers. In the year 1688, they appeared in immense swarms in the county of Galway, absolutely covering the hedges and trees, and clinging to each other's backs as bees do when they swarm, in huge clusters of thousands. During the day they were quiet, but as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon, and the shades of evening began to close in, the whole were in motion, and the humming noise caused by the vibrations of their wings sounded like distant drums. They entirely darkened the air, over a space of two or three square miles, and people travelling on the roads or fields found it difficult to make their way, as the insects were continually beating against their faces, causing great pain and annoyance. In a very short time the leaves of all the trees for miles around were totally destroyed, and the country was left as naked and desolate as if it had been the middle of winter instead of mid-summer. Swine and poultry destroyed them in vast numbers; while the native Irish, thinking that it was perfectly fair to devour those who had eaten up the whole produce of the ground, cooked them in various ways and used them for food. Towards the end of summer they disappeared quite suddenly. Muffet informs us that in the month of February, 1574, there were such multitudes of chafers in the western parts of England, that those which fell into the river Severn completely clogged the wheels of the mills worked by that stream.

In its perfect state, its span of life is very short—each individual living only about a week, even if he be enabled to escape from his numerous enemies and destroyers. The females lay their eggs in a hole in the ground, which they dig to the depth of six or seven inches by means of their forelegs, which are armed with strong claws: in about a fortnight, from these eggs emerge little whitish grubs, each with six legs, near a red head, containing a mouth furnished with strong jaws. It remains underground for four years, changing its skin each spring, and committing often the most deplorable ravages on the roots of trees and plants: when its time is come, it burrows still deeper into the earth, forms an oval cavity, (which is lined with some glutinous substance,) and there, retired from the vulgar gaze, it changes its coat for the last time, sleeps its last sleep, and finally comes forth from its chrysalis state a perfect insect.

But here crawling swiftly about this plant, is a well known creature, one with whom we have been acquainted ever since our earliest childhood, and whose misfortunes were wont to

affect deeply our then sensitive hearts, drawing forth from us in infantile accents—

"Lady-bird, Lady-bird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, your children are burnt."

There are very many varieties of this pretty little creature; in fact more than two hundred have been named, described and catalogued. They are distinguishable chiefly by the colors of, and the spots upon their wing-covers: this one is *Coccinella bi-punctata*, it having two spots, one on either wing. These little beetles have been held in very high estimation from the remotest ages. In Germany these are called by the beer-drinking, tobacco smoking natives *Frauen* or *Marien-Kafer*, Lady beetles of the Virgin Mary; while in France they have the equally fine names of *Vaches de Dieu* or *Bêtes de la Vierge*, Cows of the Lord, or Animals of the Virgin. And they have good claims to be held in such esteem, for they are most beneficial to man in destroying those insects which if allowed to go on, propagating and increasing unchecked, would soon reduce the most fertile country into a barren and dreary wilderness—namely, the plant lice (*aphides*.) Lady-birds, both in their perfect and in their larva state, feed on these lice; and few trees, plants or shrubs infested by these disgusting and destructive creatures are to be found without this antidote for them. The grubs, which are of a flattened shape and bluish color, spotted usually with red or yellow, and furnished with six legs near the forepart of the body, are much more voracious than the mature insect: they creep along on the leaves of plants until they find the plant-lice, among which they ravage like wolves in a sheepfold; and then doubtless many an heartbroken aphid parent, pointing to the aldermanic dimensions of the lady, exclaim—

"Foul murder hath been done: lo! here's the proof!"

But these beetles of the Virgin Mary are not to be esteemed merely for their gormandising powers, but they ought also (according to some) to be ranked among the *materia medica*, and to have a place assigned them in the pharmacopœia; for it is a superior and never-failing remedy for tooth-ache, which is immediately cured by putting one or two mashed Lady-birds into the hollow tooth. A well known American entomologist says that he tried this application in two instances, and the toothache was immediately relieved; but he confesses he did not know whether the remedy or the faith of the patient acted therapeutically or the tooth ceased aching of itself. However let us by all means be charitable, and give the benefit of the doubt to the pretty little beetle; and let those who are troubled with pangs in their fangs collect these *coccinellidæ* during the summer months that they may give this simple remedy a fair trial. They, as well as all other insects of the hard-shell kind, may be killed by being immersed in a bottle of alcohol, in which they may be kept for years, if not exactly perfectly sweet, still perfectly fresh and without detriment to their brilliant colors.

Although most of these *aphides* are of no perceptible use to man, and would become a perfect scourge (being so very prolific,) unless their numbers were kept down, would cover the face of the whole earth and would eat every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees, so that there would remain not any green thing in the trees or in the herbs of the field throughout all the land,—still one species is of very great importance as an article of commerce: we refer to the Cochineal insect, to which we are indebted for the most beautiful of the colors which are used to adorn the human form divine. In the days of "auld lang syne," when Cæsar Au-