

All of the Odonata deposit their eggs in water, and the young insects bear some resemblance to the adults in the shape of the head and size of the eyes, and in the avidity with which they prey upon other weaker insects. The young of the Damsel-flies are more slender than those of the true Dragon-flies and are further distinguished by having several flat leaf-like plates at the hind end of the abdomen, which aid in purifying the blood by acquiring fresh air from the very minute bubbles which are present in the water. In the young of the true Dragon-flies there are no such plates, but the air is drawn into and forced out of the hinder part of the body.

There is, among the ignorant, much needless fear of the Dragon-flies. In various sections they are known as Dragon-flies, Darning-needles, Snake-doctors, Mule-killers, Mosquito-hawks, etc. Of these names, the first and last give the truest idea of their habits. They are true dragons of the air, and undoubtedly do devour immense numbers of mosquitoes; for woe unto the gnat or small fly which is spied by a dragon-fly!—a swift swoop of the long, strong wings, a quick dart of the Dragon-fly, and the place which the gnat knows it no more. They are absolutely harmless to man and may be handled in the fingers with impunity: a slight pinching with their jaws is all that they can give,—but this, while nothing to us, means death to weaker creatures.

The appetite of an adult Dragon-fly is something remarkable. I have seen specimens held in the hand cease struggling to munch on a proffered fly, and the same thing may be observed even when the creature is impaled on a pin which is passed directly through the body between the wings. But most remarkable of all was the case in which a captured specimen, when its own body was bent under so that the tip was near its mouth, seized its own abdomen and ate off two of the segments!

The Odonata is a good example of a group of insects which for a long time were regarded as of no economic importance, but which suddenly acquired interest. When it had been clearly demonstrated that mosquitoes may transmit the germs of malaria and yellow fever to man, the question of natural enemies of mosquitoes became important. Mosquitoes lay their eggs in water and the young are known as "wrigglers" or "wiggle-tails." Coursing over the pool and marshes, the large, swift Dragon-flies surely destroy many an impregnated female mosquito, or more likely destroy them when they first emerge, before they are ready to lay eggs. In the pool, creeping about on the bottom in the shallow places, the young Dragon-fly doubtless makes many a happy meal on the luckless wrigglers which come within reach.