

The Ingle Nook.

ANTS, AND HOW TO EXTERMINATE THEM.

The other day I had to look up something in regard to ants, and found myself so interested in their history that the thought occurred to me: Why not pass some of all this on to the Chatterers?

As you know, there has been no end of debating in regard to whether ants possess intellect or not. Some naturalists have written enthusiastically in favor of the theory that they do reason and calculate as to the result of their labors; others repudiate this as nonsensical, and hold that instinct—whatever that poorly-defined quantity may be—and not reason, is the motive power at the back of the marvellous workings of these wonderful little creatures. "Among those who hold the latter theory is the great German naturalist, Rethe, who says: 'They learn nothing, but act mechanically in whatever they do, their complicated reflexes being set off by simple physiological stimuli.'"

Perhaps some of you have read Mark Twain's "Tramp Abroad." It is a book which I can recommend you with all my heart; that is, if you like information and good fun mixed up together. But to return, in one part, which he calls his "chapter on natural history," he tells of an ant which he observed in the Black Forest, and sums up his observation of ants in general as follows: "During many summers now I have watched him when I ought to have been in better business, and I have not yet come across a living ant that seemed to have any more sense than a dead one. . . . I admit his industry, of course; he is the hardest-working creature in the world—when anybody is looking—but his leatherheadedness is the point I make against him. He goes out foraging, he makes a capture, and then, what does he do? Go home? No,—he goes anywhere but home. He doesn't know where home is. His home may be only three feet away—no matter, he can't find it. He makes his capture, as I have said; it is generally something which can be of no sort of use to himself or anybody else; it is usually seven times bigger than it ought to be; he hunts out the awkwardest place to take hold of it; he lifts it bodily up into the air by main force, and starts; not toward home, but in the opposite direction; not calmly and wisely, but with a frantic haste, which is wasteful of his strength; he fetches up against a pebble, and instead of going around it, he climbs over it backwards, dragging his booty after him, tumbles down on the other side, jumps up in a passion, kicks the dust off his clothes, moistens his hands, grabs his property viciously, yanks it this way, then that, shoves it ahead of him a moment, turns tail, and lugs it after him a moment, gets madder, then presently hoists it into the air and goes tearing away in an entirely new direction; comes to a weed; it never occurs to him to go around it, he must climb it, dragging his worthless property to the top—which is as bright a thing to do as it would be for me to carry a sack of flour from Heidelberg to Paris by way of Strasburg steeple; when he gets up there he finds that is not the place, takes a cursory glance at the scenery and either climbs down again or tumbles down, and starts off once more—as usual in a new direction. At the end of half an hour he fetches up within six inches of the place he started from and lays his burden down." . . .

Of course, Mark Twain is a humorist, not a naturalist, and so, possibly, has not given the ant the study necessary to a full understanding of it. Probably his observation has been just about equal to that of the most of us, and that is why we can enjoy his description so much. For my own part, I must confess that nearly all the ants I ever observed acted about in this way; yet once, about a year ago, I watched a colony which

seemed to move about with more common sense. It was made up of small black (I think, but would not like to swear to it now) ants, which had fixed upon an old veranda post as a place of residence. Day after day we saw the little fellows running in and out of the small opening near the bottom of the post, which served as a door to the abode, and presently we noticed that hundreds of them were at work, evidently enlarging the premises. One after another would come to the "door," each laden with a bit of wood resembling a grain of sawdust, which was thrown out on to the step beneath, the little workers then hurrying back again with breathless speed for another burden. Once I saw one of them come out with a dead fellow ant in its mandibles, or whatever it is that it carries things with. The body was not, however, deposited on the growing heap of sawdust. The little pallbearer evidently knew what it was about, and, in order to get its gruesome burden far enough from the opening, carried it down not over one but over two of the steps leading from the veranda.

And now for a few things that some of the naturalists have observed. Whether ants be guided by intellect or instinct, it has been universally conceded that while working in colonies they act with an apparently calculated organization simply marvellous in creatures so tiny. There is always a queen, whose duty it is to lay eggs; but neither she nor the males do any of the manual labor of the colony. This falls upon the workers, or "neuters," imperfect females which cannot reproduce, but whose office in life seems to be to act as hewers of wood and drawers of water to the higher powers of the community. The amount of work these neuters do might well put the sluggard to shame. They collect stores, keep the apartments clean, take absolute charge of the eggs as soon as laid, and of the young progeny when hatched. More wonderful still, they convey plant lice, of whose sweet exudations (honey dew) they are very fond, from place to place, to good feeding grounds, and often bring them into the ant habitations and keep them there as veritable milch cows in their service. This last sounds like a fairy tale, but has been proven true so often that even the most skeptical among the naturalists have been convinced.

Then there are other kinds that make war, and take slaves, which are compelled to assist the workers in the manual labor. In Africa, there is a terrible species—army ants—which migrate from place to place devouring everything in their path. When the natives see them approaching, they take refuge in flight, even from the villages, and, although they may return to find all of their provisions eaten by the ants, they have some recompense in knowing that all domestic pests, mice, etc., have also been put out of existence. It is said that among some of the savage African peoples malefactors have been put to death by being strapped to trees directly in the route of these terrible insects.

In Texas and some other parts of the Southern States there are colonies of "agricultural" ants, which build immense underground nests, and are said to cultivate upon the area overhead the species of grasses upon which they feed. Howard also refers to a species which "cultivates mushrooms," but of how the work is done in either case I have been able to find no record.

When ants are first hatched from the eggs, they are in the form of very tiny larvae or grubs. When full-grown, these grubs spin a cocoon about themselves, just as caterpillar larvae do. In these cocoons they are transformed into pupae, which, late in summer, emerge as fully-developed ants, winged males and females, and wingless neuters, the last being the smallest in size.

All ants hibernate in winter, and the males and females are known to live several years, although the life span of the neuters is much shorter. Sir John Lubbock, who kept thirty colonies working in glass cases, where they were supplied with food and material for nest building, observed that some queens lived for seven years, while the neuters died in three or four.

There are probably many thousand species of ants; over one thousand have been classified. Some build mounds, ranging in size all the way from the well-known ant hills of our fields to the

gigantic cones of Africa, which gave so much trouble to some of our soldiers during the Boer war; others burrow in wood; others simply make tunnels underground; and still others erect dwellings of a paste-like substance, which hardens later into substantial walls. One very curious species collects honey as the bees do, but instead of storing it in cells, they literally cram it into some of the members of the clan, which seem to be especially designed for the purpose. The process goes on until the honey holders are bulged out in their posterior parts to the size of currants, and are quite helpless and unable to move about. Thus they remain, clinging to the walls of their domiciles until the tribe is in need of food, when they regurgitate the honey and presently regain their normal size and activity.

All this is but a mere beginning of the wonderful things that are known about ants, but this is quite enough to interest you and me in studying them still further if ever we have a chance.

As for how to exterminate them, for, after all, they are something of a pest and are fond of being in places where they should not be, the following methods are given: For eradicating ants in hills, pour a little carbon bisulphide into the hill and cover to keep the fumes in. As the latter are very inflammable, see that no light or fire is near while you are handling the substance. Pouring coal oil over the hills is also efficacious, as is also plowing up late in the fall, when the insects have become dormant. If, however, the ants are in the house, and you do not know where the nest is, watch to see if you can find any crack through which they emerge, then stuff it up with batting soaked in kerosene. Also moisten a sponge, sprinkle well into the cells with fine sugar, and leave about the places they frequent. As soon as it is full of ants, drop it into hot water, and repeat the process over and over until the whole colony is exterminated.

D. D.

Warts—Pickling Corn Cobs.

Dear Dame Durden,—Can any of the members give a remedy to remove warts from a child's hands that are almost covered, and hence very unsightly? I know caustic, nitric acid, or any of those severe acids would remove them, but will leave a scar, besides being rather hard to apply to a child as they burn so. What I want is just a simple remedy (not a charm) that someone has used with success, and I shall be very grateful indeed.

Last fall someone asked for a recipe for pickling small corn cobs, so I will send mine, as the season will soon be here. Pick the cobs when very small (almost as soon as formed), remove all leaves, etc., and place in a crock in slightly-salted water over night. In the morning, put on your vinegar to heat, with spices, and, when boiling, put in the corn, leaving just long enough to be nicely heated through. Remove, pack in sealers, and pour vinegar over, and seal. I use white-wine vinegar for this, as homemade vinegar is apt to make the cobs somewhat dark in color. I hope I have made this plain, and, if desired, I will send a recipe for corn chowchow, or salad, later. We all appreciate "The Farmer's Advocate" very much, and it is read from cover to cover every week. Hoping I may obtain the information desired, I will close by wishing Dame Durden and all the Chatterers every success.

AMARYLLIS.

Perth Co., Ont.

Scientific American gives the following for the treatment of warts on children: "Apply strong soda and water for a few days and then paint them with ethereal tincture of tannin."

Many thanks for the corn recipe. We shall be pleased to have the others.

Ingrowing Toe Nails.

Mrs. J. L. Perth Co., Ont., writes: "I was delighted on receiving our last 'Advocate' to find 'The Nook' had taken up the subject of fashions, and hope it may continue, as it is sure to help many readers who can and will do lots of their own sewing. For ingrowing toe-nails, I have found hot tallow, as hot as can be borne, poured on the nail after trimming an excellent remedy."

PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FALL FAIR.

Fair time is drawing on apace. Prospective exhibits are, it is to be presumed, well under way, and there seems little further to be done; yet it is not one whit too soon to be making plans for the fair itself, particularly in regard to how the exhibits may be disposed to show them to better advantage, and so to make the fair more educative, more attractive than ever before.

Our fairs are well worth an effort. They afford the one general opportunity of showing not only what our country is doing in the various lines represented, but—what is more to the point—what it can do when trying its best. From making an extra effort for the fair to making an extra effort all round is no very far cry. Moreover, there is a stimulus in seeing what others have done; there is an education in it, provided the entry lists have been carefully compiled, and everything that borders on the crude or vulgar unsparingly weeded out. We sincerely hope no prize will be given in Canada this year for Berlin-wool wreaths, or any like monstrosity. It seems a pity to waste space in such perpetrations when so much is or should be required for exhibits of the substantial things—good bread, butter, canned fruit, honey, neat plain sewing, etc.—and for those which make for refinement and beauty—dainty white work, fine pencil drawings and flowers. How much better to see a good exhibit of bread and butter than an extensive showing of dauby oil paintings; a fine arrangement of cut flowers than an array of cushions, wondrous of coloring and workmanship, upon which no tired head is ever, by any means, intended to rest; a beautifully-made child's dress than a "quilt" made up of two thousand and five pieces, put together at an absolutely senseless waste of energy and time. The quilt would serve its purpose just as well if it were made up of forty pieces, or twenty, or ten, while the child certainly must be at a disadvantage in a sloppily-made garment.

We set out, however, to emphasize the point that good arrangement counts for much at a fair. . . . And just here may we suggest that the work of arranging in the women's department should be under the direct supervision of women. Women, as a rule, have a finer sense of contrast and harmony than men, and are much more likely to recognize the excellence of fine but unobtrusive work, and to give it the place of prominence which it deserves. . . . See to it that, if possible, things are not huddled together. Provide backgrounds that will throw into clear and pleasing relief the articles disposed thereon. Have fruit and flowers distinctly labelled, and see to it that they, as well as any new fancywork, etc., which it is desirable to propagate in the neighborhood are in charge of someone who understands the exhibit, and is prepared to answer questions in regard to it. May we repeat, our fairs should, as far as possible, be educative, and how can they be unless teachers, as well as object lessons, are provided?

Apropos of flowers, do not greatly favor extensive exhibits of "mixed" bouquets—mixed bouquets are usually things to be handled with tongs. And do not permit too much banking or massing, except where merely decorative effects are to be obtained. For the exhibit proper, place the flowers in separate uniform glasses—pickle bottles will do admirably—each species by itself, and but very few specimens (a single one, if large) in each glass. Across the front of each bottle, or on the table beside it, place a distinctly-written label, and so make it possible for spectators to take note of the kinds they would like to have in their own gardens.

Again, do not place filmy white lace-work, dainty embroideries, etc., in juxtaposition with anything much coarser in texture or bright in color. The effect is sure to be either that the dainty things are overshadowed, or that the others appear distractingly harsh and crude by contrast.

It seems a pity that there is not some systematic way of teaching taste in color, house-furnishing, etc., to the people as a whole. Good taste, of course, comes naturally to some; by others, it is easily acquired, and in this respect perceptible improvement has been made of