

The Wise Little Wasp.

FROM A MISSIONARY IN INDIA.

I have been thinking that you might like to hear a little about a very industrious kind of wasp, which is common here. It has not the bright-yellow and black stripes of the English wasp, but is of a brown colour and larger. This little creature is very industrious, as may be seen in the care with which it makes cells for its young. These it builds on walls or doors, generally preferring wood. Sometimes you will see a row of them under a table, or you will hear the buzz of the little creature behind your chair, for it is building there. When it has selected the place for its nest it flies off, and soon comes back with a little ball of mud, about the size of a small pea, between its two front feet. It has been into the garden and worked up some of the earth there, with a fluid supplied from its own body, into a lump of soft mud fit for use in its building. This it sticks to the chair, or to any spot where it intends to make its cell, and then it spreads it out and shapes it with its feet, so as to lay the foundation for a little wall. This being done, off it flies again to get another ball of mud, which is put upon that which was brought before, and worked on it, and thus it builds till it has made a long oval cell, about an inch long, and half an inch broad: so roof and walls are all built of mud. For a door a little round hole is left at one end.—When the cell is finished thus far, the wasp lays a small egg inside, fastening it to the cell by a fine thread, so that the egg hangs from the top. This done, away it flies again, and gets small green caterpillars, or spiders, with which it fills up the bottom of the cell. These caterpillars the wasp in some way or other stuns, but does not kill, for if they were killed they would be soon unfit for food. These are put into the cell, that when the egg is hatched there may be food for the young grub which comes out of it.—

Now, as the egg will be some days before it is hatched, it is necessary that the caterpillars should be alive.—What a clever wasp to know all this; or rather, how wise that God who teaches it thus to act!

When it has brought seven or eight caterpillars, the wasp closes up the hole with a thin coating of mud, to prevent insects from getting in which might destroy the egg. Then it sets to work to build another cell, adjoining the other, so that the same side wall may do for both. When this is finished, another little egg is put into it, with caterpillars collected as before. In this way the ingenious builder forms the cells in a row, seldom less than three, and often five or six. All the time it is at work it makes a low buzzing noise, as if talking to itself, or singing some little song. As soon as the little grub comes out of the cell it begins to eat up the caterpillars; and it devours them so fast that in a few days they have all disappeared, and the little glutton has become so big as nearly to fill up its cell. Having no more food to eat, the grub turns into a chrysalis, and after a time is changed again into a wasp. And now, being ready to fly about in the open air, it wishes to get out of its prison. And it does this very cleverly, by first wetting the earth by which the cell was closed up with fluid from its own body, and then breaking open the door.

Now you have often heard of the poor heathen here, and that they are very ignorant. This you will easily believe when I will tell you what they think of this wasp and its buzzing. It is so common that most of them have seen it; yet, from not attending much to its movements, they do not know that it lays an egg, and thus they foolishly fancy that it is a kind of charmer. It builds, say they, a cell, collects caterpillars, and then by the buzzing, which they consider to be the saying of *mun-thrums*, or prayers, they suppose it changes these caterpillars into wasps like itself. This strange notion is