

To quote the words of Kirby and Spence (*Introduction*, Letter ix.),—"How disgusting to the eye, how offensive to the smell, would be the whole face of nature, were the vast quantity of excrement daily falling to the earth from the various animals which inhabit it, suffered to remain until gradually dissolved by the rain, or decomposed by the elements! That it does not thus offend us, we are indebted to an inconceivable host of insects which attack it the moment it falls; some immediately begin to devour it, others depositing in it eggs from which are soon hatched larvæ that concur in the same office with tenfold voracity; and thus every particle of dung, at least of the most offensive kinds, speedily swarms with inhabitants which consume all the liquid and noisome particles, leaving nothing but the undigested remains, that soon dry and are scattered by the winds, while the grass upon which it rested, no longer smothered by an impenetrable mass, springs up with increased vigour." The insects that engage in this work belong to many different tribes, chiefly pertaining to the orders of beetles and flies (*Diptera*). A large proportion of the former come in natural sequence almost immediately after the Carrion Beetles already described, and may, therefore, be fitly reviewed here. To give a complete account of all the different families of beetles that belong to the hordes of scavengers, would be a long, and—to the general reader—by no means an interesting proceeding; we shall, therefore, content ourselves with describing the peculiarities in structure and habits of the common sorts.

The first and most numerous family that we come to, includes all those species of beetles, called in England "Rove-beetles" or "Cock-tails" (*Staphylinidæ*). They are readily distinguished from all the other families by their peculiarly long and narrow bodies, flattened form and very short wing-covers, (*elytra*) which only cover one or two segments of the abdomen, instead of almost the whole of it, as is the general rule with beetles. These short wing-covers give the insect somewhat the appearance of wearing a boy's short jacket, instead of a long coat; notwithstanding their brevity, however, they completely conceal and keep out of the way the ample membranous wings, which, when not in use for flight, are beautifully tucked away beneath them. The long uncovered abdomen is capable of being moved in different directions, and is employed by the creature in folding and unfolding its wings. When irritated or alarmed it cocks its tail over its back, and assumes a ludicrously threatening aspect: it also possesses the power, probably for defence, of protruding at will two vesicles from the extremity of the abdomen, which emit a very unpleasant, and sometimes indescribably fetid odour.

The chief food of these insects, both in the larval and perfect states, consists of decaying animal and vegetable matters; in early summer every piece of dung that falls to the earth speedily swarms with them, and in the autumn they are equally numerous in fungi, agarics, etc. Some species are also carnivorous, feeding upon other insects; in England a large species, commonly called the Devil's Coach Horse, (*Georinus olens*) devours large numbers of the destructive Ear-wig (*Forficula*). "On the least approach of danger," Westwood relates, "this insect, like the rest of the group, immediately puts itself into a most ferocious-looking posture of defence, throwing the tail over the head like a scorpion, protruding the anal vesicles, elevating its head and widely opening its long and powerful jaws."

Upwards of four hundred species of this family of beetles are found in North America, and of these, one hundred and five species have been taken in Canada. Many more undoubtedly remain to be found and described when collectors pay more attention to the minuter forms of insect life. Eight hundred species have been described as found in England alone. In tropical climates they are very rare; their places as insect-scavengers being supplied by the excessively abundant ants and termites.

## 6. DUNG BEETLES (*Scarabæidæ*, etc.).

The members of the family to which we have now come, and to which we have given the title of "Dung-beetles," for want of a better, have been objects of peculiar interest to mankind for many thousand years, and will, no doubt, continue to attract the attention of all observers of nature as long as the world lasts. Were it not for their extraordinary habits and for the reverence which was accorded to some of them in ancient times, these creatures—like the preceding family—would be simply disgusting to us, even though of great value in the economy of nature.