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June Beetles

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ONE can not help wondering where they all come from. There are such armies of June Beetles, and your life is made so wretched by their whizzing past your ears and dropping upon your table, not to speak of the horrible fear of their entangling themselves in your hair. They bump indignantly against the windows which happen to be shut, and are such important and terrifying creatures by gas-light that you have a sense of great satisfaction next morning at finding them by dozens on the floor, entirely subdued, miserable and shabby-looking. I used to be more afraid of them than of lions and tigers; but, happily, one summer I began to make a collection of insects. I had very few specimens of the moth and butterfly family, but the crop of beetles was immense that year, and I finally gave my whole attention to the accumulation of those, and adorned my chamber-door with my monogram and other large and pleasing devices, formed by processions of them gracefully arranged. I entirely lost all fear, and used to catch them during the evening and keep them in my handkerchief until it was convenient to go and chloroform them, two or three dozen at a time, in a suitable pasteboard box.

But it was a long time before I learned anything about them, or found how much must be gone through with before they come in of a June evening to bustle about for a while. The lives of some insects seem like intricate pieces of fireworks. It takes so much time and trouble to arrange the packages of powder in just their right places, and to place the bits of stick and wire in their right positions, and one night somebody touches it with a match, and it goes off, fizz, snap! your eyes are dazzled for a minute or two, and that is the end of it. One can not help having a little sympathy for the beetles; they spend so much time getting ready to come in and fly around our heads, and knock their heads against the wall, and the more noisily and busily they do this the more eager we are to arm ourselves with newspapers and relentlessly slay them. The eggs are put into the ground by the female June Beetle about six inches deep, without any protection or food being left for them, and in about three months a little worm crawls out and commences eating any roots which it finds near. It appears to like one as well as another; but, for all that, the mother insect probably had some choice, and left them near the kind of vegetable best for them. If they are not particular themselves

concerning the quality of their food, it is most essential that there should be a sufficient quantity, because they have enormous appetites, and for the next three years are to spend their time in eating. They make their way about underground in search of roots and vegetables with the most surprising facility, and at last grow to be disagreeable-looking big white worms or grubs with reddish-brown heads. When they have reached the perfection of this grub existence, we sometimes see them as long as an inch and a half, of a sort of yellowish white color, with a body made up of twelve sections or joints, on each side of which are nine breathing holes and three red feet. Their heads are rather larger round than the rest of the body, and they have no eyes; but there are two feelers in place of them, by which they direct their motions. This is the way they look, and there is nothing to be said about their manners and customs, except that they grow more and more greedy, and change their skins once a year.

At the end of the fourth year they begin to get ready to leave their underground existence, and there is still another long phase of the preparation. About the latter end of the autumn they bury themselves deeper and deeper in the earth, sometimes going down six feet below the surface, and there make queer little houses for themselves, the walls being made very hard and shiny inside by means of some glutinous substance. Then they grow shorter and thicker for some time, and finally burst their last skin, and take the form of a chrysalis. At first they are still pale yellow, but afterward grow red, and the outlines of the future insect are very plainly seen, and they continue to be this kind of creature for three months.

In the month of January they throw off this disguise, and show themselves completely-formed June Beetles or Dor-bugs, if you like that name better. But in spite of having lived all this time, and having had so much experience—though they have reached nearly their full size, if not quite—they are very weak and helpless, and nothing but babies after all. Their appetites have apparently gone with their old shapes, their color is brighter than when we see them, and their wing-cases and heads are not nearly so hard as they will be a little later, but very soft and delicate. People often notice them in newly-turned earth in the spring, and ~~incorrectly~~ imagine that they are the old ones of the former season which had buried themselves for the winter.

About the first of June, after they have been four years in the ground, they come up by thousands. The warm air has reached them and called them out from their groping lives to live on fresh green leaves instead of roots, and instead of being blind to see the bright lights and agreeable company made ready for their entertainment. In the daytime they hide from the sunshine as much as

possible, in the grass and among the leaves of trees. Willow leaves are their favorite food, it is said. And now they live a few days or a week or two, and in the course of a few weeks there is hardly one to be seen and soft-winged moths come to take their places. One might imagine these the ghosts of their noisy predecessors.

June Beetles have been known to do great damage sometimes, spoiling whole fields of grass, and making havoc in the gardeners' dominions. This is while they are in the grub state. A bird would not ask you for a greater delicacy for his lunch, and the first food they give their young is often one of these clumsy big worms. The rooks in England are particularly fond of the grubs of species having habits similar to ours. In fact, the people in the county of Norfolk once destroyed the rookeries because they made way with so much grain; but in proportion as they destroyed this plague they were tormented with a greater, for the youthful beetles multiplied so amazingly as not only to injure the vegetables, but the grass in the fields. One farm was so devastated that in the year 1751 the tenant could not pay his rent, and the landlord was not only content to lose his income, but also gave money for the support of the farmer and his family.

So we see that June Beetles are real dangerous creatures, and we ought to sympathize more tenderly with our young-lad friends who spend long seasons of dejection on the hall stairs because two or three energetic June Beetles have happened to con into the parlor to spend a social evening.