

May Rains and New Termites

May's rains and nature's perennial urge made the termites fly. When termites fly in at the window, good property soon begins flying down their gullets; that is, good wooden-house property; or anything that is cellulose, even a book, in a place dark and moist enough to make termites a suitable homestead. The flights of the termites had a nuptial purpose, that was in fact their only purpose. That is why, around every lamp left burning, so many boy and girl termites fluttered and fought so persistently; yes, even unto death did the battles rage—each reproductive, as science designates these fliers, seeking to live his life (or her life) in his own way (or her own way) if they could find a mate to cut in on it.

To this end they flew, all the girls going to the light where they might be seen and captured; and all the boys following in full cry; and you captured girls and boys alike by holding a receptacle of water a little way below the light and tempting them to dive toward its reflection in the water—for they promptly did so, and promptly drowned. This wasn't so hard on the boys, doomed to give up the ghost in tragic ecstasy the moment they should fulfill their biological function. Though there be termite colonies in which the consort lives on, with honor at court, richly provided for by the workers. But it was most hard on the girls, each one of whom had no other intention, in flirting so brazenly around your light, than to wed at once, declare herself a queen, and make a realm for her royal person in some post, joist, beam, book, banister or other cellulose appurtenance of your home.

There she planned to enthrone herself, eat voraciously of aforesaid cellulose, bulge into a sac of termite fecundity 2 or 3 inches long, and produce from it jolly workers enough to

reduce her portion of your home to nothingness in an incredibly short time. This fiendish purpose of hers—poor thing, she but obeys blindly nature's mandates, as don't we all?—you foiled by drowning her and beau and her sisters and their beaux. But did as much as one wee queen manage really to marry and then elude your water-trap? If so, somewhere on your premises she is this minute boring out a cellulosic domain for herself and overpopulating it with workers who will, when need comes, build covered ways as far as your roofline, or as deep as the bottom of the posts of your house, for more and more abundant provender of cellulose as the queen blandly sits and breeds and broods on and on.

It is the part of good householders in the Philippines, after the termites fly, diligently to inspect their premises to make certain that no queen termite has found lodgment anywhere. For every termite colony founded, and it is after flight and marriage that they are founded, is founded with the idea of enduring to the end of time; and if undisturbed it will do so, running its cellulose tramways farther and farther afield.

If its *reproductives* should ever be exhausted, its nymphs metamorphose into reproductives; and should the supply of nymphs run low, who knows but that the pale blind, and necessarily dumb, workers might not come forward in the crisis and the very smartest of them convert themselves first into nymphs and then into reproductives. The reason termites are so addicted to production is, that their sole food, cellulose, is generally so plentiful. Where there is ground there is wood, if even the stem of a geranium, and where there is wood there is cellulose.

Where there be even bamboo and thatch there is abundant cellulose, and obviously one

reason for building the peasant hut high on bamboo poles in the Philippines is to provide a light and airy space between the floor and the ground where termites will not choose to colonize. Therefore, at your own premises keep all pieces of loose wood picked up; have nothing lying about, that is cellulose, under, in or on which an ambitious termite queen can settle and declare her sovereignty. With growth of population in California, and a greatly increased use of lumber in houses, they have formed a scientific commission to fight their termite pest, there being in California no less than 13 distinct species of these so-called *flying ants*.

Here we do things more haphazardly. But there are things each householder may easily do. For instance, there are various hardwoods in the Philippines, molave, ipil, narra and the like, practically never attacked by termites because softer woods are procurable and even termites have sense enough to follow the road of least resistance. These very hard and valuable woods are now quite cheap in the Philippines. For what he might pay for ordinary woods in ordinary times, a householder may now replace all vulnerable woods on his premises with these invulnerable ones.

Then there is the treated wood, notably prepared by the Atlantic, Gulf & Pacific company. The California commission says:

"Treated wood... should contain a preservative which will not be leached from the timber by action of rains or ground moisture. The Termite Investigations Commission believes that wood treated with coal tar creosote under pressure and in accordance with the standard specifications of the American Wood-Preservers' Association will give satisfactory protection under all known conditions." Such is the treatment given wood by the company mentioned, which is mentioned specifically because understood to be the only company in the islands so treating lumber for the general market.

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The three above American Owned Companies produce annually a total of approximately 185,000 tons standard quality cane sugar (raw), produced with American made machinery.

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You can also paint timbers with one of the standard preservatives, and not indeed foil an attack already made, but prevent new ones from being made. Keeping things seasonably painted, thus sealing all apertures, is first rate precaution against termites. So is keeping the ground below your house not only free of rubbish, but thoroughly whitewashed. The subterranean termite colonies in the ground and explores for cellulose by means of covered ways built by the workers as they go along. Such termite colonies may be exterminated by digging into and breaking up their mound, loosening the surrounding soil and wetting it down well with (the California commission says) a 10% solution of sodium arsenite, taking care not to get it on the skin or in the eyes, or washing it off, should it do so, with a boracic acid solution. A 10% sodium arsenite solution is prepared by mixing 1 gallon of commercial 40% solution with 4 gallons of water.

As this solution is noxious to pets, and might harm children, small areas only should be treated with it at one time; and these should be protected from animals and children until absorption dissipates the solution. A number of nonnoxious solutions are unfriendly to termites, all perhaps less deadly to them than sodium arsenite is. That California commission publishes many odd facts about termites. More than 1200 species are extant today, and fossil millions of years old have been found in the United States: termites antedated man on earth. They are extremely social, their food being so abundant. They haunt darkness and dampness (though there are some drywood species, too), and their societies are rigidly caste-ridden, perhaps as much so as the societies of the bee and the ant, the latter the termites deadly and coarsely foe.

In termite society, first the reproduces headed by the queen, perhaps too the king.

These have the wings and large black compound eyes, these make their love flight around your evening light—once a year, once in a termite's lifetime. Mating, they lose their wings and crawl off to the nearest and aptest cellulose cover: a dead tree, a woodpile, a loose board or two under the porch. Then the nymphs, neutrals until nature forces them to assume productivity—which they miraculously do when necessity drives. Then the hosts of workers; slaves perhaps, pale, anemic, dullards more than dumb, but prodigiously active in stealing cellulose and porting it meekly back to the others.

There is of course a soldier caste, with enlarged armored heads and belligerent mandibles. They are single men in barracks until the colony is attacked, usually by their enemies the ants. They then sally forth and man all passage ways, and are invincible until the foe, if it be ants, turns their left and takes them in the rear, when they are practically as easy victims as the others who carry no armor and have no eyes. So one way to rid a spot of termites is to lay a train of sugar to their quarters, first opening it up as well as possible, and wait for ants to do the rest. It is especially important, at this season of the year, to inspect your house above the ceiling for new colonies of termites. It is all but certain there will be some successful unions come of all the pother of longing wings around Manila's evening lights, and during the rainy season there is dampness and darkness enough above a ceiling to make the space—any beam or rafter in it—good termite colonising territory.

Unmolested, any good colony of termite journeymen can riddle a set of rafters in a single season. It might even be not impractical to have *termite week*, about the middle or the end of June, when the whole city should

make general war on the pests—when merchants too might invite attention to their paints, and their palliatives against termites. Watch for good weather, to repaint whitewash; have an old-fashioned yard-cleaning; coat rafters and beams with antitermite preparations; replace nontreated wood with treated wood or hardwood; clear away dead growth; move palms from porches to the yard until the rains are over; let the sunshine, if it will shine, in wherever possible. These precautions, taught by the schools, might reach the home.

Contrasting with California, poor in this respect, the subtropical Philippines have 300 species of termites. Nature does little by halves here. Curious that cellulose is the termite's sole food, science at last learned that there is a trick about it. Each termite's tummy swarms with myriad protozoa living also exclusively on cellulose, who digest the cellulose for their hosts; and if the supply of oxygen accessible to termites is varied enough to kill these animalcules, but not the termites, the latter starve within a few hours. Termites are also great petters, forever nuzzling each other; dust a poison on one and soon 200, petting this one, will be dead of the poison. Neither can termites turn sharp corners, their fat bodies will not bend (which distinguishes them from ants, always wasp-waisted). Nothing this fact, the British of Borneo have had little trouble with termites in houses for the past 50 years. They have iron plates made, somewhat saucer-fashion, in England, sharp-edged. Each post supporting a house is provided with one of these near its base; and unable to turn the edge of such a plate, the termite is foiled. This compares with the cressote basins in the top of concrete bases of house-posts in the Philippines, which it is necessary to watch and keep not only filled but free of dust and cobweb bridges.

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