

At present not a single lighthouse exists to warn shipping from the dangerous reefs of Sokotra. Below the cliffs of Ras Momi, at the eastern end of the island, I saw the wreckage of a German ship, lost with all hands; and later came the loss of the Pacific and Orient liner *Aden* with a lamenta-

ble loss of life in these shark-infested waters.

What adventurous souls—Jew or Gentile—will undertake the development of this delectable island, and bring back its former prosperity and the significance of its old-time name—‘the island abode of bliss?’

III. AFRICAN SCAVENGER

By H. A. SPENCER

From the *Contemporary Review*, London Topical Monthly

AMONG the many useful scavengers which roam the veldt and forests of Africa, the Driver Ant, ferocious and inexorable, must be included. Over the sun-warmed earth of tropical and sub-tropical Africa ants of all sizes and species swarm everywhere, receiving scant attention from the grazing animals. Not so the Driver Ant. This insect is feared by every animal that roams the veldt, and horse-men coming upon a stream of Driver Ants crossing a road find it impossible to force their steeds over it. The sight, or perhaps the scent, of an army of these ants stampedes all animals from their neighborhood, and when they enter a house or hut, all vermin hurry from it on the opposite side, leaving their callow broods at the mercy of these ants, to be devoured. Even man, when these ants encroach upon his habitation, hastens from it and leaves everything to them until they have scoured it and have left the neighborhood. Their scavenging is extraordinarily effective and not a crumb will be left!

I have encountered the Driver Ants in the jungles of West Africa and on the veldt in Bechuanaland in South

Africa and studied them as they traveled and as they worked through a house, with deep interest; but the resolute manner of their advance, the speed at which they stream over the ground and over every obstruction opposing them, altering their direction this way and that in an instant, has sent a thrill through me on more than one occasion!

This species of ant appears to have been studied individually and in its life and activities below ground to a lesser extent than have other members of the family, which is perhaps understandable. Like other insects living underground, they appear to be blind or nearly so, exercising other faculties such as touch, hearing and smell to an unusual extent. They have, however, a single small eye, deep set in their heads, which is of simple construction, instead of the usual cluster of eyes found in other insects more dependent upon vision. They appear to communicate with each other by means of their antennæ, a touch with which is interpreted and responded to instantly and passed down a long line of ants on trek with extraordinary rapidity.

The Driver Ant is black in color and is encased in a shell which gives him protection from the sun and resists a good deal of pressure. As seen on the surface, an army of Driver Ants consists of thousands, even millions, of sexless workers, three-eighths of an inch in length, provided with strong mandibles; they travel in long lines eight or ten abreast, every worker in touch with those on each side and with those behind and in front so that no interval is apparent anywhere in the line throughout its length.

On each side of this advancing line of workers a single line of soldier ants, half an inch in length, armed with a formidable pair of pincers, always travels, guiding and protecting them; at the sound of a step or perhaps the smell of an intruder, a few soldiers will leave the column and at great speed circle round in that direction. If an intruder is discovered, a few of them streak back to the column, touch it and, the intimation being passed on, the column *instantly* bulges out in the direction of the threat without the line breaking. Directly the threat is removed, the line straightens again and proceeds on its way.

II

Some years ago I visited Old Calabar, on the Calabar River in West Africa, and walked up to the Mission on the hill above the river to pay my respects to the missionary in residence there. The old gentleman had been there for 'nearly forty years,' he told me. I found him interested in natural history as well as in the native welfare, and learning that I was collecting insects and keen on entomology, he said:—

'Well, tomorrow morning I shall be able to show you the Driver Ants at work in my house! You see those big ants scurrying about out there?' pointing to some black ants literally streaking about in circles on bare ground, so rapidly that it was difficult to follow them, 'Those are the soldiers of the Driver Ants, reconnoitering to see what is to be had in this vicinity; by tomorrow morning they will be here with millions of smaller ants and swarm all over my house, inside and out. We shall have to move out of it in good time and wait until they have cleaned the whole place up!'

The house was raised about a couple of feet above the ground on piles. I asked him to send a message to my ship lying in the river if the Drivers came, as I should be glad to come up and see them at work.

'They'll be here all right!' he assured me. 'They have been here several times since I arrived and cleaned up the Mission, the last time nearly two years ago now. You never saw such a housecleaning! Not a rat or a mouse, not even a cockroach was to be seen in the neighborhood when they finished their job. I know them! When they come we just move out of the house with a table and chairs under this tree and live here until they've gone! Everything edible in the house they'll clean up and won't leave a crumb or an insect of any kind. At their approach, rats and mice leave their young and scamper off pell-mell! Last time they came, a sick goat lay in the shade of a bush near by and in three days nothing was left of it but clean bones.'

'When I first came here about forty years ago it was the horrid custom of some of the neighboring chiefs to peg

down their criminals in the road or a clear bit of ground and leave them to be devoured by the Driver Ants, and while going round my district I came upon a skeleton of a human being pegged out in the road. One of my readers accompanying me told me all about it. I pulled up the chief who was responsible for that and accused him of murder; I made him compensate the man's wife and children. Thank goodness we've altered all that and stopped such barbarous customs.'

Next morning I was again at the Mission and witnessed a sight I shall never forget. Thousands upon thousands of Driver Ants streamed in orderly, serried ranks across the bare ground under and into the house. Through doors and windows, cracks and crannies, they continued their course up to the ceilings and through them to the roof; other columns hurried beneath the house and emerged through the floors into bedrooms, kitchen and pantry. In the latter they hung in black festoons, many ants deep, like a swarm of bees, around the tops of used saucepans, on an opened tin of condensed milk and a pot of jam, around dishes and plates which had contained remnants of food. Not a vestige of the tin and the jam pot was visible, they were so covered with swarming ants.

Wherever I looked, columns of ants were streaming along close to the walls, disappearing behind skirting boards and wainscoting, behind window frames loose in the walls. Here and there columns of ants, their bodies distended with food, were flowing out of the house while new columns arrived to relieve them, always in the same orderly formation and accom-

panied by soldiers who never left them. I had to move about with much circumspection lest I approach a column too closely, for when I did so, soldiers rushed toward my feet with pincers agape, followed immediately by a bulging column of workers. No materials, curtains, cushions were interfered with, only foodstuffs and insects of any kind they met.

A few years ago, while motoring from Gaborones to Molepolole in the Bechuanaland Protectorate one afternoon, I stopped to have a look at an ancient dump heap of quartz, evidence of prehistoric mining, which rose close to the road. I had nearly reached the dump when I was stopped by a broad column of Driver Ants crossing the bare ground in front of me; they emerged from the bush on one side and were streaming up the mound. As I approached the column, though still eight or ten feet away from it, the soldier ants conducting it became very excited and came toward me with gaping pincers, followed closely by the column of workers; when I stepped back, the column straightened and the soldiers returned to their places to continue their journey almost automatically. I was anxious to see what each worker carried in its mandibles but every time I approached the column they rushed to attack me and drive me away; any other ant would have scurried from my path, but these were Drivers. I accompanied the column to the top of the dump, where they disappeared into a hole beneath a large block of quartz. A number of soldiers mounted guard at the entrance to their home until the last worker had disappeared; then they followed them out of my sight.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Apocrypha

Herr Hitler and Signor Mussolini sat fishing together on one side of the lake, and Mr. Chamberlain on the other. But while the British Prime Minister caught fish after fish, the two dictators could not even raise a bite.

'How do you do it, Neville?' they shouted across the water. 'There don't seem to be any fish on our side.'

'The fish are there all right,' replied Mr. Chamberlain, 'but they daren't open their mouths.'

—*News-Letter*, London

Opportunity Knocks

Publishers! Which of you would like to adopt my latest brain-child? It is a strong, promising boy, *i.e.*, an extremely timely religio-philosophical anti-Bolshevist lecture; pure Aryan, father a German Tyrolean who has now become—thanks to God and Hitler—a Reich German overnight. Write to: 'Stretch a hand of friendship to beautiful Austria,' No. 904, care of the B-B.

—Ad in the *Buchbändler-Börsenblatt*, Leipzig
(Trade organ of German publishers)

Sic Transit

Archduke Otto has just bought a large property in the Argentine, near Chabas, with the apparent intention of becoming a gentleman farmer. While his leaving Europe is significant, the true extent of his renunciation can be seen in the fact that the Pretender has decided to go to work. Although the royal houses which still cling to their thrones have become more and more democratic, striking from the court etiquette its most ridiculous anachronistic elements, the little Habsburg court in exile in Belgium has steadfastly observed the severe ritual of the Hofburg. The Archduke has never been known, for example, to go to a shop and buy anything, even a box of matches, for himself. His chamberlain always attended to such plebeian details. That he has become reconciled to the prospects of buying manure and haggling over the price of meat is truly resignation.

—*Europe Nouvelle*, Paris

When in Greece

It fell to my lot to lecture in Athens. My subject, semi-philosophical, semi-political, had been announced several weeks in advance. A few days before our cruise started, I received a letter warning me that, in view of recent changes in the political situation in Greece, it was important that I should avoid any reference to current affairs. On arrival in Athens there was a series of meals with official personages, both English and Greek. All impressed upon me the same warning; there must be no reference, not even the remotest, to politics.

It appeared that, a few weeks before, Mr. Wedgwood Benn had delivered a lecture on the British Commonwealth, in the course of which he had remarked that one of the greatest of the gifts that the British Commonwealth had given to the world was liberty. With one accord, the audience had risen to its feet and cheered and applauded for several minutes. Altogether the scene had been an outrage upon the properties of any properly regulated dictatorship, and it must not, I gathered, be allowed to occur again. On the morning of my lecture an excited official from the Censor's Department asked to see a copy of my manuscript. There was no manuscript. For some time the fate of the lecture hung in the balance. Was it to be delivered, or not? In the end the risk was taken, and to a hall lined at the back with policemen I lectured on Plato and Aristotle.

—C. E. M. Joad in the
New Statesman and Nation, London

Control—Italian Style

It is expected that the Non-Intervention Committee, which is meeting tomorrow, will decide on the reestablishment of control at the Pyrenees frontier.

Italy proposes to send 80,000 controllers.

—*Canard Enchaîné*, Paris

Easy to Find

The German travel organization in London has issued posters inviting tourists to 'Visit Medieval Germany.' They won't need a map, we thought.

—*Tribune*, London