

The Orphans' Friend.

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THE MARCH OF THE ANTS.

"You talk of the march of an army, eh? Well, the march from Metz to Paris and the Kliva expedition were great feats in their way; but I've seen a march in my time that no army on earth could equal, though it had ten Napoleons at its head."

"You mean locusts? Well, they keep their ranks well, as I've had occasion to see out in the East."

"They do, indeed; but I don't mean locusts."

"Wild fowl, then? A flight of them passed me one night on the Don, just after sunset, that took ten minutes to pass, and not a single flaw in the whole column."

"Aye, I can quite believe that; but I don't mean them either."

"What then?"

"I am going to tell you. You know Praia Vermelha, four miles from Rio de Janeiro? Well, I had a house there a good many years ago, which had belonged to a Portuguese before I got it, and it was naturally as dirty as any house could well be. Every corner and cranny was thick with dust, and the whole place from top to bottom, was a regular public asylum for cockroaches, tarantulas, and other things that needn't be mentioned. My first idea, of course, was to give it a thorough cleaning up as soon as possible, but it was fated that the cleaning up should be done for me, in a way that I little dreamed of. I was sauntering about my garden one morning before going into the city, waiting my horse to be brought round (for in those days the tramway from the town to Praia Vermelha, round Bota Fogo Bay, wasn't made or thought of), when, all of a sudden, two or three of my niggers, who were at work a little way off, came scampering towards me, shouting, 'As formigas! as formigas! (the ants! the ants!) I ran to the spot, and there I did see a sight. The whole bed on which they had been at work was literally creeping with black ants, which were pouring by thousands through a crevice in the foot of the wall; and when I looked over into the lane, there was the long black line traced out against the white dusty road as far as I could see. The breadth of the column, as I measured it later on, was good ten inches; as for the length, you'll hear about that by-and-by."

"Well, what is to be done? The creatures were coming on as fast as they could go, and evidently towards the house. Plainly there was no time to be lost; so I got a broom and went to work with a will. Every stroke swept them away by thousands, but I might as well have tried to stem Niagara with a mop. The moment the column was broken, the masses in the rear scattered themselves like skirmishers, took up the trail of the vanguard in a moment, and restored the line so quickly that it seemed as if I had been scooping up a running brook. Plainly there was nothing to be done that way; so I shouted to Juanita, the mulatto cook, to bring me a kettle of boiling water. "And then began a massacre if you like. Every splash littered the ground with their carcasses

for yards round, and I began to hope that I had checked them at last. Not a bit of it. The rear rank scrambled over the corpses of their comrades, and came on over the scalded ground, through steam and heat and all, like the forlorn hope at Badajoz. I was just giving them the last drop from my kettle and wondering what on earth to do next, when a shout from behind made me look up, and there was old Senor Bonito, my next-door neighbor, leaning over the gate.

"What are you doing, senor?" cried he, opening the gate and coming in, 'you're killing your best friends. This is what we call a bencao (blessing.)"

"A nice sort of blessing it is!" retorted I, indignantly. "Do you think that I shall be particularly blest if these creatures get in and eat all my furniture?"

"But it's not the furniture that they want; they won't hurt the house a bit. What they're after is the beetles and tarantulas and their eggs, which are the favorite food of the black ant. You see when a house gets dirty, and full of vermin, the ants march in and make a clean sweep of them, like policemen hunting the vagabonds out of town, and that's why we call it a 'blessing.'"

"Oh! said I, beginning to understand at last. "Then this invasion is a sort of amateur house-cleaning, eh?"

"Just so; and a very thorough one it will be. When you come home to-night you won't find a single beetle or tarantula in the whole house."

"And where on earth does all this lot come from?"

"There," said the Brazilian, pointing to the summit of the Corcovado (Hunchback), which stood against the sky like a great black steeple, far away at the end of the valley."

"What?" cried I, starting, 'do you mean to tell me that this swarm comes from the top of that mountain?"

"Every inch of the way," answered my friend, decisively; 'and not a single break in the whole column, I'll be bound. You'll see bigger swarms than that, though, if you remain here a year or two."

"I opened my eyes, as well I might, for this was a new thing altogether. From the spot where we were standing to the top of the Corcovado must have been two good miles at least, and most likely a great deal more; so, if you calculate how many ants there are in a breadth of ten inches, and multiply that by a length of two miles, or upwards, you'll have some idea what a march it was."

"Come in and watch them at work," said the Brazilian, taking me by the arm. "It's a sight well worth seeing, I can tell you."

"It was indeed. Juanita and the two niggers, who were well accustomed to these domiciliary visits, had thrown open all the doors, and the whole house was creeping with ants from top to bottom. If the famous picture of the "Persecution of the Jews under Torquemada" had been painted in those days, I should have thought of it at once, though I doubt whether the alguazils of

Toledo ever made half such quick work of it as my new visitors. Every moment some fresh battalion filed off from the great column, plunged into an untouched corner or crevice, and ransacked it thoroughly, coming back immediately, as if for fresh orders, and all as regularly and orderly as soldiers on parade. And then to see the scamper of the beetles, and cockroaches, and tarantulas, and all the rest; and every now and then one of them would be overtaken by the pursuing host, and over he would go on his back, with hundreds of merciless jaws at work upon him at once. Here and there in a corner you could see some old vetran, too stiff or too hopeless for escape, sullenly awaiting his doom, like a Roman senator. It was the march of Attila and his Huns over again.

"They won't leave a single corner unsearched," said Senor Bonito, who seemed to look upon their performance as complacently as if they all belonged to him, and had come there at his especial invitation. "See there, that gang have scented some game up yonder!"

As he spoke a long line of ants darted up the mosquito-curtain of a bed near which we were standing, and the next moment flop down came a huge tarantula, big enough to smash a hundred of them with his mere weight. But the giant had no chance. He had hardly touched the ground when they were upon him from every side like a pack of wolves, and in less time than it takes to tell it, he was torn limb from limb, and hundreds of the little imps were towing off his dismembered claws in every direction.

"You'll just see the same thing at Paramaribo, in Surinam, if you go there," said the Brazilian, nodding his head approvingly. "There's a species there which the people call 'Ants of Visitation,' because they only come once in two or three years; but when they do come, they make a clean sweep of the whole settlement, just as they're doing here. The people do not mind their coming, and throw open the houses to them, and take the greatest care not to molest them—which, indeed, is just as well, for if any one disturbs them, they fall upon him without mercy, and their bite will draw blood even through a stocking."

"They must be larger than these, then, surely?"

"They are, rather; though even these will bite clean through a canvas shoe. I've seen them do it, myself. As for their nests, I've seen ant-hills in Surinam more than six feet high, and at least a hundred feet round."

"Just at that moment (rather to my chagrin, for I was beginning to get really interested in watching the progress of the devastation) one of my blacks came to say that my horse was at the gate, and away I went to the city. When I came back, about five in the evening, there was not an ant to be seen; the invading armies had vanished as suddenly as they came. The only token of their passage was the shell of a cockroach, or the hard end of a tarantula's claw, lying here and there about the floor."

Adventers.

"They that go down to the sea in ships . . . see His wonders in the deep." Much more forcibly may this be said of those who go down under the sea. A diver here narrates a curious adventure he had with a shark at the bottom of the ocean:

"I was down on a nasty rock bottom. A man never feels comfortable on them; he can't tell what big creature may be hiding under the huge quarter-deck; he leaves which grow there. The first part of the time I was visited by a porcupine fish, which kept sticking its quills up and bobbing in front of my helmet."

Soon after I saw a big shadow fall across me, and looking up there was an infernal shark playing about my tubing. It makes you feel chilly in the back when they're about. He came down to me slick as I looked up. I made at him and he sheared off. For an hour he worked at it, till I could stand it no longer.

If you can keep your head level it's all right, and you're pretty safe if they're not on you sharp. This ugly brute was twenty feet long, I should think, for when I lay down all my length on the bottom he stretched a considerable way ahead of me, and I could see him beyond my feet. Then I waited. They must turn over to bite, and my laying down bothered him.

He swam over me three or four times, and then skulked off to a big thicket of sea-weed to consider. I knew he'd come back when he'd settled his mind. It seemed a long time waiting for him.

At last he came viciously over me, but, like the time before, too far from my arms. The next time I had my chance and ripped him with my knife as neatly as I could.

A shark always remembers he's got business somewhere else when he's cut, so off this fellow goes. It is a curious thing, too, that all the sharks about will follow in the trail he leaves. I got on my hands and knees and as he swam off I noticed four shadows slip after him. I saw no more that time. They did not like my company.

MESMERIZING A ROSTER.—An experiment which it may amuse the boys to repeat has been described by several correspondents to a popular science journal. Place a cock upon a table or board, and, holding his wings close down his sides, let a second person bend down his head until his beak touches the board on which he lies, and draw a line of white chalk straight out from the point of his beak. This done the bird may be released from all restraint, and he will not stir so much as a feather. "Nay, further," writes one "you may clap your hands or shout close to him, without arousing him from his lethargy, from which, however, he will ultimately recover." Another experimenter writes: "I have seen a row of fowls rendered quite senseless by drawing a chalk-line (beginning at the top of the beak) slowly across a table, and I have, myself, successfully performed the experiment."

Ess and Essca.

"So you have finished your studies at the seminary? I was much pleased with the closing exercises. The author of that poem—Miss White, I think you called her—bids fair to become known as a poet."

"We think the authoress will become celebrated as a poetess," remarked the young lady, pertly, with a marked emphasis on two words of the sentence.

"Oh!—ah!" replied the old gentleman, looking thoughtfully over his spectacles at the young lady. "I hear her sister was quite an actress, and under Miss Hosmer's instructions will undoubtedly become quite a sculptoress."

The young lady appeared irritated.

"The seminary," continued the old gentleman, with imperturbable gravity, "is fortunate in having an efficient board of managers—ess. From the presidentess down to the humblest teacheress unusual talent is shown. There is Miss Harper, who as a chemistess is unequaled, and Mrs. Knowl's has already a reputation as an astronomeress. And in the department of music few can equal Miss Kelloogy as a singeress."

The young lady did not appear to like the chair she was sitting on. She took the sofa at the other end of the room.

"Yes," continued the old gentleman, as if talking to himself, "those White sisters are very talented. Mary, I understand, has turned her attention to painting and the drama, and will surely become famous as a painteress, and even as lectureress."

A loud slamming of the door caused the old gentleman to look up, and the criticess and grammarianess was gone.—Selected.

A WISE CHILD.—While we are in the dining-room we must not forget a little miss of five or six summers, who unconsciously perpetrated one of the best jokes of the season. Wine was being passed around, and she invited to take some but declined.

"Why do you not take wine with your dinner, Minnie?" asked a gentleman who sat near her.

"Tause I doesn't like it."

"But take a little then, my child, for your stomach's sake," he urged.

"I ain't dot no tommik's ache!" indignantly responded the little miss in the most emphatic manner. As both question and answer were distinctly heard by those around, everyone burst into laughter, which so frightened the little maid that she cried.

Which First?

"If you do not close that window, waiter, I shall die of the draught!" exclaimed a lady in the dining room of a hotel.

"If you do close that window, waiter, I shall die of the heat!" said another stout lady at the same table.

The waiter was at a loss to do either.