

昆虫记

[法] 亨利·法布尔 著

[英] 亚历山大·泰伊克塞伊拉·德·马托斯 译



by *Henri Fabre*

The Wanders of Instinct
The Life of the Fly

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随着阅读的展开，你会发现自己的英语水平无形中有了大幅提高，并且对西方历史文化的了解也日益深入广阔。

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THE WONDERS OF INSTINCT

CHAPTER 1

THE HARMAS

THIS is what I wished for, *hoc erat in votis*: a bit of land, oh, not so very large, but fenced in, to avoid the drawbacks of a public way; an abandoned, barren, sun-scorched bit of land, favoured by thistles and by Wasps and Bees. Here, without fear of being troubled by the passers-by, I could consult the *Ammophila* and the *Sphex*¹ and engage in that difficult conversation whose questions and answers have experiment for their language; here, without distant expeditions that take up my time, without tiring rambles that strain my nerves, I could contrive my plans of attack, lay my ambushes and watch their effects at every hour of the day. *Hoc erat in votis*. Yes, this was my wish, my dream, always cherished, always vanishing into the mists of the future.

And it is no easy matter to acquire a laboratory in the open fields, when harassed by a terrible anxiety about one's daily bread. For forty years have I fought, with steadfast courage, against the paltry plagues of life; and the long-wished-for laboratory has come at last. What it has cost me in perseverance and relentless work I will not try to say. It has come; and, with it – a more serious condition – perhaps a little leisure. I say perhaps, for my leg is still hampered with a few links of the convict's chain.

The wish is realized. It is a little late, O! my pretty insects! I greatly fear that the peach is offered to me when I am beginning to have no teeth wherewith to eat it. Yes, it is a little late: the wide horizons of the outset have shrunk into a low and stifling canopy, more and more straitened day by day. Regretting nothing in the past, save those whom I have lost; regretting nothing, not even my first youth; hoping nothing either, I have reached the point at which, worn out by the experience of things, we ask ourselves if life

¹ Two species of Digger-or Hunting-wasps. – *Translator's Note*.

be worth the living.

Amid the ruins that surround me, one strip of wall remains standing, immovable upon its solid base: my passion for scientific truth. Is that enough, O! my busy insects, to enable me to add yet a few seemly pages to your history? Will my strength not cheat my good intentions? Why, indeed, did I forsake you so long?

Friends have reproached me for it. Ah, tell them, tell those friends, who are yours as well as mine, tell them that it was not forgetfulness on my part, not weariness, nor neglect: I thought of you; I was convinced that the *Cerceris*¹ cave had more fair secrets to reveal to us, that the chase of the *Sphex* held fresh surprises in store. But time failed me; I was alone, deserted, struggling against misfortune. Before philosophizing, one had to live. Tell them that, and they will pardon me.

Others have reproached me with my style, which has not the solemnity, nay, better, the dryness of the schools. They fear lest a page that is read without fatigue should not always be the expression of the truth. Were I to take their word for it, we are profound only on condition of being obscure. Come here, one and all of you – you, the sting-bearers, and you, the wing-cased armour-clads – take up my defence and bear witness in my favour. Tell of the intimate terms on which I live with you, of the patience with which I observe you, of the care with which I record your actions. Your evidence is unanimous: yes, my pages, though they bristle not with hollow formulas nor learned smatterings, are the exact narrative of facts observed, neither more nor less; and whoso cares to question you in his turn will obtain the same replies.

And then, my dear insects, if you cannot convince those good people, because you do not carry the weight of tedium, I, in my turn, will say to them:

“You rip up the animal and I study it alive; you turn it into an object of horror and pity, whereas I cause it to be loved; you labour in a torture-chamber and dissecting-room, I make my observations under the

¹ A species of Digger-wasp. – *Translator's Note.*

blue sky, to the song of the Cicadæ¹; you subject cell and protoplasm to chemical tests, I study instinct in its loftiest manifestations; you pry into death, I pry into life. And why should I not complete my thought: the boars have muddied the clear stream; natural history, youth's glorious study, has, by dint of cellular improvements, become a hateful and repulsive thing. Well, if I write for men of learning, for philosophers, who, one day, will try to some extent to unravel the tough problem of instinct, I write also, I write above all things, for the young, I want to make them love the natural history which you make them hate; and that is why, while keeping strictly to the domain of truth, I avoid your scientific prose, which too often, alas, seems borrowed from some Iroquois idiom!"

But this is not my business for the moment: I want to speak of the bit of land long cherished in my plans to form a laboratory of living entomology, the bit of land which I have at last obtained in the solitude of a little village. It is a *harmas*, the name given, in this district,² to an untilled, pebbly expanse abandoned to the vegetation of the thyme. It is too poor to repay the work of the plough; but the Sheep passes there in spring, when it has chanced to rain and a little grass shoots up.

My *harmas*, however, because of its modicum of red earth swamped by a huge mass of stones, has received a rough first attempt at cultivation: I am told that vines once grew here. And, in fact, when we dig the ground before planting a few trees, we turn up, here and there, remains of the precious stock, half – carbonized by time. The three-pronged fork, therefore, the only implement of husbandry that can penetrate such a soil as this, has entered here; and I am sorry, for the primitive vegetation has disappeared. No more thyme, no more lavender, no more clumps of kermes-oak, the dwarf oak that forms forests across which we step by lengthening our stride a little. As these plants, especially the first two, might be of use to me by offering the Bees and Wasps a spoil to forage, I am compelled to reinstate them in the ground whence they were driven by the fork.

¹ The Cicada *Cigale*, an insect akin to the Grasshopper and found more particularly in the south of France. – *Translator's Note*.

² The country round Sérignan, in Provence. – *Translator's Note*.

What abounds without my mediation is the invaders of any soil that is first dug up and then left for a long time to its own resources. We have, in the first rank, the couch-grass, that execrable weed which three years of stubborn warfare have not succeeded in exterminating. Next, in respect of number, come the centauries, grim-looking one and all, bristling with prickles or starry halberds. They are the yellow-flowered centaur, the mountain centaur, the star-thistle and the rough centaur: the first predominates. Here and there, amid their inextricable confusion, stands, like a chandelier with spreading orange flowers for lights, the fierce Spanish oyster-plant, whose spikes are strong as nails. Above it towers the Illyrian cotton-thistle, whose straight and solitary stalk soars to a height of three to six feet and ends in large pink tufts. Its armour hardly yields before that of the oyster-plant. Nor must we forget the lesser thistle-tribe, with, first of all, the prickly or "cruel" thistle, which is so well armed that the plant-collector knows not where to grasp it; next, the spear-thistle, with its ample foliage, ending each of its veins with a spear-head; lastly, the black knap-weed, which gathers itself into a spiky knot. In among these, in long lines armed with hooks, the shoots of the blue dewberry creep along the ground. To visit the prickly thicket when the Wasp goes foraging, you must wear boots that come to mid-leg or else resign yourself to a smarting in the calves. As long as the ground retains a few remnants of the vernal rains, this rude vegetation does not lack a certain charm, when the pyramids of the oyster-plant and the slender branches of the cotton-thistle rise above the wide carpet formed by the yellow-flowered centaur's saffron heads; but let the droughts of summer come and we see but a desolate waste, which the flame of a match would set ablaze from one end to the other. Such is, or rather was, when I took possession of it, the Eden of bliss where I mean to live henceforth alone with the insect. Forty years of desperate struggle have won it for me.

Eden, I said; and, from the point of view that interests me, the expression is not out of place. This cursed ground, which no one would have had at a gift to sow with a pinch of turnip-seed, is an earthly paradise for the Bees and the Wasps. Its mighty growth of thistles and centauries draws them all to me from everywhere around. Never, in my insect-hunting memories,

have I seen so large a population at a single spot; all the trades have made it their rallying-point. Here come hunters of every kind of game, builders in clay, weavers of cotton goods, collectors of pieces cut from a leaf or the petals of a flower, architects in paste-board, plasterers mixing mortar, carpenters boring wood, miners digging underground galleries, workers handling goldbeater's skin and many more.

Who is this one? An *Anthidium*.¹ She scrapes the cobwebby stalk of the yellow-flowered centaury and gathers a ball of wadding which she carries off proudly in the tips of her mandibles. She will turn it, under ground, into cotton-felt satchels to hold the store of honey and the egg. And these others, so eager for plunder? They are *Megachiles*,² carrying under their bellies their black, white, or blood-red reaping-brushes. They will leave the thistles to visit the neighbouring shrubs and there cut from the leaves oval pieces which will be made into a fit receptacle to contain the harvest. And these, clad in black velvet? They are *Chalicodomæ*,³ who work with cement and gravel. We could easily find their masonry on the stones in the harmas. And these, noisily buzzing with a sudden flight? They are the *Anthophoræ*,⁴ who live in the old walls and the sunny banks of the neighbourhood.

Now come the *Osmiæ*. One stacks her cells in the spiral staircase of an empty snail-shell; another, attacking the pith of a dry bit of bramble, obtains for her grubs a cylindrical lodging and divides it into floors by means of partition-walls; a third employs the natural channel of a cut reed; a fourth is a rent-free tenant of the vacant galleries of some Mason-bee. Here are the *Macroceræ* and the *Eucерæ*, whose males are proudly horned; the *Dasypodæ*, who carry an ample brush of bristles on their hind-legs for a reaping implement; the *Andrenæ*, so manyfold in species; the slender-bellied *Halicti*.⁵ I omit a host of others. If I tried to continue this record of the guests of my thistles, it would muster almost the whole of the

¹ A Cotton-bee. — *Translator's Note.*

² Leaf-cutting Bees. — *Translator's Note.*

³ Mason-bees. — *Translator's Note.*

⁴ A species of Wild Bees. — *Translator's Note.*

⁵ *Osmiæ*, *Macroceræ*, *Eucерæ*, *Dasypodæ*, *Andrenæ*, and *Halicti* are all different species of Wild Bees. — *Translator's Note.*

honey-yielding tribe. A learned entomologist of Bordeaux, Professor Pérez, to whom I submit the naming of my prizes, once asked me if I had any special means of hunting, to send him so many rarities and even novelties. I am not at all an experienced and still less a zealous hunter, for the insect interests me much more when engaged in its work than when stuck on a pin in a cabinet. The whole secret of my hunting is reduced to my dense nursery of thistles and centauries.

By a most fortunate chance, with this populous family of honey-gatherers was allied the whole hunting tribe. The builders' men had distributed here and there, in the harmas, great mounds of sand and heaps of stones, with a view of running up some surrounding walls. The work dragged on slowly; and the materials found occupants from the first year. The Mason-bees had chosen the interstices between the stones as a dormitory where to pass the night in serried groups. The powerful Eyed Lizard, who, when close-pressed, attacks wide-mouthed both man and dog, had selected a cave wherein to lie in wait for the passing Scarab;¹ the Black-eared Chat, garbed like a Dominican, white-frocked with black wings, sat on the top stone, singing his short rustic lay: his nest, with its sky-blue eggs, must be somewhere in the heap. The little Dominican disappeared with the loads of stones. I regret him: he would have been a charming neighbour. The Eyed Lizard I do not regret at all.

The sand sheltered a different colony. Here, the Bembeces² were sweeping the threshold of their burrows, flinging a curve of dust behind them; the Languedocian SpheX was dragging her Ephippigera³ by the antennae; a Stizus⁴ was storing her preserves of Cicadellæ.⁵ To my sorrow, the masons ended by evicting the sporting tribe; but, should I ever wish to recall it, I have but to renew the mounds of sand: they will soon all be there.

Hunters that have not disappeared, their homes being different, are the

¹ A Dung-beetle known also as the Sacred Beetle. – *Translator's Note.*

² A species of Digger-wasps. – *Translator's Note.*

³ A species of Green Grasshopper. – *Translator's Note.*

⁴ A species of Hunting-wasp. – *Translator's Note.*

⁵ Froghoppers. – *Translator's Note.*

Ammophilæ, whom I see fluttering, one in spring, the others in autumn, along the garden-walks and over the lawns, in search of a Caterpillar; the Pompili,¹ who travel alertly, beating their wings and rummaging in every corner in quest of a Spider. The largest of them waylays the Narbonne Lycosa,² whose burrow is not infrequent in the harmas. This burrow is a vertical well, with a curb of fescue-grass intertwined with silk. You can see the eyes of the mighty Spider gleam at the bottom of the den like little diamonds, an object of terror to most. What a prey and what dangerous hunting for the Pompilus! And here, on a hot summer afternoon, is the Amazon-ant, who leaves her barrack-rooms in long battalions and marches far afield to hunt for slaves. We will follow her in her raids when we find time. Here again, around a heap of grasses turned to mould, are Scoliæ³ an inch and a half long, who fly gracefully and dive into the heap, attracted by a rich prey, the grubs of Lamellicorns, Oryctes, and Cetoniæ⁴.

What subjects for study! And there are more to come. The house was as utterly deserted as the ground. When man was gone and peace assured, the animal hastily seized on everything. The Warbler took up his abode in the lilac-shrubs; the Greenfinch settled in the thick shelter of the cypresses; the Sparrow carted rags and straw under every slate; the Serin-finch, whose downy nest is no bigger than half an apricot, came and chirped in the plane-tree-tops; the Scops made a habit of uttering his monotonous, piping note here, of an evening; the bird of Pallas Athene, the Owl, came hurrying along to hoot and hiss.

In front of the house is a large pond, fed by the aqueduct that supplies the village-pumps with water. Here, from half a mile and more around, come the Frogs and Toads in the lovers' season. The Natterjack, sometimes as large as a plate, with a narrow stripe of yellow down his back, makes his appointments here to take his bath; when the evening twilight falls, we see

¹ The Pompilus is a species of Hunting-wasp known also as the Ringed Calicurgus. — *Translator's Note.*

² Known also as the Black-bellied Tarantula. — *Translator's Note.*

³ Large Hunting-wasps. — *Translator's Note.*

⁴ Different species of Beetles. The Cetonia is the Rose-chafer. — *Translator's Note.*

hopping along the edge the Midwife Toad, the male, who carries a cluster of eggs, the size of peppercorns, wrapped round his hind-legs: the genial paterfamilias has brought his precious packet from afar, to leave it in the water and afterwards retire under some flat stone, whence he will emit a sound like a tinkling bell. Lastly, when not croaking amid the foliage, the Tree-frogs indulge in the most graceful dives. And so, in May, as soon as it is dark, the pond becomes a deafening orchestra: it is impossible to talk at table, impossible to sleep. We had to remedy this by means perhaps a little too rigorous. What could we do? He who tries to sleep and cannot needs become ruthless.

Bolder still, the Wasp has taken possession of the dwelling-house. On my door-sill, in a soil of rubbish, nestles the White-banded SpheX: when I go indoors, I must be careful not to damage her burrows, not to tread upon the miner absorbed in her work. It is quite a quarter of a century since I last saw the saucy Cricket-hunter. When I made her acquaintance, I used to visit her at a few miles' distance: each time, it meant an expedition under the blazing August sun. To-day I find her at my door; we are intimate neighbours. The embrasure of the closed window provides an apartment of a mild temperature for the Pelopæus.¹ The earth-built nest is fixed against the freestone wall. To enter her home, the Spider-huntress uses a little hole left open by accident in the shutters. On the mouldings of the Venetian blinds, a few stray Mason-bees build their group of cells; inside the outer shutters, left ajar, a Eumenes² constructs her little earthen dome, surmounted by a short, bell-mouthed neck. The Common Wasp and the Polistes³ are my dinner-guests: they visit my table to see if the grapes served are as ripe as they look.

Here surely – and the list is far from complete – is a company both numerous and select, whose conversation will not fail to charm my solitude, if I succeed in drawing it out, my dear beasts of former days, my old friends, and others, more recent acquaintances, all are here, hunting, foraging,

¹ A species of Mason-wasp. – *Translator's Note.*

² Another Mason-wasp. – *Translator's Note.*

³ A Wasp that builds her nest in trees. – *Translator's Note.*

building in close proximity. Besides, should we wish to vary the scene of observation, the mountain¹ is but a few hundred steps away, with its tangle of arbutus, rock-roses and arborescent heather; with its sandy spaces dear to the Bembeces; with its marly slopes exploited by different Wasps and Bees. And that is why, foreseeing these riches, I have abandoned the town for the village and come to Sérignan to weed my turnips and water my lettuces.

Laboratories are being founded at great expense, on our Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts, where people cut up small sea-animals, of but meagre interest to us; they spend a fortune on powerful microscopes, delicate dissecting-instruments, engines of capture, boats, fishing-crews, aquariums, to find out how the yolk of an Annelid's² egg is constructed, a question whereof I have never yet been able to grasp the full importance; and they scorn the little land-animal, which lives in constant touch with us, which provides universal psychology with documents of inestimable value, which too often threatens the public wealth by destroying our crops. When shall we have an entomological laboratory for the study not of the dead insect, steeped in alcohol, but of the living insect; a laboratory having for its object the instinct, the habits, the manner of living, the work, the struggles, the propagation of that little world with which agriculture and philosophy have most seriously to reckon? To know thoroughly the history of the destroyer of our vines might perhaps be more important than to know how this or that nerve-fibre of a Cirriped³ ends; to establish by experiment the line of demarcation between intellect and instinct; to prove, by comparing facts in the zoological progression, whether human reason be an irreducible faculty or not: all this ought surely to take precedence of the number of joints in a Crustacean's antenna. These enormous questions would need an army of workers; and we have not one. The fashion is all for the Mollusc and the Zoophyte.⁴ The depths of the sea are explored with many drag-nets; the soil

¹ Mont Ventoux, an outlying summit of the Alps, 6,270 feet high. — *Translator's Note.*

² A red-blooded Worm. — *Translator's Note.*

³ Cirripeds are sea-animals with hair-like legs, including the Barnacles and Acom-shells. — *Translator's Note.*

⁴ Zoophytes are plant-like sea-animals, including Star-fishes, Jelly-fishes, Sea-anemones, and Sponges. — *Translator's Note.*