Firefly of Caribbean Is Lamp to Natives—Beebe Tries One Too

"Mr. Peeney," Whether on One's Shoes, in a Bottle, or Flying Freely About, Gleams in Tropical Forests With His Amazing Headlights

Four hundred years ago, when Columbus landed on the beautiful islands of the Caribbean, he found the palm-thatched huts o the Carib Indians lighted at night by the tropical firefly which the Indians confined in cleverly wrought cages of palm fibre. To-day the gentle Carib Indian is gone, but travelers in the interior of the islands will find the "peeney" or cucujos, as the natives call the firefly, lighting the huts of an alien race.

To a northerner the tropical firefly or big elater beetle is a never-ending source of delight and interest. It is difficult to imagine anything lovelier than the pageant of dancing, flashing, fairy-like lights presented by native North American lightning-bugs on warm summer evenings, but beautiful and unforgettable as this is, it cannot be compared in brilliance to that of the tropical firefly. The northern firefly might be said to be nature's candle; the tropical firefly her incandescent lamp. Looking down upon a valley filled with countless numbers of these dancing fireflies is like looking upon the starry heavens inverted—a scene never to be forgotten.

The luminosity of our North American firefly comes from three segments of the abdomen and is only visible when the little beetle raises its wings. It is this raising and lowering of the wings that causes the intermittent flash. The elater beetle of the West Indies and tropical South American is four or five times the size of the northern lightning-bug and its chief light is given out by two eye-like spots on the thorax. There is also another area of illumination on the abdomen but this cannot be seen except when the insect is on wing.

Two Headlights.

Unlike the intermittent gleam of the northern firefly these two thoracic lights glow steadily and continuously and in a dark room their resmblance to the electric headlight of s tiny, toy automobile is both startling and amusing. William Beebe, the naturalist, tells of finding one that carried the illusion so far as actually to show a red taillight! To awaken in the middle of th night and discover one of these living, toy "motor-cars" gliding swiftly and surely across the ceiling, its headlights lighting up the ceiling for an inch or more around it, is something one must experience to appreciate, particularly if one has not had the pleasure of making "Mr. Peeney's acquaintance before. The first impulse is to pinch one's self to be sure one isn't dreaming.

While only these two thoracic lights are visible when the beetle is at rest, the light is strong enough to read by. Several beetles placed under a glass is quite frequently the only light used by the poorer natives and Dr. Beebe tells o using them in this way in place of his electric flash.

On one occasion when he was "night-stalking" with his Indian guide he caught one of the big beetles and put it in a glass vial inside his trouser pocket. Glancing down a few moments later he discovered that his trouser leg was brightly illuminated. He realized that this would betray him to the wild folk he had come out to study, but the beetle was a particularly fine specimen which he wanted to keep, so feeling around in his pocket he found a thick piece of paper in which he careully wrapped the vial and replaced it in his pocket. But the beetle refused to "hide its light." It continued to shine undimmed through paper and khaki and Dr. Beebe was forced, most reluctantly, to give the marvellous insect its freedom.

But Dr. Beebe relates an even more astonishing experience he had with the elaters. Two of the luminous beetles were chloroformed and placed in an insect box. Several evenings later the naturalist opened the box to put in more insects and was amazed to find the little "lanterns" of the dead elaters still glowing almost as brilliantly as when they were alive, "lighting up all the other insects in the box" with a "ghostly white light."

Lighting Tropical Forests.

In tropical South America travelers who are forced to pass through the forests at night, it is said, attach the fireflies to their boots to light the path for hem, avoiding in this way the danger of stepping on snakes; and certain birds fasten them to the clay of which their nests are built, utilizing their light, perhaps, to frighten away predatory animals. But perhaps the strangest use to which the beautiful insects were ever put was at a fancy dress ball given some years ago in Jamaica, when the Governor's wife appeared in the darkened ball room with hundreds of the beetles gleaming brightly under the gossamer like tulle of her evening gown . Skillful tacking of the tulle held them gently in place and as soon as the lights were turned on the beetles were liberated quite unharmed.

By day the beetle looks like the ordinary beetles of the northern hemisphere. It measures from 1¼ to 1½ inches in length, and is inky-black in color. Both the male and female beetles are luminous as are also their eggs and larvae. They live on decaying wood and vegetable matter and are perfectly harmless.

Natives Are Fond of Them.

When the natives wish to catch them they wait until it is dark. Then lighting the end of a stick they go out of doors and wave it above their head. In a few moments dozens of beetles, attracted by the unusual light, will be flying around the stick. When caught they show their displeasure by "clicking" loudly and vigorously. The natives have the greatest affection for the beautiful insects and no child or grown-up would dream of harming one.

The firefly's light is one of the secrets natural scientists are trying to solve. Man can fly; tunnel through mountains and under rivers; he can send his voice thousands of miles without the aid of wires; he can produce light by candle, oil, gas and electricity, but he cannot do what this little beetle does—produce phosphorescent light without heat!

A Wild Beast Drive With Africa Ablaze

The weird throb of tomtoms sounded all night through the Mashakulumbiwe village, and in the morning the natives left for the wildest, bloodiest, most dangerous spectacle in Africa—the annual game drive. The hunters took their positions. Presently billowing clouds of dense smoke rose from the grass for several miles around Tongues of red, leaping flame played underneath. The valley of the hunt was on fire from the river to the edge of the encircling bush. A vicious crackle and snap drifted down the wind as the tinder-dry grass, lighted by the natives to drive the game toward the hunters, flamed. But not a sound came from the watchers, crouched tense, waiting with their spears to kill whatever animals escaped the pitfalls which had been dug. Standing, expectant, with his rifle clutched in his hand, was Wynant Davis Hubbard, whose business is that of capturing wild animals for zoos and circuses. This drive, from which he hoped to obtain some specimens, he describes for us in The Elks Magazine:

I pictured in my mind the happenings in the grass in front of us. Herds of puku, lechiwe, and wildebeeste antelope would be moving slowly ahead of the advancing fire. Buffaloes ousted from their cooling, muddy wallows would be sullenly getting to their feet to find safer resting-places. There would be zebras and sitatunga, jackals, hyneas, and, perhaps, a roan antelope; undoubtedly somewhere between us and the fire there were lions and leopards slinking along, avoiding the buffaloes, angry at being disturbed at such a time of day. As yet the animals would not be afraid. They are used to fire, often feeding close behind it to get the salt residue from the ashes of the burnt grass. Every year all Africa burns. Seven months of bone-dry weather mean but one thing—fire. During August and September, all Africa south of the equator goes up in smoke.

The sun was well up. Its hot rays burnt comfortingly into my back. The roar and crackle of the fire were within a mile of us. Acrid smoke swirled over our heads Through it and above it, hovered and flew thousands of birds of all sizes intent on catching the insects driven from cover by the heat of the fire. Suddenly a puku antelope appeared for a moment through the grass. The advance guard of animals was close. Three spears flashed through the air above the grass. There was a startled bleat. Then silence. First blood had been drawn.

The smoke grew denser and hotter The roar of the fire increased in volume. A tenseness gripped the waiting line of spearmen. My hands were wet with excitement, and I breathed in choking gasps. Suddenly yells and shouts broke forth from the natives following the line of fire. They were almost on us. Running animals appeared as if by magic. Through the swirls of smoke I caught glimpses of puku dashing madly toward the line of bush to abruptly disappear from sight as their feet went through the treacherous covering on the pitfalls. A bellowing, grunting herd of buffaloes galloped past and I fired at one. Spears flashed in the sunlight for a moment, then disappeared in the grass, the long shafts quivering from the force with which they were thrown. Behind us, frantic yells rose in a crescendo of excitement. The booming, throaty roar of an angry lion told the cause Bedlam broke loose. Shrieks, yells, curses, the roar of the fire, and the grunts and squeals of the trapped and speared animals swelled into a deafening pandemonium. Naked natives tore whooping along the line of pits waving blood-stained spears and knives. It was like a scene from the Inferno.

Just in front of the pits the fire reached a cleared space. The flames died down, and gradually the smoke and dust cleared away. The drive was over.

Nearly every pit had claimed its victim. Scattered in front and behind lay the bodies of those animals which had fallen to the deadly throwing spears. Here were puku bulls and zebra mares, farther on a two-thousand-pound buffalo, then a lechiwe and a wildebeeste, enough meat and skins for every family. A few young animals had been caught alive. These were taken to the village with the bodies of the lions, leopards, jackals and smaller cats whose skins could be used as skirts for the women, or to make bags and pouches for the men.

This yearly Mashakulumbiwe drive is held to secure meat and skins. On a smaller scale the same thing takes place in many parts of Africa all during July, August and September.

This drive was of more than ordinary interest to me as the pitfalls do not have to be used to kill. The animals trapped in them can be taken out alive very easily with the help of a few natives, and the use of a shovel and some rope.

The V-bottomed pitfall is a deadly affair. The apex of the V is about four inches wide, the width of a native hoe An antelope, buffalo, or zebra falling through the covering jams its legs one behind the other. No matter ho wit struggles it cannot work loose. Dirt loosened from the long the animal is standing in a pit, sides falls down into the V, and before its weight resting on its chest and belly, with its legs firmly held in a mass of soft compact dirt.

Three methods of catching animals, pitfalls, nooses and nets, are used by the natives. They are so effective that white men have adopted them and use them almost exactly in the native manner. But there are other methods besides these three, the writer explains:

Some animals, such as the elephant and rhinoceros, can only be caught as calves. To capture a rhino we hunt until we find a cow with a calf sufficiently small for us to handle. We shoot the cow and then take after the calf on the flat of our feet. A calf elephant or rhino will not leave its mother's body. We chase it back and forth and all around until someone gets hold of an ear, a leg or a tail and tangles himself up with it. This is the most dangerous form of capturing. Trying to lay hands on a buffalo calf or a young elephant is risky, to say the least. An elephant four feet high can break trees six inches in diameter as if they were matches. They can run faster than any horse. But every now and then we do capture them, although someone nearly always pays the price in broken ribs, a gored shoulder, or even by being killed.

The big cats, such as lions and leopards, we catch in heavy box traps made either of logs or of iron bars and heavy beams. We snare birds when they come to drink, and on every possible occasion chase game with dogs A good pack of dogs will tree a leopard in short order or run a warthog down a hole within a mile.

The natives on their daily rounds of inspection are constantly on the lookout for tortoises, turtles, young birds or baby antelope. With their dogs they often chase small cats into holes or tree young baboons or monkeys.

All the animals, birds and snakes caught are brought into one central camp, where they are tamed and studied. In addition to the specimens captured by members of the camp, occasionally animals are bought from other white men, and there hardly passes a day during which village natives do not bring in animals and birds for sale.

Often Mr. Hubbard and his family made friends with their captives. For example:

"Skillum," a full-grown leopard, was a great pet. He would lie for hours stretched in the sun on top of his shelter and keep watch over the camp. Whenever either my wife or myself appeared he would "umph" and "yeo" an dcall until we came over toward him. As soon as he saw that we were really coming he would bound down from his perch and stand straining on his chain, his back arched and his tail thrashing, waiting for us. He knew that he must always back up to us. We had taught him that, as a leopard's paws and claws are too potentially dangerous to risk even in play. Grabbing hold of his tail, we would rub his chin, scratch his ears and tickle his tummy. "Skillum" talked and grunted and strained in an ecstasy of pleasure. He was like an enormous tabby cat.

"Skillum" was so tame that sometimes we would take him for a walk on the end of a leash. Three or four times his collar or wire broke and he got loose Then his one idea was to enter either the kitchen or the dining-room. As we had two young children, these escapades of his used to worry us, but "Skillum" never gave the slightest indications of vicious tendencies.

After supper, my wife and I, accompanied by Sandy, our Great Dane watch-dog, wuold make the rounds of the cages to see that all the doors were shut, and that all our adopted children were comfortable for the night. "Skillum" had to have his good-night word and rub, and then we too went to bed, turning over the responsibility for the safety of the camp to Sandy.

Military Training Good For Man and Beast

MOUNTS JUMP AS ONE

The winning pair in the half-section jumping competition at the Imber Court Horse Show.

NATURE'S TEACHING

Man has by no means reached the ultimate goal toward which he is travelling, and the growing children are the ones who must take the forward steps, as they come to manhood, if we have tried to make them into a pattern of ourselves, progress is impossible, and Nature's aim by so much defeated.

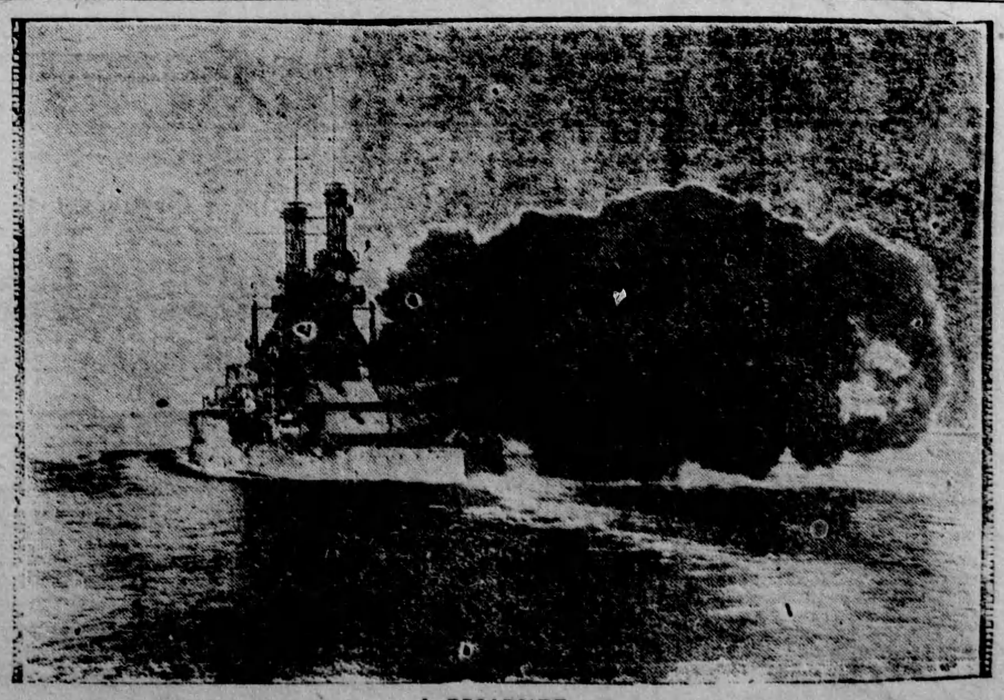
Let them drink in all that is pure and sweet, don't stuff platitudes, sentimentalism or dogma down their throats, and whatever you do, don't frighten them either of dark corners in the house or of a dark corner in life!

Let nature teach them the lessons of good and proper living, put them in touch with the best contracts you know, let them absorb truth and beauty and human brotherhood as the plant does sunshine and dew, and those children will grow to be the best men and women.—Luther Burbank in The Harvest of the Years.

Colonial Status

Round Table (London): Colonial status is an indifferent training for participation in the world's affairs. The Americans found it so after their revolution; the Dominions are finding it so now. They are only gradually awakening to the fact that new privileges entail new responsibilities, and that political isolation and immunity can be attained only by a Chinese policy of commercial abnegation which they are not prepared to adopt and their neighbors can hardly be expected to suffer.

In a certain foreign state the railway system is inclined to be rather haphazard. Recently a cow strayed on the line and was killed by a passing train. An action followed, and the driver of the train was asked to give evidence of what happened. "Well," he began, "it weren't my fault at all, 'cos if the train had bin runnin' ter proper time; if the brakes worked properly; if the whistle had blowed as it should, all of which things didn't happen — the cow wouldn't have been injured at all when she was killed."



A BROADSIDE

Cobbett's Plain English

First among Cobbett's virtues I place his English style. I cannot imagine any English prose more suitable to be given as a pattern and model to the ordinary man and woman. If England ever becomes a civilized country, ninety per cent. of the population will write like William Cobbett. His English is plain, absolutely unaffected, vigorous and supple, beautiful. He knows instinctively not only exactly what he wants to say, but also the words which will most naturally and harmoniously express his meaning. . . . In each case the "fit" is so perfect and so natural. Cobbett's style is extraordinary English. There are, of course, far greater English prose-writers than he is, but no one, I believe, has ever written sentences which are more perfectly in keeping with the peculiar genius of the English language. (It is because this faculty is natural and unconscious in him that I say that in an English Utopia we ordinary persons would all write like Cobbett.) When you read a paragraph of Cobbett, all you can say is: "Well, that simply is English"; you cannot say the same of Sir Thomas Browne or of Milton or of many fess Latinized prose-writers.

Cobbett seems to me to get into his sentences something of the atmosphere of the English country and the English climate as well as of the English language and the English character. This is true of all his writings. . . . but it is what gives a peculiar quality and charm to his descritions of English country and so to his Rural Rides. What could be simpler or apparently more easy to write than the following passages, yet how many people could ride out on a January morning from Kensington and return with this in their note-books? . . .

"Even in winter the coppices are beautiful to the eye, while they comfort . . . with the idea of shelter and warmth. In spring they change their hue from day to day during two whole months, which is about the time from the first appearance of the delicate leaves of the birch to the full expansion of those of the ash; and even before the leaves come at all to intercept the view, what . . . is so delightful to behold as the bed of a coppice bespangled with primroses and bluebells? The opening of the birch leaves is the signal for the pheasant to begin to crow, for the blackbird to whistle, and the thrush to sing; and just when the oak-buds begin to look reddish, and not a day before, the whole tribe of finches burst forth in songs from every bough, while the lark, imitating them all, carries the joyous sounds to the sky."—Leonard Woolf in "Essays on Literature, History, Politics, Etc."

Giant Motor Ship to Cross Deserts

Luxurious Four-Decked Car Will Take Passengers Over Sands

Paris.—A giant automobile resembling an ocean vessel on wheels has been designed for desert travel by a German engineer, H. E. Schuetter.

The "super-vehicle" is said to be about 125 feet long, 25 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Its wheels will be 40 feet in diameter and it will be able to carry 150 passengers and 200 tons of merchandise.

The desert-vessel will be propelled by a Diesel engine of 450 horsepowor and a second engine will be on hand for emergency. The machine, it is claimed, will be able to climb 30 per cent. grades. Its speed is estimated at 25 kilometers per hour.

The four decks will provide cabins, promenades, sitting and reading rooms, baggage and store rooms and a "cooling room," where a low temperature will be artificially maintained.

The designers of the road vessel, it is explained, wished to invent a vehicle which would be able to carry a high tonnage on deserts where other means of transportation involve unwarranted expense.

The Pinta did not win the United-States-Spain race for Class B yachts, but she bettered the record made by the Pinta which was in Christopher Columbus' fleet.

"Another need of the times," says the Indianapolis News, "is a furnace that will remove its own ashes and carry them out." That may be so in Indianapolis, but up here the cry is for a lawnmower that will shove itself round the front yard.