



XII.

PESTS.

Insects.—**Much** exaggerated nonsense has been written about the insects of Florida. It is true that the earth, the waters, and the air there teem with life, as they do in all southern climates. But it is also true that the insects are not aggressive in proportion to their number. Human life is naturally shaped so as to offset the natural surroundings; and no civilized man need succumb to so trifling an enemy. The same means that suffice to keep off mosquitoes in 'New Jersey will keep them off in Florida. The mosquito season is longer in the South, but these insects can be kept at bay more easily in the South for the reason that much greater attention is paid to appliances for that purpose. Houses are constructed so as to exclude them; and, with windows and doors properly wire-netted or closed with gauze of suitable texture, and beds properly protected **with** netting, there need be no great annoyance from mosquitoes. When they get



foothold in a room, a spoonful of insect-powder—*pyrethrum*, of several varieties—burned will expel or kill them. It can be grown there. Smudge-tires to windward will always banish the mosquitoes..

Fleas abound in some places, mostly where hogs and dogs live about the place; but these can be readily kept away with pennyroyal and several other plants, easily cultivated there.

Gnats, flies, and that class of pests, seem to be about the same as elsewhere. Where there are little pests, there are usually larger enemies to them to keep them down. A large insect known as the mosquito-hawk destroys countless thousands of gnats, as do also the spiders, birds, and lizards.

The red-bug annoys those that hunt him up in the jungles and tangles of weed and undergrowth; but nobody need hunt up such pests.

The cockroach about the house is an annoyance, but borax or some similar drug—insect-powder, for example—will drive all roaches away. The same is true of ants.

Sand-flies are very annoying in places, but nowhere constantly. They come and go, and are generally so near the water's edge that it is comparatively easy to keep away from them. These pests, as well as all mosquitoes, gnats, and air-flies, may be

kept at bay with smoldering fires, popularly known in Florida as smudge-fires, built and burned to windward of the spot to be protected. Materials of pleasant-odored smoke abound everywhere, and a spoonful of insect-powder will insure the desired effect.

Reptiles.—There are three kinds of snakes in Florida that are poisonous—the rattlesnake, the moccasins, and the adders, there being two varieties of the moccasin and two of the adder. These all, especially the rattlesnake, flee from man ; and years of life in Florida have been passed without ever hearing of a case of bite from any of these snakes. The habitat of these reptiles is the jungle, the swamp, and the thicket, places that it is rarely necessary to visit. The hunter and the fisherman will naturally provide themselves with protection against such dangers, and deserve to be bit if they do not.

There are several snakes that are wholly innocuous—the king-snake, the bull or gopher snake, the ordinary black-snake, the coach-whip, the ground-snake, and indeed all except the rattlesnake, the moccasin, and the adder.

Frogs, toads, and the like, serve their several useful purposes, as they do elsewhere, and should be protected and cultivated intelligently.

Land-Sharks. — It is difficult to classify these pests, as they are not strictly insects, nor reptiles, in the herpetological sense of that word. They must be tolerably known to the intelligent reading public of to-day; although, like Proteus, they assume new shapes with wonderful facility.

The boomer is one variety of these sharks. He has a wonderful vocabulary of adjectives, both laudatory and abusive; the former for his one little Eden where his lands are to sell, and the latter for everywhere, everything, and everybody else.

The paper-town shark is one of the most recent evolutions. He is multiform and irrepressible; and the public would better think twice before reading his wonderful "circular." The drop-game of the last generation, and the saw-dust trick of this, are neither of them so beautiful and attractive as this stupendous sell of Florida. While there may be honest and truthful boomers of the paper-town "racket," and doubtless there are, the public needs a volume of admonition and advice; and that volume is faithfully condensed in the one word—BE-WAEE.

As the tourist and prospector for a home in Florida goes on in his tour of inspection, he needs to weigh well the testimony he receives. If he do



not, he is likely to settle in the first community he interviews; for every one of these seems to feel under obligation to belittle every other community that lies ahead; and in this belittling there is too often a deal of belying. The traveler arrives at Jacksonville, and looks about him. He there is likely to get the impression that the civilization and refinement of the State center there; and that every step into the interior is a step toward the backwoods and barbarity, discomfort, malaria, and general nothingness. His first step is into the St. John's River region; and there he is in like manner plied with the idea that he is in the center of progress, culture, and happy exemption from all the ills that lie so heavy on the benighted lands to the southward. His next step is to Indian Eiver; and there he gathers in the comforting idea that he is in the genuine original center of civilization, where Nature is at her best, where real progress is bursting out, and where there are none of those disgusting and discouraging drawbacks that curse all the land that lies south of that paradise—the subtropics of Lake "Worth and Biscayne Bay, where there *can* be nothing but insects, vermin, mud, malaria, Indians, desolation, abomination, discomfort, disease, black death, and poverty—where nothing will grow



but comptie and mangroves, and where nobody lives anyhow.

But the traveler should listen at Jacksonville, listen on the St. John's, listen on Indian River, and listen in the subtropics. One disillusion ought to open his eyes. Generally it doesn't. But three or four disillusionings will suffice for all, save the fool; and *he* would better stay at home.

This is not intended to mean that "*all* men are liars" ; but that the explorer is likely to encounter in any community enough of that entertaining class to give him just that set of ideas. It means more; to wit, that that class of meddling romancers is just the one to hunt up, pursue, and persecute the tourist and stranger with their hoarded treasures of lies about the country. These misrepresenters are fully equipped with all the resources of their trade—the *suppressio veri*, the *suggestio falsi*, the innuendo, and the lie out of whole cloth. They are irrepressible, effusive, plausible, unescapable, intolerable. The Ancient Mariner was passivity itself in comparison with these. The tourist must hear them. Let him listen, and—go on.