

“War and Warrior Ants”

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It is often said that boyhood is cruel. Perhaps it is so,—but if it is so why is it? It is because boyhood is thoughtless. Personal experience has not yet developed sympathy for the sufferings of others. But if this is true, tender thoughtfulness should increase with age and mental development. All human beings should be humane. Those human beings who are not humane but inhuman, are, as shown by common consent expressed in the formation of speech, by just so much lacking in the development of their manhood and womanhood.

It is animal nature to fight. Yet not all animals delight in cruelty and deeds of blood. Only the carnivorous creatures, birds and beasts of prey, seem to delight in causing suffering, and kill for the sake of killing. However, all animated nature seems to share in the desire for conquest. The pugnacious little sparrows will sometimes fight with such ferocity that they apparently become almost oblivious to their surroundings, and flutter and tussle and roll about the lawn or the dusty street like furious little game-cocks.

Even those models of insect life, the industrious ant and the busy bee, are filled with the spirit of conquest and organize their wars with a skill and ability equal to that which they show in their industrial pursuits. An interested observer of nature has given us this vivid and circumstantial account of a battle which he witnessed:—

“One day when I went to my wood-pile I observed two large ants, the one red, the other much larger, nearly half an inch long, and black, fiercely contending with one another. Having once got hold they never let go, but struggled and wrestled and rolled on the chips incessantly. Looking farther I was surprised to find that the chips were covered with such combatants, that it was not a duel but a war, a war between two races of ants, the red always pitted against the black, and frequently two red ones to one black. It was evident that their battle cry was—Conquer or die.

“In the meanwhile there came along a single red ant on the hillside of this valley, evidently full of excitement, who had either despatched his foe, or had not yet taken part in the battle; probably the latter, for he had lost none of his limbs; whose mother had charged him to return with his shield or upon it. He saw this unequal combat from afar off,—for the blacks were nearly twice the size of the reds,—he drew near with rapid pace till he stood on his guard within half an inch of the combatants; then, watching his opportunity, he sprang upon the black warrior, and commenced his operations near the root of his right foreleg, leaving the foe to select among his own members. I should not have wondered by this time to find that they had their respective musical bands stationed on some eminent chip, and playing their national airs the while, to excite the slow and cheer the dying combatants.

“I took up the chip on which the three I have particularly described were struggling, carried them into my house, and placed it under a tumbler on my window-sill, in order to see the issue. Holding a microscope to the first-mentioned red ant, I saw that, though he was

assiduously gnawing at the foreleg of his enemy, having severed his remaining feeler, his own breast was all torn away, exposing what vitals he had there to the jaws of the black warrior, whose breast-plate was apparently too thick for him to pierce; and the dark carbuncles of the sufferer's eyes shone with ferocity such as war only could excite. They struggled half an hour longer under the tumbler, and when I looked again the black soldier had severed the heads of his foes from their bodies, and they were hanging on either side of him, like ghastly trophies at his saddle-bow, still apparently as firmly fastened as ever, and he was endeavouring with feeble struggles, being without feelers and with only the remnant of a leg, and I know not how many other wounds, to divest himself of them; which at length, after half an hour more, he accomplished. I raised the glass, and he went off the window-sill in that crippled state. I never learned which party was victorious, nor the cause of the war; but I felt for the rest of the day as if I had had my feelings excited and harrowed by witnessing the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle before my door."

Were it not that this description was written many years ago, one might almost think the writer had in mind to give an allegorical account of a battle in a race war in Africa. However, had that been so he could have no doubt as to which party was eventually victorious, although he would very likely have been just as uncertain as to the cause of the war.

What is the state of human development when mature men and civilized nations emulate the beasts of prey, the fighting sparrows, and the warrior ants, in their deed; of violence and wars of conquest? Emulate them indeed! Yes, far exceed them. But, if it be acknowledged that boyhood is thoughtlessly and ignorantly cruel, then are we still in the boyhood of mankind? No, that excuse will not hold good,—for the most ancient peoples are among the most cruel and blood-thirsty. The terrible cruelties which have recently been perpetrated in the East have been the work of those same Medes of whom Isaiah said that they should dash the young men to pieces and should not spare children. Isa. 13:16, 17. No, it is not youth,—it is not thoughtlessness,—it is not ignorance,—the world is growing old in lust and murder, and cruelty and crime. Brilliant uniforms, and martial music, and scientific appliances for slaughter do not Christianize warfare, or make it possible for Christian men to take part in it. "Thou shalt not kill," applies just as much to him who carries a sword and wears a uniform as it did to Cain who was clad in a sheepskin and used a club.