

## A HOME FOR EMPIRE INSECTS\*

### “ROGUES’ GALLERY” FOR THE KING’S SIX-LEGGED ENEMIES

#### BOXES OF BEETLES

SIX million insects have “moved house” into the new wing built by the Empire Marketing Board at the Natural History Museum, which was opened recently by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Acute over-crowding in the insect rooms, which contain specimens from every corner of the world has made necessary a new building for their display.

The collection is a sort of “rogues’ gallery” for the use of the men who are policing the Empire’s most destructive and dangerous criminals—the insect pests. If a new insect crook tries to put an Empire crop “on the spot” the entomologist’s first act, like the detective’s, is to identify the pest and to get its dossier from the criminal records. This information tells him the criminal’s habits and methods of working and helps him to find ways and means of outwitting the enemy.

#### INSECT GENERAL POST

Farmers, medical officers, missionaries, commercial men, and agricultural specialists send specimens to be identified from all parts of the Empire. By every morning’s post arrive boxes containing an unknown beetle from the West Indies, a moth which is ruining crops in Fiji, an ant which lives on railway sleepers in Palestine, or a fly suspected of carrying some fatal disease in Central Africa. These are filed in special wooden specimen cases and scientists study such delicate signs as the insect’s lower jaw or the pattern of the veins on its wing to find its exact place in the tribe.

Advice on practical control measures, also, is given. The new building contains “controlled temperature” rooms where the insects can be reared under tropical conditions even in an English winter. Their life-histories can then be studied and certain methods of destruction tested.

#### TWO STRANGE COLLECTORS

Three-quarters of a million butterflies are arranged in one of the new rooms and have a romantic history. Two brothers who lived near Rheims, in France, collected insects as a hobby. One devoted himself to beetles; the other collected butterflies, and by the end of his life had amassed one million specimens. When the collection came up for sale the Natural History Museum acquired the bulk of it. Then the butterflies, the most fragile of cargoes, had to be transported to London. They were taken across France by road, shipped with tender care over the Channel and finally delivered in South Kensington in thirteen specially padded vans.

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\* Empire Marketing Board Publication, 1930.

Other insects have reached the Museum in odd ways. A bookseller bought an ancient cabinet of books in which he found a number of dead butterflies. They turned out to belong to an old English species which had since become extinct and to be worth ten guineas each. They now repose in the new insect wing. Attempts have been made to re-introduce several species of butterflies which had become extinct into butterfly sanctuaries in East Anglia.

### **MOTHS FROM AN OIL-FIELD**

Some other valuable moths were collected by an engineer on a South American oil-field. "The desire of the moth for the flame" drove them to beseege his flares when he was working at night. Other specimens have been sent in by army officers who take up "bug-hunting" in their spare time in Iraq, Egypt, Aden, and the Frontier.

The insect wing will provide room for scientists from overseas who wish to work at the Museum. Nowhere else in the Empire can they find so complete a collection, and the new accommodation should prove another valuable weapon in the war against insect pests, for which the Empire Marketing Board has already allocated some £200,000. The Natural History Museum does for insects much what Kew does, through its Herbarium, for the plant world.