

## INSECTS INJURIOUS TO HOUSE PLANTS.

WRITTEN FOR THE ANNALS OF IOWA.

BY MISS ALICE B. WALTON.

*Muscatine.*

**T**HE *Aphis*, or green plant lice, are the most common of all the insects troublesome to the lovers of house-plants. They are small, soft, oval, green insects, belonging to the division of insects called *Hemiptera*, or true "bugs." They obtain their living by sucking the juices of plants with their beaks. The name *aphis* was derived from a Greek word, signifying to exhaust.

It is claimed that all trees, shrubs, and plants have their own peculiar species of aphid, and that "a single aphid in the course of five generations may become the progenitor of six thousand millions of descendants." It is not the individual, but their collective damage that is so consequential. They will not leave a leaf or twig where they have congregated, until it will no longer furnish a sufficient supply of food. The tender leaves and twigs are often completely covered with aphid, which are wingless and consist of the smaller type of females and the young. At certain seasons of the year, usually in the fall and occasionally in the spring, aphid having wings are noticed. These are the winged males, and the larger type of females. There is also a bright yellow aphid found on house-plants, but not very common.

One of the peculiarities of these insects are the two honey tubes near the latter extremity of the body. From these tubes a honey-like fluid constantly exudes in little drops and is much prized by ants. In summer ants may frequently be observed running up and down plants gathering the honey dew from the aphid.

The best remedy for the aphid is tobacco smoke. In a greenhouse or conservatory, it is very easy of application. Obtain some refuse tobacco stems from a cigar factory, or plug tobacco will answer, and an old iron kettle or something

large enough to hold a shovelful of good wood coals. Place a large handful of the stems on the live coals and close the conservatory. There should be stems enough used so that the conservatory will be completely filled with a very dense cloud of tobacco smoke. If this plan is followed once a week no conservatory will ever be seriously affected with aphids.

The few plants that nearly everybody tries to keep through the winter must be covered with a box, barrel, or even an old quilt will answer, though not very well, and the burning tobacco shoved under to remain some time. If one application is not sufficient it should be tried again. We have seen it stated that if the plants are thoroughly washed with strong tobacco water it answers the same purpose, but have never tested this plan. Soapsuds has also been recommended.

*Bark Lice.*—When we look at those little spots resembling injured or blistered places on the bark of plants and trees, we can hardly believe that they are real, living members of the animal kingdom. But such they are, and though apparently simple, little, harmless scales, they are all the while sucking the very life from the tree, or more surely from the plant on which they are found. While young they are very minute, six-legged creatures, with the power of moving about and spreading themselves over leaves and branches. They move about for a short time, when part of them become stationary, and undergoing a partial transformation, finally become stationary females covered with scales. The remainder of the young are the males. They undergo a complete transformation, and in the perfect state appear with two wings, but the beaks have disappeared, while the females retain theirs, and by means of which absorb the sap of the plants. The scales under which the females live serve as a covering or shield for the eggs, and after these are deposited the females die. The eggs are hatched and the young come forth to live through the same round of life as their parents.

The house-plants that are most disturbed by these insects are the wax plants, ivies, oleanders, and those of hard bark. Begonias also suffer very frequently. These insects are difficult to overcome. When a plant is covered with

them, all that can be done is to pick them off or wash the plant with strong soap suds. One time we cleaned them from a red honey suckle by painting all the branches where they were with strong lye, while the sun was shining brightly on the bush. But this is too heroic treatment for house-plants.

The *Meally Bug* is simply another species of bark lice and is covered with a meally or cotteny substance, from which it receives its common name. It can be easily destroyed by simply dusting dry sulphur on the plants. We once tried burning sulphur in our conservatory for this insect, and as a result turned every leaf perfectly black. After a long time most of the plants recovered. We therefore would not advise burning sulphur, although like many fictitious remedies it is often suggested.

The *Red Spider* is a very small, almost microscopic insect, of a deep red color. It is hardly what we might call a true insect, for it belongs to the Arachnids, or spider group, having eight legs. The Arachnids are divided into three suborders. In one of these, the Acarnia or Mites, we find the little red spider. It is not indigenous to this country, but was imported from Europe, and has become naturalized. When young it is pale yellow, but when mature deep red. When the leaves of a plant are badly infested, put the plants for a few days in a dark, damp cellar, or else wash thoroughly with water. If a little soap be added to the water it will be all the more effective. Water is the natural enemy of the red spider, and it can only flourish well in the dry warm atmosphere of a living room, or in a hot dry summer.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.