

A SPIDER'S ENGINEERING

Its Wonderful Ability in Lifting Heavy Bodies.

IS THE CARPENTER BEE

Has Been Known to Lift a Snake Which Weighed Ninety-six Times as Much as Its Captor—Feats That Require Instinct Which Amounts to Engineering Skill.

Recently, in the village of Havana, in New York State, an insignificant looking little garden spider pounced upon a milk snake, bit it, entangled it in her threads and actually hoisted it off the ground. The fact that the snake weighed ninety-six times as much as its captor makes this achievement a remarkable one.

Several years ago a paragraph went the rounds of the newspapers in which it was said that a spider had caught and suspended an unfortunate mouse, raising it nearly a foot from the ground and leaving it there to slowly starve to death.

Learned scientists said it was impossible for such a tiny insect as a spider to possess strength enough to lift a comparatively enormous animal like a mouse. It would be as easy to believe a man could lift an elephant.

Since then the little spider has been made the subject of a most interesting investigation, in which it has been found that in physical culture, Jiu-jitsu and other sciences affiliated with muscular development the spider knows a great deal more than we do.

By lifting the snake off the ground at Havana the spider did something which, in comparison, the strongest man on earth would find impossible—unless he knew as much as the spider.

Notwithstanding its strength, the spider's thread alone would be useless as a mechanical power if it were not for its elasticity. The spider has no blocks or pulleys, and therefore it cannot cause the thread to divide up and run in different directions, but the elasticity of the thread more than makes up for this, and renders possible the lifting of an animal much heavier than a snake or a mouse. This may require a little explanation.

Let us suppose that a child can lift a six-pound weight one-foot high, and do this twenty times a minute, furnish him with \$50 rubber bands, each capable of pulling six pounds through one foot when stretched. Let these bands be attached to a wooden platform on which stands a pair of horses weighing 2,100 pounds, or rather more than a ton. If now the child will go to work and stretch these rubber bands, single, hooking each one up, as it is stretched, in less than twenty minutes he will have raised the pair of horses one foot.

We thus see that the elasticity of the rubber bands enables the child to divide the weight of the horses into 350 pieces of six pounds each, and at the rate of a little less than one every three seconds, he lifts all these separate pieces one foot, so that the child easily lifts this enormous weight.

Each spider's thread acts like one of the elastic rubber bands. Let us suppose that the mouse weighed half an ounce, and that each thread is capable of supporting a grain and a half. The spider would have to connect the mouse with the point from which it was to be suspended with 150 threads, and if the little quadruped was once swung off his feet he would be powerless. By pulling successively on each thread and shortening it a little, the mouse or snake might be raised to any height within the capacity of the building or structure in which the work was done.

Just what object the spider could have had for catching the snake and lifting it off the ground it is difficult to see. It may have been a dread of the harm which the mouse or snake might work, or it may have been a hope that after the captured animals had starved to death the decaying carcasses would attract flies which would furnish food for the engineer.

In a most instructive and interesting volume on "Insect Literature," by Rennie, a tribute is paid to the wonderful engineering ability displayed by the little spider and other insects.

Long before man had thought of the saw, the saw-fly had used the same tool, made after the same fashion and used in the same way for the purpose of making slits in the branches of trees so that she may have a secure place in which to deposit her eggs.

The carpenter bee with only the tools which nature has given her, cuts a round hole the full diameter of her body, through thick boards, and so makes a tunnel by which she can have a safe retreat in which to rear her young.

The tumblebug, without derrick or machinery, rolls over large masses of dirt many times her own weight, and the sexton beetle, in a few hours bury beneath the ground the carcass of a comparatively large animal. These feats require a degree of instinct which in a reasonable creature would be called engineering skill.

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FRENCHMEN EAT ODD FISH.

One Kind That is Much in Demand Is a Species of Octopus.

If the traveler approaches Marseilles by water he will be rewarded by a novel pageant of Baherfolk, gamins who have rowed out and are on the lookout for coins, and a stretch of ocean liners representing every port in the world floating peacefully in the foreground, while high above all, like a silhouette against the sky, rises the statue of Notre Dame de la Garde, the sailors' patron and the chief landmark of the city. The entire population of Marseilles seems to be occupied in either buying or selling fish. The wonder of it is, says Leslie's Weekly, that when anybody apparently might catch all the fish that he wants—for the city centers right around the harbor—the markets, which in the morning are piled high with every variety of sea food, are in a few hours depleted of stock, although there is no canning or preserving establishment to use up the supply. And these markets are scattered about in all parts of the city, and are quite independent of the street sellers with their accompanying baskets.

The most curious edible fish in the world are to be found here for sale. Fish which it would seem from their color and oddity should be relegated to the aquarium are used as foods. A species of octopus with its long tentacles is one of the most popular, and, strange to say, the hideous-looking arms are the most delicate and the most valued part. Huge crabs, known best in either Havana or in the cities along the Pacific coast are also here in quantity. Sea slugs, several varieties of scallops, and other shellfish not generally eaten in America, although they are found in some parts, are on display, and they seem to be much in demand. The Mediterranean fish are more brilliant in color and differ in many other respects from the fish of the Atlantic. Their flavor is undoubtedly influenced by the deposit of salt in the water, which in the Mediterranean is 7 per cent, while it is only 2 per cent. in the Atlantic.

The Air-brake.

The air-brake was ushered into actual use in the most dramatic fashion. The trial trip occurred in April, 1869. The train selected was the Steubenville accommodation running between Pittsburg and Steubenville, O.

When the train was going at full speed, suddenly as it came around a sharp curve the engineer saw a stalled wagon in the middle of the track, dead ahead. With only hand brakes nothing could have prevented a terrible smashup. The formal time for the trial of the air-brake had not come, but the brake was there, and in desperation, not believing for a minute that the thing could avert, the engineer threw on the air. But it did avail.

The observers in the rear were almost catapulted out of their seats by the shock of the sudden stop. But when they saw the engine fairly poking its nose into the wagon bed, so narrow had been the margin between safety and disaster, they forgot all about their shock and stood in awed silence. The air-brake had come into its own.

Maroon.

The word "maroon" is from the verb "maroon," to "set a person on an inhospitable shore and leave him there," a practice that was common among the pirates of the Spanish Main. The word is a corruption of "Cimarron," meaning anything unruly, whether man or beast.

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