

# PSYCHE.

## THE YELLOW FEVER FLY.

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It is not without precedent that certain facts or observations in natural history suddenly acquire a great fame, go more or less over the whole scientific world, and are forgotten with wonderful quickness, when they have been found out not to be true. Some twenty-five years ago the history of the famous yellow fever fly was everywhere told and largely analyzed. It seems that the height of its glory was in 1855; I say it seems, as I have been unable to see any account or even any mention of it in a scientific publication or a newspaper. Gentlemen, who were largely connected with such publications in former times, assure me that the matter was at that time much spoken of in periodicals, but that they cannot give any quotation of an article. Upon application to the well known physician, Dr. St. Julian B. Ravenel, in S. Carolina, I obtained the answer that although the Doctor had almost forgotten about it, yet with some effort of memory he recalled that during the epidemic at Norfolk in 1855, a fly appeared in swarms, which the people there said had never been seen before, and which they called the yellow fever fly. The Doctor had sent some of them to the late Prof. L. Agassiz for examination; but these are not now to be found in the collection of

the museum. The Doctor, however, states that he has since found the same fly in Charleston, S. C., in dark, close places, even in perfectly healthy seasons, and thinks that it only becomes immeasurably multiplied in the dirt and filth of all kinds produced by pestilence. It has never been observed in Charleston during epidemics. This is the only direct information I was able to obtain. The collection bought by the Museum of Comparative Zoology from Prof. Loew, contains one specimen, collected in 1848 in New Orleans by the late Prof. Schaum, and three others, one marked as the yellow fever fly. The species has never been described. It belongs to *Sciara*, and a careful examination of the descriptions of all the species quoted in Baron Osten Sacken's new catalog of N. A. diptera, shows that none of them belong to this species. I was not able to compare the descriptions of *Sciara nigra* Wied.

The fact that the species appeared in swarms is also new. A list of swarms of diptera, given by Prof. Weyenbergh (Tijdschr. v. Entom., 1861), records 29, but none of *Sciara*.

I believe that a description of the species is very desirable, so that its former curious history, and the fact of its swarming, may not be lost.



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