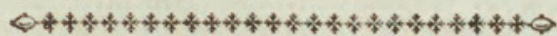


PULEX IRRITANS.



CHARACTER GENERICUS.

Pedes sex, saltatorii.

Oculi duo.

Antennæ filiformes (feu potius moniliformes.)

Os rostro inflexo, setaceo, aculeum recondente.

Abdomen compressum.

CHARACTER SPECIFICUS, &c.

PULEX proboscide corpore brevior.

Lin. Syst. Nat. p. 1021.

PULEX rostro corpore brevior,

Lin. Syst. Nat. Gmel. p. 2923.

PULEX COMMUNIS.

Papilionaceis insectis ab ovo exortis subeundas esse quasdam formæ mutationes antequam plene adoleverint, fere omnibus cognitum est: paucis fortasse, similiter voluisse naturam in pulice. Ova pulicis minima et alba, inter pilos quadrupedum, plumas avium, et in variis ejusmodi locis a parente deposita, finito quasi hebdomade, in larvas excluduntur

duntur parvulas, albidas, seu levissime rubentes, agillimas, et variis modis se contorquentes, simul atque turbantur. Hæ cum ad plenam magnitudinem pervenerint, (circiter quintam scilicet uncie partem) obvelantes se operimento laxo, albo, et veluti gossipino expectant donec in chrysalidas mutantur; quod fit diebus circiter duodecim: et e chrysalide erumpit pulex jam perfectus. Quamvis molestissimum sit hoc animalculum, negandum tamen non est inesse illi quandam formæ concinnitatem. Expeditissima est nec inelegans corporis agilitas. Lorica, qua tegitur, nullis unquam fœdatur sordibus, sed nitet semper quasi polita. At tantum musculosi roboris spatium adeo exiguo contineri et terminari quis non miretur? cui forsitan vix simile invenitur in aliis omnibus animalibus; ne quidem in ipsis gryllis; posse enim pulicem distantiam sui ipsius corporis ducentes superantem uno saltu conficere fatis probavit nec exaggerata computatio. Socratem, quem de hac ipsa re finxit se calculis torquentem, atro sale perfricuit Aristophanes.

“ Ἀλλ' εἰ δέμεις, ” &c.

Disc. Sed fas non est hæc cuiquam dicere nisi discipulis.

Strepf. Mihi dic ergo audacter: ego enim ipse
Venio in scholam discipulus.

D. Dicam, sed te oportet habere ista pro mysteriis.
Modo interrogabat Chærephonta Socrates,
Pulex quot pedes suos ipse saltaret?
Cum enim momordisset Chærephontis supercilium,
In caput Socratis inde saltavit.

S. Quo-

S. Quomodo ergo istud metiebatur? D. Scite admodum.
Cera liquefacta, deinde pulice prehenso,
Immersit in ceram pedes ejus:
Post, refrigerato adnatæ sunt crepidæ Perficæ.
His detractis dimetiebatur locum.

S. O rex Jupiter, quanta subtilitas mentis!

AR: *Nubes. act 1. sc. 2.*

Hujus quoque mordaces facetias transtulit in
poema fatiricum Butlerus nostras.

A capite ad calcem si fit mensura, repertum est
Saltabit pulex quot spatia ipse sui:
Chære-que-phonteo tentamine, Socraticoque,
Frustra quæsitum tempore præterito.

Mira inest pulicibus, ut et aliis multis insectis,
reviviscendi facultas, vel ea passis quæ vitæ sunt
inimicissima. Narravit mihi ingeniosus quidam
amicus quod suo experimento confirmavit, revixisse
pulicem a calido aere, licet horas viginti et quatuor
in aqua fuisset immerfus. Insectis tamen nonnullis
in classe *Coleoptera* redintegrari solet vita vel longius
suspensa. Descriptionem insecti hujus belli et pe-
tulantis claudet epigramma lepidum quod legitur in
carminibus quadragesimalibus Oxonii editis anno
millesimo septingentesimo vicesimo tertio.

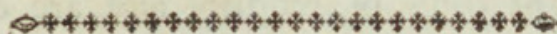
Pulicis exigui tenues per colla catenas
Nexuit artificii pulchra Corinna manu.
Sic, inquit, pavo Junoni chara, palumbes
Sic Veneri; pulex tu mihi gratus eris.
Hic nova lascivo testatur gaudia saltu,
Et cadit in molles parvulus erro sinus:

Mox

Mox suadente fiti, tanta est solertia, fertur
Qua sanguis roseo semper in ore sedet.
Credideris illic semper voluisse morari,
Nec blandas unquam destituisse genas.
Jam secura potes nexas laxare catenas,
Non opus artifice, pulchra Corinna, iugo.
Dum licet hic pasci, licet hac in sede morari,
Non tua captivum vincla, sed ipsa tenes,



THE
F L E A.



GENERIC CHARACTER.

Feet fix, formed for leaping.

Eyes two.

Antennæ filiform (or rather moniliform.)

Mouth consisting of an inflected setaceous tube
containing a tubular piercer.

Body compressed.

SPECIFIC CHARACTER, &c.

FLEA with proboscis shorter than the body.

THE COMMON FLEA.

The change of form in the papilionaceous insects during their progress from the egg to their complete state, is almost universally known. But that a similar process takes place in the Flea, is perhaps by no means generally understood.

The eggs of the Flea, which are very small, white, and of an oval form, are deposited by the parent insect in various situations favorable to their

their evolution, viz. amongst the hair and on the skins of quadrupeds, the feathers of birds, &c. &c. After the space of about a week they are hatched into small larvæ, which are of a whitish colour, with a slight tinge of reddish, and are extremely locomotive; and on being disturbed, throw themselves into various sudden contorsions. When arrived at their full size, they are about the fifth of an inch in length. At this period they prepare themselves for their pupa or chrysalis state, by enclosing themselves in a loosely spun web or diffused envelopement of a very soft, silky, or rather cotton-like appearance, and of a white colour. In this the larva changes into a chrysalis, out of which, in about the space of twelve days emerges the animal in its complete state.

Notwithstanding the inconveniences attending this little insect, and the general disapprobation which its frequency occasions, there is something pleasing in the appearance of the Flea. All its motions are elegant, and all its postures indicate agility. The shelly armour with which it is enveloped, is in a state of perpetual cleanliness; while the muscular power which it is capable of exerting is so extraordinary, as justly to excite our wonder at so much strength confined, and concentrated, as it were, in so small a space. Perhaps of all animals the Flea possesses the greatest muscular strength, and far exceeds in point of exertion all the insects of the locust tribe; being able to spring, on the most moderate computation, to the distance of at least

least two hundred times its own length. It is remarkable that Socrates was ridiculed for his pretended experiments on this very subject, by the licentious pen of Aristophanes.

DISCIPLE.

That were not lawful to reveal to strangers.

STREPSIADES.

Speak boldly then as to a fellow student;
For therefore am I come.

DISC.

Then I will speak;
But set it down amongst our mysteries.
It is a question put to Chærephon
By our great master Socrates to answer,
How many of his own lengths at one spring
A flea can hop? for one by chance had skipp'd
Straight from the brow of Chærephon to th' head
Of Socrates.

STR.

And how did then the sage
Contrive to measure this?

DISC.

Most dext'roufly.
He dipp'd the insect's feet in melted wax,
Which hard'ning into slippers as it cool'd,
By these computed he the question'd space.

STR.

O Jupiter, what subtilty of thought!

ARIST: *Clouds. Act. 1. Scene 2.*

The

The celebrated Butler has also commemorated the same circumstance in his poem of *Hudibras*, viz.

“ How many scores a flea will jump
Of his own length, from head to rump;
Which Socrates and Chærephon
In vain assay’d so long agon.”

The Flea, like many other insects, is eminent for its powers of revivescence, and will frequently recover, after being placed in situations highly unfavourable to animal life. I might here mention the experiment of an ingenious friend, who assures me that on immersing a flea in a vial of water, after being apparently drowned, and lying upwards of twenty-four hours, it has again revived on exposure to warm air. Some of the coleopterous insects are, however, capable of exhibiting far more striking examples of suspended animation.

I shall conclude the description of this locomotive little insect by the following *jeu d’esprit*, relative to a flea which a lady is supposed to have kept in a state of captivity. The reader will find the original in that truly classical publication the *Carmina Quadragesimalia*. Oxon. 1723.

Corinna, in a sportive vein,
A fav’rite Flea approves:
And fasten’d by a golden chain
The little captive moves.

Not Juno view’d with more delight
Her peacock’s train display’d:
Not Venus more her fav’rite dove
In changing plumes array’d.

With

With conscious joy the insect springs ;
His soft confinement loves :
And sinking on her snowy breast,
In full luxuriance roves.

Then waking light from soft repose,
Attacks her rubied lips ;
And where the deepest colour glows,
The living vermil sips.

Loose, fair Corinna, loose his chain,
Nor fear his flight away :
For how, thus tempted to remain,
How should he wish to stray ?

Permitted on those lips to feed,
And slumber on that breast,
Thy charms, Corinna, not thy chains,
Will fastest bind the guest.



Shaw, George. 1794. "The Flea, *Pulex irritanus* [Pl. 178]." *The Naturalist's Miscellany* 5(LIV), <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.310757>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/276340>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.310757>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/310757>

Holding Institution

Museums Victoria

Sponsored by

Atlas of Living Australia

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.