

*A Letter from William Molyneux Esq. Secretary of  
the Philosophical Society of Dublin, to a S. of  
the R. S. giving an account of the Connough-  
Worm.*

**I** Here send you inclosed the figures of our Connough-worm, which is reported to be the only poysonous Animal in our Kingdome; but whether it be really so, or not, I cannot assert on my own experience. That from which the figures were taken, was sent alive to me, from the Country, about 40. miles from Dublin. The Gentleman that sent it, had kept it above six weeks in a large Box on a Grassy sod, now and then giving it a fresh sod, and Ragwort to eat, besprinkling them with Dew. Before I could get the figures taken, the creature was so unquiet, I was forced to stifle it, as Huswives do their Bees, with the fume of sulphur. When the Gentleman first took it, it was much smaller then when he sent it to me; And had I been at the trouble of keeping it, it might have been yet much larger; some of them being as thick as a Mans thumb, and above three Inches long, and some live so long as to have fine hair thinly dispersed over their bodys. Immediately upon my receipt thereof, I writ to the same Ingenious Gentleman that sent it me, proposing some Queries to him concerning it, the chief whereof were, whether he had any certain Experiment to prove them Venemous? What Symptoms attended the Beasts affected by them? And what cures were applyed to them? To the first, his answer was to this effect, that he had consulted the experienced People of the Country, who all agree in asserting the Animal poysonous, but he knew none that had made a satisfactory experiment thereof, none being able to say they  
ever



ever saw a beast eat it, or sting by it. And yet for his own Opinion, he was apt to think, that the Animal was pernicious, if eaten by a beast. For first, the disease imputed to this Creature seldom or never affects the Cattle but in Autumn, and then only this Insect is to be found; secondly it seldom or never attends any Cattle but what feed in low Marshy grounds, and there only this Animal frequents; Thirdly Cows who are greedy feeders by great Mouths (by reason of their chewing it afterwards in their Cud,) but especially Swine that feed in low grounds, are the only Creatures troubled by this Worm; Fourthly, the Worm is very rare and scarce to be found in seven years, and so likewise is the distemper that proceeds from it, it being rare to have a Beast affected by it. As to the symptoms that attend its Venome, they are swelling in the Head, and (as a peculiar Characteristick, the swelling and *Procedentia Ani*, in so much that the *Rectum* will hang out above half a foot. The effectual cure applyed to this Malady in black Cattle, is a Drench of the Herb Bears-foot, Rue, Garlick, butter and beer; but for Swine, Raddle pounded small mingled with Buttermilk. These only are used by the English Husbandmen. But the Irish, as they certainly impute the Malady to this Insect, so they draw the Remedy therefrom, for they assert, that if an hole be bored in a Tree, and this Creature stooped up therein, so as to starve and dye, the leaves and bark of that Tree ever after infused in water, and given as a Drench, cures the affected Beast; and severall will repair to such a Tree ten miles for a cure. Another fancy (& as ill grounded,) they have, that if a Man bruise this Worm between his hands, and let the expressed juice dry thereon, ever after the water he first washes in, in the morning, given to the Beast to drink, cures it. And the Worthy Gentleman that sent me the Worm, tho' he be far from giving credit to the cure, yet for the satisfaction of his poor Neighbours, did severall years ago



bruise one of these Worms in his hands, and ever since he has been often applyed to from severall parts of the Country for his Virtue, and the People go away well satisfied, assuring him (when he asks them afterwards,) that the Remedy proved very effectually on their afflicted Beast.

But that I may give you my own sentiments, I am very apt to suspect that this Worm is no more poyson then other Catterpillers ( for 'tis of the Catterpillar kind,) and I believe, in *Godartius* of Insects, lately englished by the most learned and ingenious *Dr. Lister*, you will find the very same Animal as this I speak of; but at present I have not that book by me, having sent it to my Brother in *Holland*. I never had, or have seen, but this one, and so I would make no experiment therewith, being forced (as I told you,) to kill it. But I verily believe that the Uglinefs of the Worm (it being of a dark fuscous, and as they say, poysonous colour,) together with its largeness beyond common Catterpillers, has wrought so upon the fearfull and ignorant Vulgar, that they have given it the name of Venemous. As to the Gentlemans forementioned Reasons, they are but conjectures, and as such I submit them to your judgment; and my negative opinion has much the same foundation, for I find the People of our Country much in the wrong in some particulars relating to the Animal, which makes me suspect they may be in an error relating to its poyson. For first tis commonly asserted by them, that the two spots marked *dd* Fig: 1. are Goggle Eyes, whereas they are nothing more then two Variegated spots of a colour different from the rest of the Back. Secondly, they assert likewise, that the part marked *e* Fig: 1. is a sting, whereas this Protuberance in the Tail is common with it to severall other Catterpillers, and the greater the Catterpillar, the larger this Horn. So that if their fear or abhorrence of the Worm may make them believe those parts



parts Eys that are not, and that part a Sting, which is not at all like it, contrary to the plain View of the Creature; It may likewise make them imagine it poysonous, when it is no such thing. But yet I will not conceal what I have from another Gentleman (but with some diffidence of the Experiment,) he gave the juice of one of these Worms to one Dog, which shewed no alteration thereon, but another Dog, to whom he gave the skin of the Creature, was found dead three dayes after; but whether his death proceeded from the poysonous skin, he could not assert; for the Dog ran at liberty, and might have been kild (for ought as he knew,) by some other Accident, tho' no externall sign of any Violence offer'd to him did appear. But leaving these conjectures, I come to what is evident to the senses (and experimental Philosophy ought to go no farther,) the explanation of the Figures.

Fig. 1. *AB.* the Worm lying on his Belly, long  $2\frac{1}{2}$  Inches almost. *c.* his head. *dd.* two Variegated spots mistaken for Eyes. *e.* a small Protuberance towards its Tail, from whence arises a part in shape of a horn, mistaken for a Sting.

Fig. 2. Represents the Worm Reclined almost on his back. *F.* His mouth formed like that of other Catterpillars, as appeared in the Microscope. *gg, &c.* six small horny feet or Claws, 3 on each side, as in other Catterpillars. *hh, &c.* Eight *Papillæ*, with which he fastens himself to what he goes or hangs on, as Childrens suckers are fastened to wet stones.

*ii.* Two larger *Papillæ*, with which he does both suck himself fast, but most commonly therewith he grasps the stems of Grass and Herbs, to which he clings with the other.

P. S. Since the writing of this Letter, I have again seen Godartius of Insects, and in him I find, (as I surmized,) our Connought Worm, described by the Name of the Elephant Catterpillar, Numb. 125. or 126

*Yours Will. Molineux.*

H.

*Part of*