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Age: 15 years

Second Prize

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Empire Essay Competition

An argument between a locust, mosquito & tsetse fly.

A cloud of red dust swirled over the African expanse, thrashing dry leaves and twigs in its train.

A small brown insect caught in the eddying motion beat its wings furiously and alighted on the twig of a bone thorn tree, reading a stagnant pool of water. This was Glossina Palpalis—a Tsetse Fly of the first order, and an arrogant inhabitant of the African wilds. His observant eye took in with some scorn the form of a mosquito which had settled on a nearby twig.

This latter insect noticing Glossina at the same moment and being a friendly creature, flapped her wings in greeting and flew over to join him. Glossina acknowledged her presence by a slight inclination of his antenna. Mrs. Anophele, who though she came of the aristocratic house of Gambia was always friendly to the least of her fellow-insects, addressed Glossina Palpalis in her effusive shrill voice: "How fortunate that you should
fly along at this minute just when I was wishing for company. My husband has been so uninteresting of late. He sleeps on the water weeds all day long. "She paused, her ant- ennea quivering with suppressed excitement as she leaned forward and said in a confiding tone. "My dear, I laid an enormous batch of eggs a short while ago. I really quite surpassed myself. Just imagine all the hundreds of mosquitoes I have brought into the world. Think of the harm they will cause by carrying malaria to man." At this last word she gave a shiver of repulsion.

Glossina had listened up to this moment in bored and unresponsive silence. Now after this last remark she raised herself to say in her superior tone. "My good Mrs. Anopheles, the damage caused by your offspring is nothing in comparison to the havoc raised by mine. Are you aware that we "setoe Yip" (there was special emphasis laid on this last phrase) "cause that dreaded illness called "sleeping sickness"? You cannot, I am sure, estimate the thousands of natives, animals and white men that have
been infected with this disease. All these wonderful devices that men have thought of to rid themselves of wo have never entirely succeeded. We are in fact quite indomitable!"

Mrs. Eupheline could not help feeling a small spark of indignation at this speech and could not refrain from replying, though undoubtedly in a honeyed tone. "But my dear Mr. Glossina have you forgotten the untold suffering, debility and general poverty caused by malaria among millions of the world's population. Blackwater (the result of continued malaria) kills many. My husband overheard a doctor saying that malaria afflicts one-third of the human race causing yearly 200,000 deaths," she concluded in an awed tone.

Mrs. Glossina Polpatis was preparing to deliver herself of a scurrilous answer to this when a strange squeaking voice broke in. "Excuse me; I could not help overhearing your conversation just now. It was most interesting hearing about the damage you each cause among the human race and animals; but neither of you can imagine the distress caused by
my family." 

Mr. Glossina and Mrs. Grootelie turned
round in surprise at the sound of this voice
on the end of the same twig on which they
were sitting was perched a locust regarding
them with bright inquisitive eyes.

"I am reading," he announced in his
harsh voice. "I hope you have no objection
to my butting in on your conversation.
I am sure you will both be interested to
hear about the incredible activities of my
family in this respect." He settled himself
more comfortably on the twig and without
further invitation he began his discourse.
"We are of course remarkable insects. We
sing about famine and starvation by
eating crops and you have no idea what
damage we can cause in a few minutes.
I recall a time when swarms of us laid
waste to the whole of eastern Africa. There
were two separate armies, the desert
locusts from the north and the red
locusts from the west. I was in the red
army and never shall I forget the glorious
line we had. I remember the white men
and natives fought desperately to overcome us. They lost the fight, however, and I believe later eight hundred thousand people died of starvation owing to no locusts. Did you know that we cause men a loss of £15,000,000 per year in the world? We get our strength in our numbers. I was in a swarm once which was about sixty miles long and three miles thick containing ten million, million insects. How can you beat that?"

Mr. Glossina who had listened to his narrative with the same amused condescension which he had shown toward Mr. Anopheles replied in his superior voice, "Oh, that is very enlightening indeed! But I am afraid that neither you nor this mosquito fully appreciate our possibilities. We have renamed large areas of Africa useless for stock and dairying and after all the wealth of a country is mainly derived from the land. We prevent a lot of money from coming in to the country and many spend much time and go to great expense to get rid of us and never with entire success."
Mrs. Anophele broke in with her shrill accents, "I am still determined that mosquitoes cause the most amount of damage to man. Whatever you two may say I will still hold my opinion! Oh dear!" she exclaimed, "I hear my husband calling for me. What a really delightful that we have had. I have really thoroughly enjoyed it," she flew off with an energetic flutter of her wings.

"Well now, master Redwing," said Glossina Palpaxis with amusement "which of us two do you think is most beneficial to the human race. I have no doubt of your answer though. There can be no doubt that the little fly is by far the superior to others. I am positive that we agree on that point." Without giving Redwing time to assert his opposition to this view, he poised his wings for flight and disappeared into the wide expanse of sky.

Sr. Mary Cherubine, O.P.