

**Cochineal.** (*köch'e-nél*), n. [Sp. *cochinilla*; Fr. *cochenille*.] (*Zöhl.*) An insect of the genus *coccus*, *C. cacti*, or *cochineal cactus*, celebrated for the beauty of the color which it yields. It is a native of S. America, and was

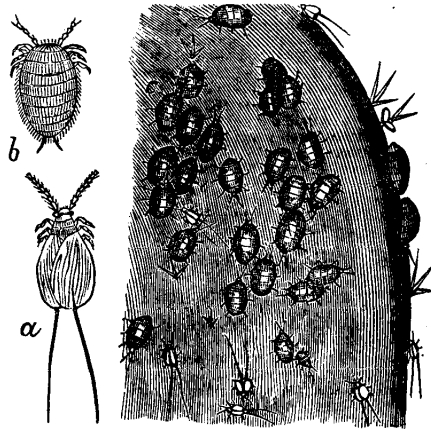


Fig. 637. — COCHINEAL INSECT.  
(*Coccus cacti*.)

a, Male; b, Female; c, Females feeding on a portion of nopal.

for a long time confined to Mexico, where it feeds on the nopal, a species of *Opuntia*, q. v. The female officinal *C.* insect, in its full-grown pregnant or torpid state, swells or grows to such a size, in proportion to that of its first or creeping state, that the legs, antennæ, and proboscis, are so small with respect to the rest of the animal as hardly to be discovered by the naked eye; so that on a general view it bears a great resemblance to a seed or berry; hence arose that difference of opinion which at one period subsisted among writers: some maintaining that *C.* was a berry, while others contended that it was an insect. When the female insect is arrived at its full size, it fixes itself to the surface of the leaf, and envelops itself in a kind of white down, which it spins or draws through its proboscis in a continued double filament. The male is a small and rather slender two-winged fly, about the size of a flea, with jointed antennæ and large white wings in proportion to the body, which is of a red color, with two long filaments proceeding from the tail. When the female insect has discharged all its eggs, it becomes a mere husk, and dies; so that great care is taken to kill the insects before that time, to prevent the young from escaping. The operation of collecting the insects, which is exceedingly tedious, is performed by women. Wild *C.* is collected six times in the year; but that which is cultivated is only collected thrice during the same period. The insects, of which there are about 70,000 in a pound, being detached from the plants on which they feed, by a blunt knife, are put into bags, and dipped in boiling water to kill them, after which they are dried in the sun. It is principally used in the dyeing of scarlet, crimson, and other esteemed colors. (See CARMINE and CARMINE ACID.) It is imported in bags, each containing about 200 lbs., and has the appearance of small, dry, shrivelled, rugose berries or seeds. The best have a purplish-gray color, the blackish varieties being less valuable. *C.* is sometimes adulterated by the admixture of a manufactured article composed of colored dough. This is detected by the action of boiling water, which dissolves and disintegrates the imitation, but has little effect upon the real insect. A variety found in Todd's Valley, California, has all the properties of the *C.* of Brazil and the S. parts of Mexico, the only apparent difference being that the article found in California is a light pink, while that of other regions is of a deep scarlet.