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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS

Darwin Etherizes Venus Flytraps

In his 1875 text Insectivorous Plants, naturalist Charles Darwin noted that the “plant, commonly called Venus’ fly-trap, from the rapidity and force of its movements, is one of the most wonderful in the world.” While investigating anesthetics’ effects on the botanical carnivore’s leaf-closing, he tried chloroform and then ether vapors. Using a 2-oz. vessel, the naturalist determined that the flytrap’s leaf required 24 hr to recover sensibility from 20 min exposure to “15 minims” of ether, but only 52 min to recover from 3 min exposure to “10 drops” in a larger bottle. Darwin conceded that he did not know whether “the larger doses of... ether, which caused the leaves to close slowly, acted on the sensitive filaments or on the leaf itself...” His son George provided the illustration above of an unclosed leaf of Dionaea muscipula, whose Latin name actually means “Venus mousetrap.” (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. This image appears in the Anesthesiology Reflections online collection available at www.anesthesiology.org.)

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