



Figure 20.—*Solenopsis xyloni* McCook, southern fire ant: a, Lateral view of worker; b, right mandible showing shape of mandible and number and arrangement of teeth.

dible with three well-developed teeth (fig. 20, b), often a fourth or vestigial tooth posterior to the well-developed teeth. Antennal scape short, apex of scape, when fully extended, reaching about half way between eye and posterior border of head. Anterior border of mesopleuron continuous, without toothlike or other irregularities. Petiolar node, in profile, not sharp or bladelike at the summit as in *geminata*. Petiole usually with a distinct anteroventral tooth. Surface of mesopleuron very finely sculptured, scarcely subopaque. Body, especially gaster, usually very hairy. Body color varying from yellowish to reddish, with gaster dark, especially around the posterior border of the gastric segments.

Biology and Economic Importance

S. xyloni is largely a ground-nesting species, the colonies of which may be freely exposed or under the cover of stones and other objects. The ants also nest in wood, sometimes even in the woodwork or masonry of houses. Colonies are frequently very populous. Outdoors, the earth is commonly thrown from the nest in irregular and variable-sized, crater-shaped masses of loose soil. Workers are slow-moving when compared with such agile and quick-moving ants as the Argentine ant *Iridomyrmex humilis* (Mayr). They are very sensitive to vibrations or jars, however, and when one steps on a nest, the workers rush out and viciously sting one's feet or legs. A complete study has not yet been made of the biology of *xyloni*. On numerous occasions recently fertilized females have been seen establishing nests independently in the soil. The large population of some colonies suggests, however, that more than one female takes part in reproductive activities. The ants are practically omnivorous, feeding on seeds, honeydew, flesh, the juices or sap of fruits and plants, and various human foods. The ants are especially known for their predacious habits, although they will also eat dead insects. Especially in the Gulf States and California, *xyloni* is one of the worst of the ant pests. The species affects man in