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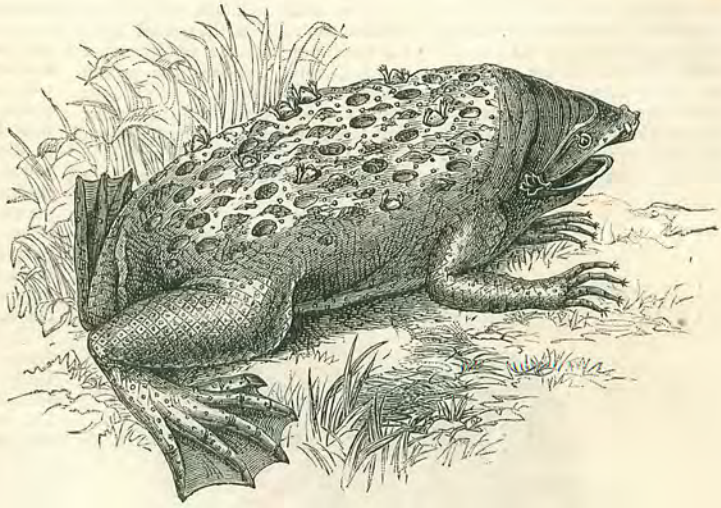
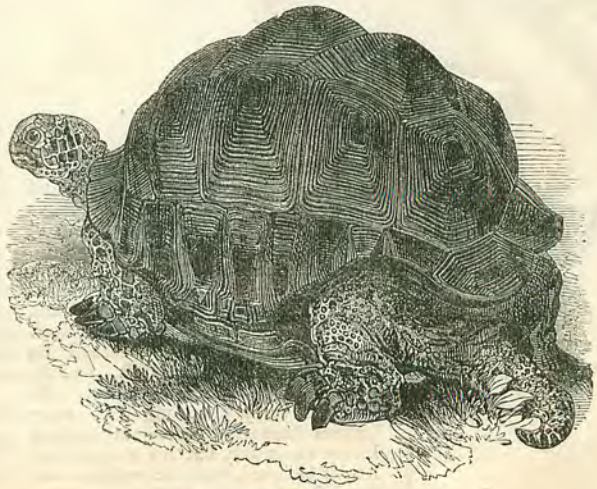
WONDERFUL REPTILES.

By FREDERICK WHYMPER.

COMMON IGUANA.

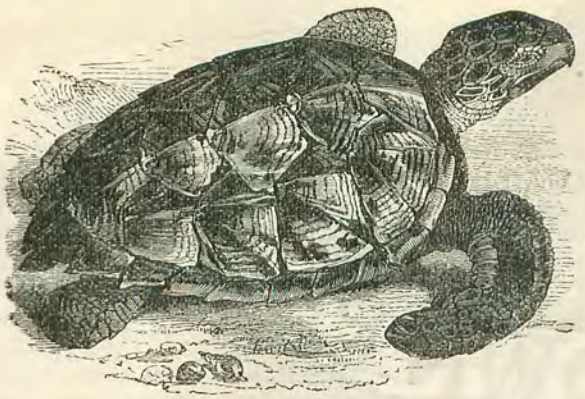


SURINAM TOAD.



ELEPHANTINE TORTOISE.

THE reptile, taking the popular sense attached to the word, is always something mean, low, vicious, and grovelling; and in a large proportion of cases that idea is correct. Regarded scientifically, however, the order "Reptilia" includes many animals almost specially harmless, and many others particularly useful to man. It is true that out of the 20,000 human beings who in densely-populated India annually lose their lives from the attacks of wild beasts and snakes, much more than three-fourths of the number are sacrificed to the appetites or poison of the latter; nevertheless the majority of snakes are perfectly innocuous. The lazy alligator is not very prone to attack man or woman unless provoked, or specially tempted by their immediate proximity when bathing in his own domain. The many varieties of lizards—some of them most graceful and beautifully-coloured creatures—are, as a rule, on perfectly good terms with us. We may shudder at a toad, but is there anything specially repulsive about the tortoise, so often made a pet, and whose shell—formerly, at all events—used to adorn (in the form of ornamental combs) the more or less luxuriant tresses of our mothers and grandmothers? Tell a greedy alderman—of the



HAWKSBILL TURTLE.

olden time, of course: there are no such people now—that some of his favourite dishes were derived from a reptile, and he would doubt your information—or your sanity. Yet the turtle is so classed by the naturalist.

Every member of the English nation has a particular interest in the subject under notice, for did not her patron saint, the valiant St. George, struggle long with, and finally vanquish, a fearful and wonderful dragon? Alas!—and this is not so generally known—the champion succumbed to the venom of its horrid fangs not long after. Says the veracious chronicler: "The dragon's sting annoyed the good knight so much that the abominable beast being no sooner slain and weltering in its venomous gore that St. George likewise took his death wound from the deep strokes of its sting. Yet, retaining his true nobleness of mind, he valiantly returned victor to Coventry, where the whole inhabitants stood without the gates, in great splendour, to receive him; and he had no sooner arrived before the city and presented them with the dragon's head than, from the abundance of blood that issued from his deep wounds, he was forced to yield up his breath, and the whole country, from the king to the shepherd, mourned for him for the space

FLYING DRAGON.

of a month." Dragons are extinct animals nowadays—so far as England is concerned, but if we are to believe some recent accounts they are still rampant in some parts of the world. Last autumn, a Californian hunter asserts, while pursuing a wounded buck deer, that he suddenly found himself confronted by such a monster. Fortunately for him, it turned its attention to the poor deer, and he speedily made off into the forest. He told his story that night to some brother hunters, as they sat by their lonely camp fire, but his account was hardly believed, from the confused and flurried manner in which he presented it. Later, one of the same hunters passing near a great lake in the same neighbourhood, was astonished by a fearful hissing noise, and looking in the direction from which it came, he saw a monster with horse-shaped head and scaly body, at least fifty feet in length, swimming in the water. He also was fortunate in not attracting its notice, and it speedily dived down out of sight. The latest account of a similar nature—only that the head was like a calf, and the body was sixty-five feet long—comes from the Witzenberg Mountains, South Africa, and was not unlikely circulated by the Boers to prevent emigration. What after all, are any of these creatures to the great sea-monster, derisively known as De Montfort's "Poulpe colossal"—a gigantic cuttle, which snapped off the masts of a large ship, and would have dragged it to the bottom, had not the crew lopped off its immense limbs with cutlasses and hatchets? It is said—and this part of the story is more likely to be correct than the other—that this French naturalist's propensity for writing that which was not true, culminated in his committing forgery, and that he died in the galleys.

In a period long passed away there were reptiles of a size utterly unknown in these happier days. The subject is too vast and important to be treated at this time, but one example may be permitted. For several years past scientific workmen have been unearthing extinct animals of gigantic calibre from the clay strata of the Bernissart coal mines, Belgium, and some of them have been recently "set up"—that is, the fossil bones have been put together and strung with wires, until the skeletons have been completed—at the Brussels Museum. One of the most remarkable is the giant iguanodon. The general form is that of a bird, with short legs, and head small as compared to the body. The naturalists of Belgium are agreed that it walked upright, and that its forelegs or arms were for holding or snatching operations, but not usually, at all events, for purposes of locomotion. It had a horny beak, and its jaws possessed ninety-two teeth. The actual skeleton under notice is twenty-three feet nine inches in length, and stands fourteen feet two inches high. Truly a pleasant creature to encounter, say, on a solitary moonlight ramble in the country!

Fortunately for us, the reptiles of England are neither numerous nor (excepting only the adder) at all venomous. Ignorant people in the country often kill the poor, harmless slowworm—itself a curious lizard, with its feet *within* its skin—under the impression that its bite is poisonous, but science knows better. The nonsense which has been talked about the venom of the toad would fill volumes. They are regularly imported to England from parts of the Continent for practical use in gardens and greenhouses, bringing sometimes as much as ten shillings a dozen in the market. They are distinctly inimical to spiders, gnats, and other insects, and are not pleasant things to handle, though nobody is likely to be injured by the act. There are even weak-minded people who shudder at a frog; the epicure looks at him gloatingly, knowing that his hind-legs are, when properly cooked, one of the greatest delicacies in the world, resembling the tenderest spring chicken more than anything else.

The toad—it must be confessed, wherever met and in whatever form—is a repulsive creature. The palm of hideousness would probably be given to the Surinam variety, a native of Guiana and Brazil, with its flat and triangular head, unusually short neck, and specially flat body. Its eyes are very small, and are of an olive tint, spotted with red. Yet the parental instincts of these creatures are as kind in their way as those of the most beautiful animals in creation. The female, in due course, having laid her eggs, the male toad picks them up and deposits them on her horny back, when she immediately starts for the nearest marsh, and immerses herself and the embryotic brood in the semi-liquid mud, where she remains until they are hatched.

Many and curious are the varieties of tortoises, which occasionally reach a great size. The elephantine tortoise, for example, reaches a length of three feet, and may weigh 600 lbs. or more. Its flesh is delicate eating. The mud tortoise is remarkable for finger-like appendages hanging from its skin, and for its shell, which is covered with conical bosses or knobs, not unlike limpets. The snapping turtle, so called, is a river tortoise, common in America, particularly active and vivacious in its way, and always on the look-out for fish, molluscs, worms, and more especially for young crocodiles. It is caught with hook and line, but the bait *must* be alive. To seize its victim it darts out its long neck, and snaps its beak viciously, holding on till it has at least secured a piece thereof. In this pleasant way they occasionally snap at (human) bathers, taking off their toes and fingers. But the bathers can have their revenge, for the snapping turtle is a *bonne bouche*, delicate and tender. These amiable creatures spend their days in the water, but prefer to sleep by night on logs or secluded islets. The habit sometimes leads to their destruction, especially should the log be a floating one, when the planter or settler can sometimes secure a good supply of food, and the firewood to cook it, at one and the same time.

The great freshwater tortoise, or turtle of the Amazon, as Mr. Bates tells us, is commonly fed and fattened in ponds for home consumption when other supplies fail. It is of no mean size, its back averaging about a yard long by a couple of feet wide. That distinguished naturalist, who lived some twelve years in the Amazon region, got so sick of them that he preferred at times to go half-starved. This can be well understood, for in San Francisco, where one obtains a plate of turtle soup for a fraction over sixpence and a

turtle steak for eighteenpence, which would respectively cost about five shillings and half a guinea in the City of London, few of the inhabitants will touch either. It is the foreigners, travellers, and new arrivals generally who gloat over these luxurious but rich and unwholesome dishes, and they soon tire of them if they remain in the Golden City.

The sea tortoise or turtle attains to an immense size, and its flesh is considered by many natives the most wholesome and nourishing of any of its tribe. Its great shell often serves for roofs, and is used for making troughs, children's baths, and even canoes. Its fat is regarded as a substitute for butter. An American captain recently saw—according to his own account, which was also substantiated by his crew—on the Grand Bank, off the Bahamas, a turtle of this description so large that it was at first supposed to be a vessel bottom up! His schooner passed within a few yards of this marine giant, and those on board had an opportunity of comparing its length with that of the vessel. They estimated it at forty feet in length and thirty in breadth. The story, though undoubtedly an exaggeration, is probably based on fact; there is, at all events, always the possibility of some exceptionally large specimens being in existence. The account naïvely concludes by stating that it was not deemed advisable to attempt its capture.

INDIAN BOA.

A curious creature, found in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, and which has been known to stray as far as the English and French coasts, is the corded turtle, so called because of seven deep furrows or grooves on its shell. The best tortoiseshell of commerce is derived from the hawksbill turtle, which is a native of the Indian Ocean and South American coasts, while a rarer kind is derived from the loggerhead turtle, a native of the Mediterranean and Atlantic.

The lizards would themselves take the space occupied by this article, even though described in the briefest manner; we must content ourselves here with mentioning a few only of them. Many of them are most excellent food. The gecko, a wonderful little creature, is common to many hot countries; the native Cubans worship it. It is a clever animal, and can run up a perpendicular wall with the greatest ease, owing to a peculiar conformation of the foot. It is sometimes known as the "Evening Bird," and derives its former name from the very distinct way in which it shrieks out Geck—O! the last syllable being given in a marked manner. The iguana is an active tree-climber, and has a great pouch under its chin. It is repulsive-looking, but is excellent eating; an iguana steak is a delicacy, and the eggs are nearly full of yolk. Three of the most curious of the family are the flying dragon—so called because it has membraneous wings on each side of the body, enabling it to launch itself through the air—like the flying-fish—for a distance of sixty or eighty feet; the gigantic Salamander, a native of Japan, which attains a length of four and a-half feet sometimes, and may weigh as much as 50lbs.; and the better known chameleon, which—although the fact has been doubted—*does* change its colour. One kept by the Rev. J. G. Wood went through the following changes: grey, black, zebra stripes with yellow bands, circular yellow spots, chesnut and black, brilliant green, grey with black spots, and autumnal leaf colour.

The crocodile and the alligator may both be regarded as magnified lizards. English naturalists, it is true, usually make them belong to another "order," but those of France classify them together. The alligator is to-day "going up" rapidly in the market. Within the last few years new uses have been found for its hide, and one has only to study the shop windows of the better class to verify the fact. Boots and shoes, book-binding, knife, dagger, pistol and sword-cases, and a score of other things are nowadays made from its tough, strong skin. As a reptile, although he will often take a mean advantage of a single negro in a frail canoe, or a bather in a solitary pool, he is not, as a rule, particularly prone to attack man, more especially if he can get plenty of other food, which in his usual haunts is generally abundant. His appetite, however, is an excellent one.

COBRA DI CAPELLO.

RATTLESNAKE.

An amusing story is that told of Waterton, a once celebrated traveller. The Indians on the banks of the Demerara River had baited a night-line, and when, early in the morning, they arrived on the scene, they found that a huge "cayman" or crocodile, ten and a half feet long, had been caught by it. They were in favour of shooting it, but Waterton, who had accompanied them, was determined to secure it alive. Taking out the mast of their canoe, to use in case of necessity as a weapon of defence, he ordered the natives to draw the animal out of the water, which was immediately done. By this time the cayman was within two yards of the intrepid traveller, and was viciously snapping his hideous jaws at him. Seeing plainly that it was in a state of fear and perturbation, Waterton dropped the spar, sprang forward lightly, jumped on its back, and was soon seated on a natural saddle of crocodile hide. Seizing its fore-legs, he twisted them by main force upwards and over its back, using them as a kind of bridle. The cayman now began to plunge furiously, and lashed out with its tail and hind-legs, but its rider was out of their reach. The Indians shouted and roared, and were so noisy in their demonstrations of joy that it was a long time before they could hear Waterton shouting to them to haul in the rope once more. At last they understood and obeyed him, dragging the monster and its rider some forty yards over the sand. "Should it be asked," Waterton naïvely remarks, "how I managed to keep my seat, I would answer: I hunted some year with Lord Darlington's foxhounds." Finally, after many a struggle on the part of the cayman, the rider managed, with the assistance of the Indians, to tie up its jaws and cut its throat.

In the Southern States of America the alligator has long been a source of moderate profit. A recent American writer tells us of a visit paid to the house of a cotton planter, where a billet of wood thrown into the water of a "bayou" (the swampy branch of some great river) brought perhaps as many as three hundred of all sizes to the surface, many of which struggled and fought for its possession, whilst others, probably "old hands," remained as quiescent as the veriest log. The visitor in his innocence asked whether these pests could not be frightened away. "Good lands!" replied the old planter, "but I don't want to! I want to foster them. I want 'em to thrive, and increase, and multiply until the bayou won't hold 'em. Ten, fifteen, or twenty years' hence the price of alligator hides will be four times what it is now, and then I'll turn in on 'em, and make some money. That bayou is my alligator farm. The seeds are there and the plants are growing, and when I can figure that I own 3,000 good sized alligators I shall let cotton go for one season and send alligator hides to market." The speaker averred that he would not let anyone crack away there with a rifle for any consideration whatever, as very likely they would all be scared away. "Like enough," said he, "my whole alligator farm would sail off down the river in search of a new owner." Speaking of the age to which they attained, he stated that there were examples known to his family for forty years, and that he believed that the average length of their life was from fifty to seventy years.

The serpent is a wonderful combination of beauty, hideousness, strength, meanness, and mystery, and these characteristics made it in ancient days, and still make it among some heathen peoples, an object of reverence and adoration. To us it is simply the most repulsive form of animated nature: to the poor Hindoos and other Orientals it is a scourge, a terror, a source of death and destruction.

Boa is a name largely applied to great serpents which kill by "constriction"—that is, by the action of their powerful ribs (by which all snakes and serpents progress along the ground), contracting and crushing the poor victim. Art students may see their cruel mode of operation illustrated in the grand Laocoön group of statuary. The true boa is a native principally of tropical America, the python being his representative and near relative in Asia. They feed chiefly on the smaller quadrupeds, and very frequently suspend themselves by the tail from large trees till their prey comes in close proximity below. M. de la Gironière frequently saw wild boars being gradually lifted from the ground by boa-constrictors, and then pressed against the tree-trunk with a force that crushed their bones and stifled them to death. On rare occasions they will kill man also. The same writer tells of a young man who fled from justice and hid himself in a cave, where his father brought him supplies of food. One day he found, in place of his son, an enormous boa fast asleep in the cavern. He killed it and ripped it open—to find the remains of his son, who had been surprised, crushed to death, and swallowed. A Dutch friend of Waterton's killed a boa twenty-two feet long, which had a pair of stag's horns sticking out of its mouth. It had swallowed the stag, but could not manage the antlers! They will sometimes, also, swallow each other. Thus, a python once at the Zoo, nine feet in length, killed and swallowed its companion, eight feet long.

A boa was once observed in Kalladgee, India, in the act of swallowing a poor monkey, while its frightened and indignant companions, powerless to save it, chattered and gesticulated on the neighbouring rocks. But they had their revenge, for presently the serpent, gorged with its meal, went to sleep at the foot of a small rocky bluff or cliff. Then the monkeys silently unloosened a number of rocks and boulders at its summit, and, at a given moment, sent them rolling and tumbling down on the top of their enemy, who was, of course, crushed to death.

The cobra di capello—the "hooded snake" of India—a much smaller serpent than the boa, is an infinitely more vicious animal. It inhabits every part of India, from Ceylon to the Himalayas, and causes the deaths of at least 10,000 natives annually. There is no known antidote to its poison. When in our own country a caterpillar drops from the top of a summer-house into one's strawberries and cream, or crawls into our lobster salad at a picnic, it is considered rather a nuisance: in India the caterpillar is represented by the cobra. It has appeared suddenly on and under many a dinner-table; one finds it coiled up in the wardrobe or cupboard, or in the large pockets of a dress. A doctor of reputation tells how he found one ensconced in the lining of his brougham. Although there is a Government reward for all brought in dead, only the lowest caste Hindoos will engage in the work; it is regarded with superstition, awe, and reverence, and is often petted and protected.

The number of deaths caused by the dreaded rattlesnake is as nothing compared with those due to the cobra. There is some evidence to show that unless specially aroused or frightened it would not of its own accord attack mankind. A recent American anecdote illustrates this point. Two children, one aged two and the other only three years old, were noticed by the mother of the first making feints of striking or stroking something in the grass, and after each stroke laughing gaily. She thought nothing about it, till at the end of a quarter of an hour or so, she rose and walked towards the little ones. When within a few feet of them she was horrified to find that their plaything was a large rattlesnake! There it lay, basking in the sun, making no hostile demonstration whatever, but simply raising its head when it was touched, and darting its tongue out and in. It was this that caused the children's amusement. Finally, the lady took a step forward, when the snake noticed her. Instantly its whole appearance changed. As quick as lightning it threw itself into the coil which gives it the power to make its deadly spring, and sounded its rattle. This sudden change alarmed the children, who quickly moved away. The poor distracted mother did not lose her presence of mind till she had picked up a strong stick which fortunately lay handy for her, and killed the snake with several determined blows. Then she fainted, and was found and revived some time afterwards by kindly neighbours—the dead rattlesnake by her side.

ESTHER.

By ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY, Author of "Nellie's Memories," &c.

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE AT THE BRAMBLES.

It was a lovely evening when we arrived at Roseberry.

"We lead regular hermit lives at the Brambles, away from the haunts of men," observed Miss Ruth; but I was too much occupied to answer her. Dot and I were peeping through the windows of the little omnibus that was conveying us and our luggage to the cottage. Miss Ruth had a pretty little pony carriage for country use; but she would not have it sent to the station to meet us—the omnibus would hold us all, she said. Nurse could go outside; the other two servants who made up the modest establishment at the Brambles had arrived the previous day.

Roseberry was a struggling little place, without much pretension to gentility. A row of white lodging-houses, with green verandahs, looked over the little parade; there was a railed-in green enclosure before the houses, where a few children played.

Half a dozen bathing machines were drawn up on the beach; beyond was the Preventive station, and the little white cottages, where the Preventive men lived, with neat little gardens in front.

The town was rather like Milnethorpe, for it boasted only one long street. A few modest shops, the Blue Boar Inn, and