

NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES:

OR

UNCLE JOHN'S TRUE STORIES

ABOUT

Natural History.



NUMBER FOUR.



BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Green Mountain Annals,"—"Christmas Token."



NEW-YORK:

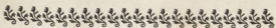
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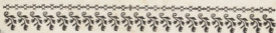
1833.



FRONTISPIECE.



THE BOA SWALLOWING AN OX.



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THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES

THE

SECOND

BY

JOHN

WILKINS

ESQ.

OF THE

BAR

AT

LONDON

NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES.

THE BOA.

Good evening, my children! I see a great many of you here to-night, and I will try to make out a lively evening for you.

You have all heard of the great serpent called the Boa. My picture of this enormous snake, shows him in the act of swallowing an ox which he sometimes does. Oh, it is a terrible sight!

I will tell you some particulars of this species of the snake. They are the largest of the serpent tribe, and are no where found in their full growth except in Guiana, in South America. There they sometimes grow thirty and even forty feet in length, and can swell as large as a barrel in the middle of their bodies. Such large monsters wind their tails around the branches of trees, and hang their heads quietly down by the side of the trunks of the trees, until oxen and cows come along, when they seize them, strangle them, crush their bones by winding themselves around them, and then, after sliming them all over, they suck them down whole, and lie stupidly on the ground for some days until the meal is digested. These snakes are not poisonous—their strength is tre-

mendous. It is well for man that they generally dwell in hot unhealthy marshes, where the human foot never has occasion to wander.

The largest snakes we ever see in this country are of a kind called the Anaconda. There has one of these snakes been kept in Peale's museum in this city, as a curiosity. It was perfectly tame and harmless—about eight feet long, and as large round when swelled with anger, as a man's leg. Although this serpent was greatly attached to Mr. Peele, would wind itself around his neck, and fondly caress him, yet if a stranger imposed upon him, he would show his sense of resentment. One evening, a gentleman, either wantonly or for want of thought, struck him with the ferule of his umbrella on the back, making some remarks at the same time, and then proceeded to the other end of the room. The serpent became so agitated as to excite its keeper's attention, but still perfectly harmless, appearing to have more the appearance of terror than revenge. After a while the offending party returned, and was again making some remarks, when the Anaconda recognizing his voice, made a spring direct for his face, which, however, he happily missed, and was as gentle as ever. What makes the above the more remarkable, is, the animal was blind at the time, from some of the last year's skin obstruct-

ing its vision, so that it must have discovered its adversary by the sound of his voice.

“Well, that is very wonderful.”

So it is—but it is the truth. Lord Byron once said, that “Truth is strange, stranger than fiction.”

My dear children, you have only to study nature, and you will find enough to interest and amuse you.

But I must go on; I mean to tell you a great many things to-night, and show you more pictures than I have any evening before.

I will tell you a singular story about snakes in Guiana, in South America, and then we will have something else.

The traveller, Baron Humboldt, was riding on horseback, attended by ten horsemen, on the plains close by the skirts of a great forest. One of the blacks who rode forward, returned full gallop, and calling to the Baron, said, “here, sir, come see serpents in pile.” He pointed out to Humboldt, something elevated in the middle of the savannah, or swamp, which appeared like a bundle of arms. One of the company then said, “This is certainly one of the assemblages of serpents, which heap themselves on each other after a violent tempest; I have heard of these, but have never seen any; let us proceed cautiously, and not go too near.” We continued, says Hum-

boldt, our way slowly ; I fixed my eyes on the pyramid, which appeared immoveable. When we were within twenty paces of it, the terror of our horses prevented our nearer approach, to which, however, none of us were inclined. On a sudden the pyramidal mass became agitated ; horrible hissings issued from it, and thousands of serpents, rolled spirally on each other, shot forth out of the circle their hideous heads, presenting their envenomed darts and fiery eyes to us. I own I was one of the first to draw back ; but, when I saw this formidable phalanx remained at its post, and appeared to be more disposed to defend itself than to attack us, I rode round it, in order to view its order of battle, which faced the enemy from every side. I then sought to find what could be the design of this numerous assemblage ; and I concluded that this species of serpents dreaded some colossean enemy, which might be the great serpent, or Boa.

“ Oh, what a terrible pile of stacked arms this must have been, Uncle John—heads all outward I suppose, and tails in the centre of the pile.”

Yes, my fine fellow ; the big snake, had he approached, would have found a tough pile for his dinner.



THE CROCODILE.

You here see a drawing of the Crocodile, which was first known in Egypt, living in and about the waters of the Nile. They are, however, quite as plenty under the name of Alligators, in the Mississippi river, and the stagnant lagoons and lakes of our western and southern states. They were once thought very terrible creatures, and many strange faculties were ascribed to them.

That great philosopher, Sir Joseph Banks, of London, once thought that they could moan, if not shed tears. The Yankee, Shackford, who is said to have sailed across the Atlantic alone in a small vessel, saw a live crocodile in Sir Joseph's museum, and said to him, "what are you going to do with the crocodile you have there?" "I am almost about preparing a paper to read before the society, upon his habits and nature, which I shall read to-morrow. Do you know any thing about the animal, Mr. Shackford?" "I lived three years in the West Indies, where they were as thick as grasshoppers." "Have you ever heard

their moans to entice and allure travellers to come to them, in order, (as writers in natural history have mentioned) that they may secure them as their prey?" inquired the philosopher. "No, they never did any such thing; for a good reason, they have no tongue to make a clear sound with; and they cannot make a noise, except one of bringing their jaws together. They move the upper jaw, and somehow bring it down with great force, and a single sound proceeds from this; but how can a thing moan without a tongue? Look into his mouth, and you will find that he has no tongue." "Well," said Sir Joseph, not a little mortified, "the crocodiles are very ferocious and dangerous." "Why," said Shackford, "they have a good large mouth of their own, and an ugly looking set of teeth, but very seldom attack a man; a very slight splash in the water generally frightens them off. Once in a while they catch a young negro in the water: the old ones don't mind them no more than musquitoes." Sir Joseph's paper would not do. All his argument of that wondrous moaning, and great fierceness, at last had opposers.

In our great western waters they float sluggishly along, like heavy logs of wood, sometimes fourteen or sixteen feet long. When they crawl through the mud, they leave a hollow behind them, as if a log had been drawn along. They

would eat a child any time if they could get him into their mouths ; but little boys are sometimes so bold as to go and rap their noses with a stick, and then get away unhurt.



THE HORSE.

As you are all so well acquainted with the noble and useful nature of the horse, I only show you his picture to introduce some facts respecting horses used in war.

General Washington had two favorite horses ; one a large elegant parade horse, of a chestnut color, high-spirited, and of a gallant carriage. This horse had belonged to the British army. The other was smaller, and his color sorrel. This he used always to ride in time of action ; so that whenever the General mounted him, the word ran through the ranks, 'We have business on hand.'

At the battle of Germantown, General Wayne rode his gallant roan, and in charging the enemy, his horse received a wound in his head, and fell, as was supposed, dead. Two days after, the roan returned to the American camp, not materially injured, and was again fit for service.

During the battle of Waterloo, some of the horses, as they lay on the ground, having recovered from the first agony of their wounds, fell to eating the grass about them, thus surrounding themselves with a circle of bare ground, the limited extent of which showed their weakness. Others of these interesting animals were observed quietly grazing in the middle of the field, between the two hostile lines, their riders having been shot off their backs; and the balls that flew over their heads, and the roaring behind and before, caused no respite of the usual instinct of their nature. When a charge of cavalry went past, near to any of these stray horses, the trained animals would set off, form themselves in the rear of their mounted companions, and though without riders, gallop strenuously along with the rest, not stopping or flinching when the fatal shock with the enemy took place.

By those who have witnessed those tremendous scenes of murder, called battles, it is said that the wounded and dying horses furnish no small part of the bloody drama.

“What a sad thing it is, Uncle John, that wretched kings and ambitious statesmen could not confine their fighting to themselves, and not put the hardest and bloodiest of the battle upon poor men who have no concern in the quarrel, and the beasts who know nothing of the matter.”

This is well said, my lad: war is but another name for lust, cruelty and murder.



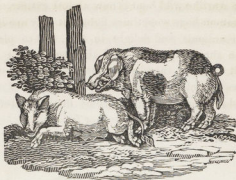
THE COCK.

This is a proud bird, which we have all seen marching in great dignity in the poultry and barn yards. He is no less remarkable or beautiful for being common. Were it not for his continual self-applause and boasting, we might love many of his qualities. He is undoubtedly brave. Let danger only approach the circle of chickens, and you will see his fiery eye dilate, and hear his scream of defiance.

Such is the unconquerable determination with which he fights, that it is a barbarous custom in some places, to arm cocks for a deadly battle, with steel spurs, and then two are let loose upon each other, when they fight until one is killed. This bloody sport reminds one of the savage Romans, who made the prisoners they had taken in war fight on the stage for their amusement. The gladiators, then, were indeed human beings—while now, particularly among Spaniards, the gladiators are game cocks. The disgraceful principle of cruelty is however, as much the moving one of the last sport as the first.

So regular are these remarkable birds in their knowledge of a particular hour in the morning, which is oftentimes before the least daylight can be seen, that they commence crowing, as if by common consent, like the watchmen of a city calling out to each other—*four o'clock, and all's well!* The Hebrews called one of the divisions of their time, the fourth watch, or cock-crowing.

There was an ancient opinion that cocks had an instinctive knowledge of just or wicked decisions in a court of justice—so that they were kept in judgment halls. No doubt this was a superstition without any foundation in fact. One was at hand to crow when Peter was denying his Saviour, and the wretched man, remembering the words of Jesus, went out and wept bitterly.



THE BOAR.

My dear children, we can have but little idea, from the domestic hogs which we daily see, what a terrible animal the wild boar formerly was, and is still, in some parts of Europe and Asia. In Germany, France, and other places, it was once a warlike sport to hunt them. None but soldiers would dare to face this enraged monarch of the wild woods. His hide was almost impenetrable to arrows or the spear; his tusks were long and sharp, and his savage nature perfectly outrageous. Mounted on horses, kings and nobility used to scour the forests, and engage in tremendous battles with these beasts, and horses and men would not unfrequently come off with severe wounds. The invention of gunpowder has, however, given men the advantage over them, and the race of

the warlike wild boar is now almost extinct. Our common hogs sometimes fight, but they are ignoble animals, and delight in filth, and to plunge into the quagmire. Had they on a bright new suit of silk, they would not think themselves dressed until they had wallowed in a gulf of mud, and come out reeking, as some dirty children do when they walk the streets or fields.



THE REINDEER.

In snowy, northern countries, where other animals would have a hard chance to get a living, the lively, useful, and hardy reindeer is found, furnishing excellent food with its flesh, and is better than a horse as a beast of burden, to transport sledges with unrivalled speed over frozen lakes, rivers, and snowy deserts.

They are used in northern Russia, Kamschatka, and Greenland, for travelling; and the distance they will go over in one day is surprising.

How would you like, my little ladies and gentlemen, to get on sledges, wrap up warm in bear skins, and ride a hundred and fifty miles before sunrise to-morrow morning?

"Oh we should like the sport grandly. Can we start, Uncle John?"

Would you go, and leave me to tell my stories alone?

"No, no, Uncle John. We thought the ride was to be a continuation of the story telling."



THE PEACOCK.

Here you see the beau, or dandy, of the bird race.

This remarkable bird is one of the most beautiful of the feathered creation. It is usually about three feet in height from the ground to the top of its head. The feathers of its tail frequently

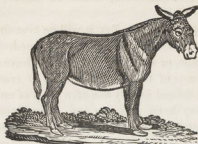
measure four feet. Its legs are rough, and its feet appear ugly. The head, neck, and breast, are of a beautiful blue color; on the top of its head is a plume of greenish feathers; the back and upper part of the wings are light ash mixed with black stripes. Its wide spreading train is exceedingly beautiful, the feathers of which have a mixture of shining green, blue and gold color, ornamented with regular dark spots surrounded with green, and having the appearance of numerous eyes.

The train thus variegated has a splendid effect when displayed against the rays of the sun, and then it exhibits a very great variety of colors.

The peahen is a smaller bird, and not near so beautiful in its appearance.

The peacock, though possessed of so much dazzling finery, is both cruel and stupid: its loud screaming is very disagreeable, and is said to be a sign of approaching bad weather.

We find in the old testament, that the ships of king Solomon brought these birds from Tarshish, as ornamental appendages to his magnificent palaces and museums, where the choice and rare things of the ancient world were gathered.



THE JACK.

You must excuse me, my young friends, for presenting you with the unsightly Jackass. Nothing is made in vain. This animal, although the type of dullness, and but another name for obstinacy, is yet extremely useful in many countries. He is patient to a proverb. He has, perhaps, one of the most discordant voices of any animal in creation—yet it is supposed that it sounds sweetly in his own long ears, as he is quite apt to set his musical powers in motion.

Well, my young friends, I have had the pleasure of showing you many things, and relating to you many remarkable facts. We have spent four evenings very agreeably to myself. It has made my blood brisker, and I have felt myself young again when your eyes have sparkled with interest at what I have told you.

“Why, Uncle John, shall we never meet again?”

Perhaps we may. But it will be best first to reflect on what we have already learned. The few animals, or birds, or monsters we have seen, are but parts of the immense family of creation. A single animal is only one of a class of animals which may have affinities and resemblances to each other. The naturalist finds his pleasure in seeking out these relationships, and studying the manners and habits of these wonderful creatures.

From what I have shown and told you, would you think it strange that such men as Buffon, Cuvier, Humboldt, Davy, and our own countryman, Audubon, should become enthusiastically attached to these sciences, and spend their entire lives in their study?

“No: we should not. It must be the most exciting study in the world.”

It is a study, my dear young friends, that gives us a deep insight into the power, and variety, and order of the works of our Almighty Creator.

How wonderful must be that Great Being who has created and given such propensities to countless millions of beings which inhabit earth, sea, and air! *Let all that hath breath, praise the Lord.*

The face of nature every where is covered with

beauty or sublimity. The ancient name of the island on which our large and beautiful city is built, is Manhattan. I will close this, our last evening, by reciting to you some verses I have made about New-York and the scenery around it.

NEW-YORK.

Manhattan! loveliest island gem,
In pearly waters set,
Surmounted by Art's diadem,
And Honor's coronet.

Manhattan! round thy sea-swept shores
Earth's navies ride at rest,
While o'er Gowannis' rampart roars
The Atlantic surge they prest,

When o'er the hills of Neversink
The evening sun goes down,
The light house gilds the ocean's brink,
A star on Vesper's crown.

Dark o'er the northwest Weehawk lours,
A battery uproll'd,
To guard a city's quiet towers,
Within its giant fold.

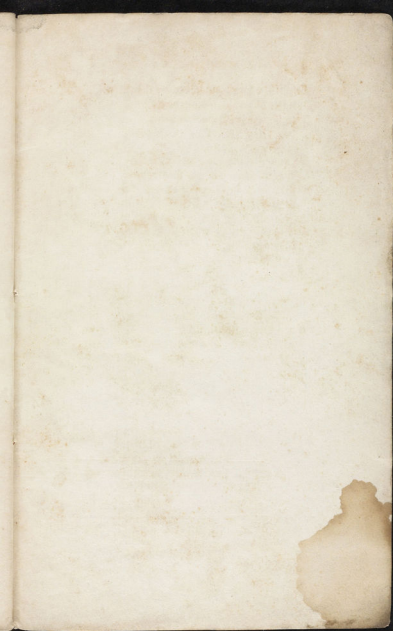
The Maelstrom of the eastern bay,
A dragon sentinel,
Foams hoarsely in its fearful play
To guard the citadel.

Bright Hudson ! bolder waves than thine
Ne'er burst the mountain wall,
To mingle with the ocean brine
In stormy festival :—

To sweep along the guardian isles,
Where floats our war-flag free—
Where beauty over valor smiles
In fond security.

And hark ! the shouts of thousands rise,
Like sounding ocean floods,
Or winds that lift their trumpet cries
Among the autumn woods !

Joy—joy—upon this island throne,
With laughing, blissful eye,
And music in her thrilling tone,
Invites to ecstasy.



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