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WILD LIFE

IN

THE INTERIOR

OF

CENTRAL AMERICA.

By GEORGE BYAM,

Late Forty-third Light Infantry.

LONDON:

JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND.

1849.

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TO

MAJOR WILLIAM FRASER,

FORTY-THIRD LIGHT INFANTRY.

My dear Fraser,

I dedicate the following little Work to you, having so often, and for so many years, enjoyed sports of the field and flood with you in Barbary, Spain, and Ireland, that I feel you will like to read what an old friend has been doing, and how things are done in a very strange land.

I am,
my dear Fraser,
very sincerely yours,
George Byam,
late 43rd.

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WILD LIFE

IN THE

INTERIOR OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

CHAPTER I.

REASONS FOR EXPLORING CENTRAL AMERICA. — THE VOYAGE.—REALEJO.—LEON.—CLEARING LAND.—MODE OF LIFE.—PROVISIONS.

ONE of the reasons that induced me to explore the Interior of Central America, was the report I had heard of the mineral riches contained in that country, and although the report partly proceeded from persons who had not been far from the coast, yet I heard enough to make me believe that in the high mountain regions of the interior many a rich virgin mine awaited the explorer. Another reason was, the spirit of adventure inherent in almost all Englishmen; and a third was, the wish of returning home from Chili, where I was then residing, by some other route than

Cape Horn. A kind friend who commanded one of her Majesty's 18 gun sloops, offered me a passage to visit Mexico, and return with him home, *via* Cape Horn and Rio Janeiro; but at that time an English gentleman, who owns a large sugar estate in Central America, arrived at Valparaiso, and offered me a passage to Realejo in his own vessel, a beautiful Yankee clipping brigantine, under United States' colours. I accepted his kind offer, and never enjoyed a sea voyage more in my life; well bred and well read, Mr. B—— did the honours of his vessel in princely style, and the commander, a North American, was as fine a specimen of a thorough sailor and gentlemanly officer, as could well be met with, full of anecdote and good humour.

They were both proud of their vessel, and well they might be, for she was the fastest craft on those waters, and passed men-of-war and clippers of all nations in great style.

She was built in Baltimore, and was about one hundred and forty tons burthen, but when laden did not draw more than eight feet and a half water, with a rather flat floor, long sharp bow, but without a hollow line, and a fine clean run.

She was brig-rigged forward, and schooner-rigged aft, and running free, was the fastest vessel I ever saw; and although when on a wind she was obliged to be kept a very clean full, on account of her small hold on the water, yet, by her superior fore-reaching, she more than counterbalanced not laying very close to the wind. Half yacht and half bearer of the owner's estate's produce, she was in no hurry to leave any port that might prove agreeable; and as she was to touch at almost every principal town on the coast from Valparaiso to Realejo, a distance of forty-five degrees of latitude, I certainly anticipated a pleasant voyage; and what combination of sea chances could have formed a more favourable anticipation?

The almost certainty of a smooth sea (which I only cared about at meal times), the same assurance of a fair wind the whole voyage, a perfect gentleman for host, a most amusing companion for captain, a first-rate cook, an abundant and well-selected larder of preserved good things of every sort; plenty of live stock, a choice cellar, a good collection of books; for those who liked them, some of the finest cigars, and a crew of steady, obliging petty officers and able seamen.

The brigantine was in very light trim, which made her run before the wind all the faster; and at every port we touched at, having plenty of time to look about us, my anticipations were fully realised, for it was doubtful which was the pleasantest, on shore or at sea. On the whole, I give the preference to the many pleasant days I spent on board the good ship A——.

The captain was the best hand with the harpoon or grains I ever met with; and though we generally went too fast to fish, yet in calm weather we killed a fair quantity of different sorts, principally dolphin. We likewise beat up the river Guyaquil, and remained eight days moored off the wharf of the town; but, as the object of this little work is only to give a few sketches and anecdotes, relating mostly to the wildest part of Central America, I will pass over any excursions or observations I have made (and of which I have notes) in any other country, and confine myself entirely to that named in the title of this book.

We arrived safely at Realejo after a long voyage, very short time actually at sea, but making the most of any agreeable port we stopped at; and here let me remark that,

having lived four years in Chili, and that mostly in the wildest part of the province of Coquimbo, I arrived in Central America with rather peculiar advantages for prosecuting researches for minerals, or for hunting in the interior: and these advantages were the knowledge of the value of ores by sight, especially copper ones, the way of searching for them, speaking the language, a very fair use of the lasso, in which I found myself superior to most of the Indians, and a good acquaintance with the breaking and bitting of horses for the lasso. I had also brought with me an excellent Chili saddle, with lassoing girths and rings, several lassos, and dressed sheepskins, or, as they are called, pillions. I was well provided with all sorts of fire-arms, down to holster and pocket-pistols, plenty of powder, ball, shot, wadding, and copper caps, and, in short, was quite ready to take the field, after having provided horses and mules for myself and servants.

On my arrival at Realejo, I was almost immediately seized with the fever that is so prevalent on the low, muddy, pestilential shores of the western coast, and it was only the kind attention and skilful treatment of the gentleman who had brought me in his

vessel that carried me through the crisis; though, one night, I overheard a conversation between him and the English vice-consul respecting the spot where I was to be buried. I shortly recovered, though very weak; and, as soon as I could sit on horseback, went up to Leon, about thirty leagues from Realejo, to make the necessary preparations for a tour through the interior of the country.

I now take leave of the sort of narrative that I have given; it was only to shew that my objects in exploring Central America were partly to discover some of the rich mines I had often heard of, partly to see a country I had never seen, and to enjoy the wild sports of its immense forests, in many parts of which no Englishman had ever been, and lastly, to make my way to the Atlantic overland, and return to England after a visit to the West Indies.

My aim is not to give a connected account of two years' residence in Central America, of which almost the whole was passed in the midst of the forest, and near the foot of the central ranges of mountains, but to give short, unconnected details of the country, inhabitants, produce, and minerals, but more especially of the wild beasts, birds, reptiles, &c.,

that swarm in the forests, and with whom I was much more in contact than with the half-civilised dwellers in the towns nearer the coast.

After a fortnight's residence in Leon, which is a large straggling town, and in which two English gentlemen were living, I made a tour in company with one of them through a great part of the interior; and, after much difficult travelling, and plenty of "roughing it," decided on a spot on which to build a couple of large huts, that might serve as head-quarters, the surrounding mountains shewing many traces of very rich copper ore. We had a piece of land cleared; and, with the help of some Indians, who lived in a village about twenty miles off, these huts were built after the manner of the country, hereafter to be described, and of which I made a sketch (presented in the Frontispiece).

It was situated near the boundaries of Nicaragua and Segovia; and, from being so much higher than the large wooded plains about the coast, was cooler and comparatively healthy, especially when care was taken not to get wet while warm with exercise, which almost invariably produces tertian ague, from which I suffered severely for about three months, reducing my weight from ten stone

ten pounds, hard condition, to ninety-seven pounds weight Spanish, or seven stone and a half. However, directly the disease leaves a person, strength and health are rapidly regained.

There was a cool shaded stream of delicious water hardly fifty yards from the "ranchos," as these huts are called, plenty of food for the horses and mules, and the distance was about one hundred and twenty miles from Leon, and upwards of two hundred from Realejo. My friend then returned to Leon, we having agreed to keep up a communication by means of mounted Indians, and I was left alone in the wilderness with a few servants, followers, and miners in embryo. My servants had been strongly recommended to me for honesty and fidelity, and one at least for courage and coolness, and he fully bore out the character given with him, as indeed they all did: he was a constant and faithful companion to me in many an adventure, and we were mutually sorry to part. This is very far from the general character of the lower orders of Central Americans, and I have therefore the greater pleasure in recording the exception afforded by my personal experience.

Though without books, newspapers, or any mental amusement, time did not hang very heavy on my hands, except during a long continuance of rain; and, what with overlooking some mines I was teaching a few Indians to work, and a variety of field sports, I was generally glad to turn in a little after the sun set, to be up in the morning a little before he rose.

Half tame cattle we could get in abundance from a natural "corral" about nine miles distant, formed by rocks and steep hills, where a great number were kept by herdsmen in the employ of a Spaniard in Leon; and the forest amply supplied any extra delicacy for the table in the shape of venison, two sorts of wild turkey, partridges, &c.; and, although everything was served in true forest fashion, yet in general all hands had plentiful and wholesome meals: but this was very far from being the case on long excursions, where often, water failing, game failed likewise. Of vegetables we had none, and no bread; but we had maize, baked over the ashes into a flat cake, and now and then a substitute for cabbage, when we met with a young palm-tree (of the species that gives the palm wine).

A supply of onions was forwarded from

Leon; and, with the exception of wine or beer, the general living was far better than I have often experienced in my many travels.

Though in latitude twelve to thirteen degrees north of the line, the heat was not so immoderate as on the coast, and the vast range of forest gave plenty of shelter; indeed, when the north winds rushed down with great violence from the mountains after the rains, the nights were often very chilly, and the water of the stream at day icy cold; very different from the hot moist nights and the lukewarm water on the vast plains below.

These "ranchos" served me as head-quarters for two years; and, though I do not regret having thrown away such time, I certainly would not wish to pass that time over again in the same way, though I look back with pleasure to many adventures on lake and river, forest, savannah, and mountain.

I shall now proceed to give a few short chapters on the different subjects before adverted to, confessing at once my ignorance of the technical terms ascribed by the learned to some of the different geological formations,

and also of those used in botany and zoology. I have written everything from what I have seen; and my anecdotes of the wild denizens of the forest and flood are either the fruit of my own observation, or collected from old Indian hunters whom I encountered in my wanderings.

CHAPTER II.

INHABITANTS.—REVOLUTIONS.—TROOPS OF THE STATES.—CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF THE REVOLUTIONS.—OFFICIAL PROCLAMATIONS.—ATROCITIES BY THE MILITARY.—DWELLERS IN THE WOODS AND FORESTS.

THERE is nothing that can strike a person, who resides any length of time in Central America, so much as the quiet steady demeanour of the great mass of the people, contrasted with the frequency of insurrections and revolutions, accompanied by the most atrocious and revolting murders.

The most respectable of the better and easier classes are chiefly Spanish, or of Spanish origin, with some mixture of Indian, and even African blood. Some, but not many, boast of pure white European blood, but the generality of the higher classes in the towns, or "haciendas" near them, are what we should call "persons of colour." The lower orders are of every shade of colour and of vice; the mixture of white and Indian which greatly preponderates, being very superior to the Indian and African black.

In the towns there is very little pure Indian blood, though many villages might be quoted that possess it; in general there is, even in the interior, a slight mixture of races, but the dark red skin, and the long black straight hair, is generally seen after leaving the towns.

It is true that many of the upper classes possess large herds of cattle, but still they are very poor, as they can seldom dispose of but a very few, and that by a sort of barter. A good bullock is only worth from four to six dollars, and even to obtain that, in any number above two or three, the herds must be driven some hundreds of miles to the fair of St. Miguel, which occurs once a year.

Many of the cattle perish on the difficult road; and the expenses of the herdsmen and horses that accompany the herd, together with the great probability that no sale will be effected, render the speculation very doubtful. The loss is, on the average, greater than the gain. There are many proprietors of land near the towns who cultivate indigo, but the crop is so very precarious, and the want of capital to keep the pits in order, and pay the wages of working, in ready money, so great, as to render it almost invariably a

losing concern, particularly as, after the indigo is made, it has to be carried on mules' backs for sale to the same place that the cattle are driven to, St. Miguel. At the annual fair held at that town every year, buyers come from all parts of the American coast as far south as Valparaiso, to make their purchases of cocoa, indigo, cochineal, hides, &c., the cattle purchased at that fair being mostly intended for the Guatamala country.

Thus the inhabitants of the towns about Leon and Realejo, having no sure sale for their herds and indigo, are generally very poor, as regards the possession of money, or even as to being able to obtain what in Europe would be considered, not the comforts, but the necessities of life. They have in general abundance of plain but very coarse food; they are very well mannered, as all Spaniards are; they are quiet, inoffensive, and wish for nothing but ease and tranquillity; and a stranger is puzzled to know how the many revolutions, that prove such a curse to the country, are brought about, when these persons abstain from any thing like even agitation.

The fact is, that every revolution effected

in all the republics from Chili to Mexico, is brought about by such a mere fraction of the population, that it seems a wonder to an Englishman that the great majority do not arise and speak out. "We wish to be quiet; we do not want revolution and murders, nor do we wish to see our streets running with blood; we do not wish to be subjected to forced contributions of money, cattle, and personal service; and above all, we are nine out of ten in number against your one; and the great majority will not consent to be plundered by the small minority, who are only dissolute ruffians."

This they might in truth say; but they *do not* say it; nor do they act upon it; and the consequence is that they are plundered, robbed, and murdered in the most shameful manner by the small minority of rascals; but they half deserve it, for if the nine or the ninety and nine would make the protest, they would have a very small per centage who would back their protest by an appeal to arms, even in defence of their homes and families.

In Central America every State has a small number of soldiers, ill paid, worse fed and clothed, and of the lowest order of scoundrels; the officers being hardly a shade

better, but with a little more method in their general conduct.

Leon, being the capital of the province of Nicaragua and head-quarters for the troops, may contain fifty thousand inhabitants and about three hundred dissolute soldiers; and it is by this mere handful of ruffians, or rather by a portion of them, that revolutions are effected. A subaltern officer gains over a portion of the men, with promises of plunder, increased pay, and promotion for the non-commissioned officers to the commissions soon to be vacant. They await the time when the barrack-guard and sentries will be all composed of the men so gained over. The barracks are then taken possession of in the night, the commandant's house stormed and plundered, and the next morning a few volleys of musketry make the people acquainted with the fact that their late commandant and his adherents have been placed on the fatal "Banqueta,"* and have made vacancies for the successful rebels, who may most likely be destined to suffer the *lex talionis* within a very few months.

Armed parties are then sent round to

* The seat upon which prisoners are placed when about to be shot.

every house for the purpose of gathering forced contributions, in the name of the new Government, from all parties, but very especially from those who are known to be favourable to their predecessors. Those that will not, or cannot pay, are dreadfully ill-treated ; they are often taken out and shot, before their families; and their houses, stores, or shops, ransacked of everything, not "too hot or heavy" to carry off.

These revolutions are likewise excellent opportunities for the most depraved (generally allied to the soldiery) for a general plunder, and too often enables them to satisfy their revenge for former affronts or quarrels.

A lull of a few days, seldom more, follows the storm. The victorious party is aware that neighbouring towns and villages are at their mercy, and accordingly armed parties are again sent out to every house, with orders to seize all the horses and mules that they can lay their hands upon; these are to mount parties of the soldiers, that they may make their predatory excursions with ease and comparative luxury.

On their arrival at these towns and villages the above scene is re-enacted ; they sell all the horses and mules they pressed, and

plunder the inhabitants of others, which they re-sell at some other town, eventually bringing back a good quantity of plunder and a number of animals to the place from whence they started.

Having, by these and divers other most oppressive measures, made themselves pretty comfortable for a short time, quiet may possibly resume its sway, until their necessities, discontent, or the persuasion of some other aspiring officer may induce them to break out into another revolution, and sacrifice their former leaders.

The commandant, for the time being, always manages to collect a "Congreso" or "Junta" of his own party; and as by the law each member is paid, and that, too, in preference to any other claim on the whole country, they are perfectly willing to give authority to the military for all their excesses. Thus are the generality of revolutions effected in Central America, and, indeed, in many other small Republics of that continent. I have frequently had opportunities of witnessing the disastrous effect of a paid body of adventurers legislating for a country, and I believe it has only to be witnessed to be abhorred.

It is only in the large towns and villages near the coast, and on the low flat ground, that the effect of these revolutions is felt. In the forest and amidst the hills a man may remain in perfect quiet for a few months, and on going to the capital may learn, for the first time, that everything is changed: on inquiring for some of his old acquaintances, is told they have been shot, and that others, from occupying the lowest seats at the political table, have promoted themselves to the highest; but that another revolution is expected in a few nights, when those highest will, most probably, be laid low alongside of their predecessors.

Not but in the forest there may be "rumours of wars," but it is impossible to get at the truth of any rumour; and to the dweller in the woods, or calm observer, the reason of all these *émeutes* is as mysterious as the *refrain* of the old song—

"Friends and foes,
To battle they goes,
But what they all fights for, nobody knows!"

In truth, these revolutions, like many other agitations, are invariably *got up* for the personal profit of a few, and at the expense of the great majority.

In such a state of affairs to say that there is any government, would be absurd; and yet the number of official proclamations that are constantly being issued, would lead most persons to believe that the government was excessively active, indeed too much so, did they not, by examining these proclamations and laws, find them of such contradictory tendencies as completely to defeat their own ends. To give one example among many:— A flaming proclamation was issued by the Government, stating, that "an opportunity having luckily arisen which might tend to develope the mineral resources of Central America, decree, &c. &c." The substance of the decree is as follows. "That every facility and protection should be given to those who dedicated themselves to the exploring and working of mines. That all previous laws which compelled owners to give a part of their produce to the Government be annulled. That no duty should be placed by the present, or any succeeding Government, on the exportation of any mineral ores in their crude state, a very small duty after having undergone smelting, and the duty greatly reduced upon all mining tools and implements imported. That the proprietors

were to be exempt from taxes and forced contributions of any kind, and their horses and mules on no account pressed for the service of the troops or public works. That the men working in the mines were to be exempted from serving the number of days' labour they annually contribute to the Government," &c.

Upon the faith and strength of the above decree, mines were explored, good lodes discovered, capital invested, miners engaged, mines opened, and fine rich ore brought to the surface, where, by the bye, it still remains at grass, and is likely to do so to the end of time.

Another proclamation made its appearance a few months after the first, placing a heavy duty on the exportation of crude ores, and at the same time rescinding most of the above-mentioned privileges. Still, under these disadvantages the works were proceeded with, a quantity of ore was extracted, miners learnt their work, and the appearance of the workmen in the small villages greatly improved.

Then appeared a third decree, prohibiting absolutely the exportation of crude ores of any kind, and this under the pretence of encouraging smelting in their own country,

at the same time knowing there was neither a reverberating or blast-furnace from one end of it to the other, not a single fire-brick, and not a single person who could build or work any sort of furnace. The decree at the same time placed a very heavy duty on the exportation of bar-copper of all degrees of fineness, under the plea that it was wanted in Central America, where there was no person to buy above a few pounds at a time, and that rarely. This last proclamation was the last and final one, for the party abandoned the undertaking, throwing many men out of employ, and leaving the works as a comfortable domicile for wild beasts, snakes, and vampire bats.

The above series of contradictory and mischievous decrees is only one instance out of many that are constantly making their appearance, to their own ruin and poverty, and to the detriment of all connected with them.

It is impossible that, with such a succession of plundering imbecile governments, a people can be prosperous, but, with the great mass of the inhabitants, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;" and, when the danger and day of oppression is past for a while, they talk it over with many shrugs and

"Santa Marias!" and point out what ought to have been done, but never by any act attempt to prevent the recurrence of the same evil.

Nor are their brethren of the United Provinces one whit better off. Should there be no revolution in Leon, Guatemala has *pronounced* for something or some one; should Guatemala or St. Miguel happen to be quiet, and enjoy a short breathing time, there is a revolt in the Honduras, or an *émeute* in Granada or Segovia, and the beaten party comes to Leon, or any other place, to request assistance in regaining their places, promising at the same time the plunder of some or other of their native towns as the kind reward of their aid.

This last offer I heard myself made in the "Placa de Leon" by an emissary from the Honduras of a party who had just been thrashed. The offer was made to about three hundred ragamuffin soldiers, who accepted it, and started the next morning on their fraternal errand.

Report proclaimed aloud the atrocity of their proceedings on the line of march. At the first village they arrived at, after passing the frontier, they brought out the old priest,

placed him in his chair, and shot him before all his parishioners. They then proceeded to sack the village, and commit all sorts of abominations. They returned from their tour in a few weeks, leaving a desolated trail behind them, and pretty well laden with spoil won by every species of cruelty and oppression.

Ask the best educated what he thinks of any of these actions, and the answer is always the eternal "Quien sabe?" ("who knows?") and, lighting his cigar, takes a swing in his hammock;—if he does think of it at all, he takes very good care not to let his thoughts escape.

Not like these are the dwellers in the woods and forests; generally honest and inoffensive, but bold and hardy, they seem to care as little for revolutions as revolutions do for them. "Remote from cities," they lead a rather uncertain precarious life, but, with a little hard work for a short time in the year, they can assure subsistence to their families. An acre of forest land, cleared, burnt, and fenced, is sure to produce an abundant crop of maize; and if a few join together in felling and fencing,—of which I shall give a description,—the work is better and quicker done, and the produce divided. This ground may

last for three years, when another piece is cleared in the same way. Every *rancho* has its fowls, and often wild turkeys. The man, after he has sowed, has all his time to himself; he mostly possesses a tame cow or two, to find him in milk, curds, and a coarse cheese; they feed in the forest, and cost him nothing; he fishes in the river, now and then kills a deer, traps a rabbit, and is always on the look out for iguanas and their eggs; brings home sometimes a wild pig; he very often possesses a young horse or mule, that he breaks for the journey he makes once or twice a-year to some large town, where he sells it; he looks after his own horse or two that he rides about on, hunts bees, and preserves the wax, using the honey at home; and when the day comes for him to go to the town, he leads his colt and takes his wax there, where he sells them both, the latter to make tapers for the Virgin Mary and saints, and returns home with a flare-up piece of chintz for his wife and daughters, and a piece of strong linen for his Sunday white trowsers and shirt; and is altogether as superior to the townsman, both physically and morally, as an English gamekeeper is to many of our squalid operatives of Wigan and Manchester.

CHAPTER III.

VOLCANOES.—MY TENT.—SACATE GRASSES.—AN EARTHQUAKE.—TREES.—CURIOUS VOLCANOES.

I BELIEVE it is Lady Mary Wortley Montague who remarks, that the most picturesque parts of any country are those where the plains terminate and the mountains commence to rise.

However I may have misquoted, and I have no means for correction, there is great truth in the saying; and no country affords a better example of it than South America in general, but particularly Central America. The approach to the Andes, whether you proceed over the Pampas, or from the Pacific, is generally devoid of trees, and it is only at the foot of the first ranges that anything to be called a wood is to be met with; but in Central America from the shore of the Pacific to that of the Atlantic one immense dense forest covers the whole land, except the few spots that have been cleared near the towns, some savannahs of small extent, and the

central range of mountains: the forest is so thick, and the trees so high, that a view of these mountains can only be had in passing some of the larger clearings.

The volcanoes near Leon are a conspicuous land-mark from the sea; and form a view from Leon itself that may almost be called national, as the government coins and seals bear the impression of those volcanos; but the metalliferous ranges of hills are much further in the interior, and deserve the name of mountains; and it is near the foot of these hills, where the different gullies or "quebrados," with generally a clear rippling stream running in the bottom, begin to *débouche* into the plain; and where the forest, losing its character of sameness and gloomy majesty, begins to break into patches, intermixed with savannahs and modulating hills, that the most beautiful, as well as the most healthy spots, are found in a country so fatal in general to European life. It was on one of these spots I pitched my tent in the shape of a couple of cottages or ranchos, as they are called; and a short account is given of the mode of building, for the benefit of any who may come after me.

A yoke of tame oxen were procured from

a village about twenty-five miles from the spot pitched upon, and having arrived at the scene of operations, accompanied by eight or ten Indians, the top of an elevated patch of grass land was marked out, and all the trees, except three, cut down within a hundred yards on every side but one, where the clear stream rippled under the shade of trees within fifty yards of the intended cottages. Search was then made in the neighbouring forest for trees uniting every requisite quality, viz. good hard wood; straight for about fifteen or sixteen feet, about the thickness of a man's waist, and dividing at the above height into a fork or two branches, which being lopped rather short might serve as a secure support for the lateral poles. The plan I marked out for the largest hut was thirty-six feet in length by eighteen in breadth, and operations were commenced by digging six holes in the ground about seven feet deep, one at each corner, and one at the middle of each long side. The trees were then, after having been lopped where they fell, dragged by the oxen to the clearing, and planted in the holes, taking care to turn the forks so as to receive the side poles firmly; the earth was then rammed in again

hard, and the side poles, of about the thickness of a man's thigh, placed at the top on these forks, and round the whole building. The roof must be made very steep to allow the violent tropical rains to run off without wetting the inner thatching, and to support the great weight several stout and long poles are placed perpendicularly inside the hut to sustain the ridge, and slanting ones laid from the eaves to the top where they are made fast together, and the ridge-pole placed over all. Slighter ones, like hop-poles, are then laid horizontally and parallel from the top of the roof to the eaves.

While the above operations are going on, the lads that accompany the men so engaged are picking *sacate* on the hills. Sacate is a very long wiry grass, that, when young, is willingly eaten by cattle of all sorts, but when old is fit for nothing but thatching, and harbouring snakes and wild beasts. A large quantity is gathered, and laid to dry in small bundles; and when the skeleton of the house is finished, half a dozen men place themselves abreast and thatch the house with this grass in a very neat and creditable manner; twisting a good ridge on the very top, and squaring the lowest layer with their

knives. Thus the house is finished but without sides,—and through all this work a single nail has not been used; a tough pliant parasite, "lianne," being used to fasten the larger poles, and the inner bark of a tree for the smaller ones and thatch: this bark being as strong as rope, and as easily tied as bass.

There only remains to complete the sides, which are formed of strong sticks placed vertically, strengthened by two or three strong ones placed horizontally. A door is then made of a sort of wicker-work, the hinges and fastenings being of the same material, and the mansion is complete. It is true that, snakes and other reptiles have a very free passage in and out, by night or day; and we must have killed some dozens of snakes in both the ranchos; for that reason some Indians fill the interstices of the side-sticks with mud, which, when dry, makes a wall; but they are then nearly in the dark and get little fresh air, so I was content with the rancho as it was; there was plenty of light, air, and coolness, and when the north winds were cold and violent during a few months in the year, some of the skins of the beasts we killed made it more snug, by hanging them up on the windward-side. The other

rancho was built in the same way, only smaller, and a third one for a couple of calves, whose mothers roamed in the forest all day, keeping near to the clearance at night, and returning to their young at daybreak, when they were partially milked and the remainder left for the calves. I had a very large quantity of poultry that lodged in the few trees left on the clearance, producing plenty of eggs and chickens to eat, when game was scarce. And now I take leave of my head-quarters, from whence I started on many an expedition.

Having mentioned the sacate grass, a digression would not, I believe, be unacceptable, relating to the extraordinary change that took place some years ago in almost all the other grasses. Good grass is rarely to be met with in a tropical climate; but in Central America, a few years ago, good grass was very common, owing to the great moisture combined with intense heat, which, though so fatal to human life, is the cause of luxuriant vegetation. After the first rains, in two or three days the very paths and trails are covered with a short grass, and, as mentioned above, a few years ago the opener glades of the forest and the savannahs were

almost always covered with a wholesome herbage for cattle and horses. The change was a memorable event for some districts of Central America. I will relate the event as it occurred at Leon, though for hundreds of miles around the same thing happened, with the difference of a few hours' date from the commencement.

Early on the morning of January 20th, 1835, a few smart shocks of earthquake were felt, and the inhabitants, as they invariably do, ran out of their houses into their "patios" (courtyards) or into the streets. The alarm soon subsided, and the people returned to their dwellings, but the earth did not seem quiet, and continual repetitions of running out of the houses and returning, shewed that the inhabitants were kept on the *qui vive*. These shocks continued at intervals all day, and the night was quieter; but early on the 21st, the people were again driven out of their houses by a very violent one that lasted a few seconds, and it was some time before they would return, when, as it was still very early, most of them turned into bed again, or laid down in their hammocks. But the darkness seemed most unusually prolonged; a feeling of suffocation was uni-

versally felt; and when at last the people rose, they were still more alarmed by finding the air filled with a fine impalpable greyish-black powder, which, entering the respiration, eyes, nose, and ears, produced a perfect gasping for breath. The first remedy was to shut up doors and windows as close as possible, but it was soon found worse than useless, as the powder was so subtile that it penetrated into every apartment, and the exclusion of air made the rooms insupportable. Possibly half a dozen persons in the country might have heard of the last days of Pompeii, and perhaps might have anticipated being discovered in some future ages, in a good state of preservation; but the remainder put their trust in the Virgin Mary, and their different patron saints, especially Saint Lorenzo, who is supposed to have a special interest in volcanos, eruptions, and burnings of every sort.*

The doors and windows were thrown open,

* Even in Chili the miners cannot be persuaded to work on St. Lorenzo's day. They say, that if they do, they are sure to be burnt by their gunpowder blasting during the ensuing year, and if a man does get hurt they always inquire whether he had worked the last St. Lorenzo's feast.

and, generally, the wiser plan was adopted, of covering the head and face with a linen cloth dipped in water; some saddled their horses and mules, thinking to escape, but they would only have been going to certain death. The poor brutes were gasping for breath, but those who had the care and humanity to throw a wet poncho or cloth over the animals' heads, saved their beasts, but many died. To add to the terror of the day, at intervals smart shocks of earthquake made themselves felt, and a distant roaring, like thunder afar off, was heard during most part of the day; still the ashes fell; and so passed that day, the very birds entering into the rooms were candles were burning, but scarcely visible; and the sun went down, and the only perceptible difference between day and night was, that total darkness succeeded to a *darkness visible*, like that which we may fancy was spread over the land of Pharaoh. Night came on, and the lamp placed on a table looked like the street lights in a dense London fog, scarcely beaconing the way from one lamp-post to another; and the night passed, and the morning ought to have broken, for the sun must have risen; but no! the change was only from black darkness to

grey darkness; and some of the men, and nearly all the women hurried to the churches, their forms wrapped up, and very dimly discerned through the deep gloom, and their footsteps, noiseless on the bed of ashes, recalled to the imagination Virgil's description of the shades; and they went and prostrated themselves at the feet of their saints, and beating their bosoms, vowed candles and offerings for relief; but the saints were made of wood or stone, and heard them not; and another sun went down on their agony, for agony it was.

During the day at intervals, several shocks of earthquake were felt, and frequently the distant thunder, or a noise very like it, was heard. The ashes had accumulated to some depth; the fall was as great, if not greater, than ever; the darkness as grey by day and as black by night; no termination of it even to be prophecied, and a tomb growing up around man and beast; flight was useless; thousands of cattle had already perished in the woods and savannahs, though at that moment the fact was not then known; and persons seemed more inclined to meet any fate reserved for them in the town, than to fly to what they knew not in solitude. And

so they passed the second night. On the morning of the 23rd the layer of ashes had considerably increased in depth; but the fall had become very much more dense, and the natural grave of man seemed to be rising from the mother earth, instead of being dug into it. The women, with their heads covered with wet linen, again hurried to the churches with cries and lamentations, and tried to sing canticles to their favourite saints. As a last resource, every saint in Leon's churches, without any exception, lest he be offended, was taken from his niche and placed out in the open air,—I suppose to enable him to judge from experience of the state of affairs;—but still the ashes fell!

No doubt, at the height of two or three miles the sun was shining clear and warm in the bright blue sky; but all his power and glory could not penetrate enough into the thick cloud of ashes, even to make his situation in the heavens to be guessed at; but when he was nearly sinking in the western horizon, a mighty wind sprang up from the north, and in the space of half an hour allowed the inhabitants of Leon just to gain a view of his setting rays gilding the tops of their national volcanos.

Of course the cessation of the shower of ashes was attributed to the intercession of these saints, who doubtless wished to get under cover again, which opinion was strongly approved of by the priests, as they would certainly not be losers by the many offerings; but during a general procession for thanks that took place the next day it was discovered that the paint that had been liberally but rather clumsily bestowed on the Virgin Mary's face, had blistered; and half Leon proclaimed that this image had caught the small-pox at her residence in that city, and in consequence of her anger the infliction they had just suffered was imposed upon them. Innumerable were the candles burnt before the altars of the "Queen of Heaven," many and valuable were the gifts and offerings to her priests for the sake of propitiating her ladyship.

This shower of ashes, which was felt by an English man-of-war a long way from the coast, altered and deteriorated considerably every grass of the country, except the sacate; whole savannahs and clearings, upon which grew a wholesome herbage were utterly destroyed, and a vile useless weed grew up on the same spots, where cattle had pre-

viously found good nourishment. This weed perfectly resembles a tall strong nettle, but, instead of stinging, it emits a rather fragrant smell when crushed in the hand; it is worse than useless, as cattle will not touch it, and it grows again directly when dug or turned up, thus occupying the ground to the exclusion of any other plant: it is not found on the hills, where sacate grows, or in the forest, but mostly on old cleared lands, savannahs near towns, or spots that had long ago been prepared for maize or indigo.

The cattle and the deer in the wilds suffered much, and great numbers were found dead near the rivers. The foliage of the trees, which for some months in the year forms the principal part of their food in the forest, was completely destroyed, and many animals died afterwards from starvation. Some years elapsed before the country even partially recovered, but no time can repair the damage done to the grasses.

At the foot of the mountains, where the flat forest begins to break into openings and undulating hills, the most valuable timber is to be met with. On the plains and near the coast huge quantities of gigantic trees spread their enormous branches on every side, but

they are mostly of an inferior nature to those which take root in some firmer ground than the rich alluvial soil of the lower country. The great cotton-tree is left behind, or only met with near the moist banks of large rivers; the bannyan is unknown near the hills; but the mahogany, ebony, lignum vitæ, iron-wood, guanacaster, guyacan, and many other most valuable woods, are to be had in any quantities, but will probably for hundreds of years to come be of use to no one except to the hut-builders, on account of the distance and difficulty of transport to the coast.

The enormous cedar,* without a branch for a great height, is as common as the oak is in Hampshire, and so it will remain, as there is no one to cut it; there are some near the coast and lake of Nicaragua, where they are used for canoes and piraguas, but they are neither so fine nor abundant as in the hilly country; in short, a treasure in woods of all description is as much lost to the people

* The Royal Cedar, as the Spaniards call it, is a different tree from the Cedar of Lebanon. The wood is almost without knots, very hard, and was much valued for ship and boat building. Many of the large canoes are hollowed out of a single tree.

themselves, and to the rest of the world, as if it never existed, owing to causes that now appear without remedy. About three miles from my ranchos, up a very steep, rocky mountain, the range of pines commenced, where the weather was really very cold some months in the year. We used to send up now and then to procure pine-splints and torches.

Nature has done much for this people, but the enervating climate, the government, superstition, and insufferable idleness of most of the inhabitants, together with their pride, which makes them consider themselves superior to all nations, will for a long time prove a bar against improvement. In the towns, the men would rather live miserably on an hour's work each day (not a feast-day) than live comfortably, which they easily might, on six hours' work. Riding through a town one morning at about nine o'clock, I had the curiosity to count the relative number of those men at work and those idle: four men were at work, and about one hundred and fifty swinging in their grass hammocks, smoking cigars.

Before taking my leave of the plains, I wish to describe a very curious spot about

fifteen miles to the north-east of Leon. Passing one night through a thick forest, about six or seven miles from the foot of the volcanos, I saw a strong blue light in the wood about a quarter of a mile from the path, but extending over many hundreds of feet. I asked an Indian with me what it was, and his answer was, "a volcano *turned upside down*." He evidently did not like remaining; and, after having gone a little into the wood to examine it closer, returned upon his continually calling to me, and resumed the journey, intending to make inquiries and revisit it shortly.

A blue luminous vapour appeared to be rising from the ground, covering a space of about an acre; but the forest was too thick, and the Indian too impatient to wait longer. Two days afterwards I started to inspect this place, taking with me the same Indian and a supply of *munitions de bouche*. He told me he did not care going there in the day-time, but that in the night it had a bad name, and so we arrived about eleven o'clock at the spot where we had stopped to look at the flame previously. After turning into the wood, we proceeded about a quarter of a mile, when we arrived at an open space of

about twenty acres, but sunk in the ground, and the descent a precipitous sand-bank, except in one or two places where a horse could walk down. There was no appearance of flame, but a sort of gas or vapour might be plainly seen issuing from an irregular broken piece of ground in the centre, looking like a heap of old ruins, and occupying about an acre. This vapour appeared similar to that which is seen sometimes to rise from a lime-kiln, but there was nothing to indicate any luminous appearance, such as we had seen in the dark: the strong light of the sun had overpowered it.

After watching it for some time, we descended the bank on horseback, and found the bottom to consist of a sandy clay, in which the horses' feet sunk up to the fetlock. As we approached towards the centre, the ground got so much deeper that we were glad to turn back and scramble out again; so we tied up our horses and attempted it on foot. After walking a short distance towards the crater, the footing became very unsound and the earth very hot, so much so, that it was impossible with any safety to advance, and we were obliged to retrace our steps. We then attempted to walk round the whole of the

bottom, approaching now and then as near as we could to the crater, but it felt very hollow and very ticklish walking.

We had entered by the side furthest from the volcanos, but on arriving at the side nearest to them, the passage got more difficult and the ground hotter and more spongy; however, by dint of perseverance we made the tour of this curious place, without being able from any point to approach the spot from whence the vapour was issuing, but when we arrived directly to leeward of it, the smell was very powerful; of that sulphureous description that produces violent coughing. After returning to the spot we entered by, we sat down under a tree, and after our midday meal, I made a water-coloured drawing of this strange spot, which, I am sorry to say, with many other sketches, were lost in a river. It was a desolate place, and though surrounded at a certain distance with fine trees, not a single blade of grass or vestige of vegetation was to be seen within the banks of this sunken volcano; all was sterile and barren beyond description, and the ruin-like convulsion in the centre, with the sulphureous vapour arising from it, together with the desolation around, did not

fail to suggest the image, on a small scale, of those cities of the plain, in sacred lore, after their dread judgement, and before they were finally covered by the Dead Sea.

The Indian could not be made to understand, that the greater light of the sun overpowered the lesser one of the vapour, and prevented it being seen in the day-time, but contended stoutly that it was only lighted at night by the "Demonios," who arrived at sunset and departed in the morning. A very little learning is a very bad thing, and the priests that had taught him the doctrine of demons, might just as well have gone a little further, and taught him that they had not much to do with volcanos.

CHAPTER IV.

MINES.—EARTHQUAKES.—COPPER MINES.—GOLD WASHING.—SILVER MINES.—WILD ANIMALS.

IN a rocky mountainous country, such as Chili, where on the hills the soil scarcely covers the irregular stony formation, metallic veins are much more easily discovered than in one like Central America, where the burning and rotting of grass and leaves for many ages have buried almost every trace of them from twelve to twenty feet in depth: I use, the term "vein," in speaking of a "lode," as being the literal translation of the word "veta," which is always used by South American miners; "veta réal," or royal vein, being the term employed to describe a strong regular lode.

In Chili it is an easy matter to follow up a vein for some distance on the surface, by the "farillons," as the Spanish miners call them, or spirts of the ore, that make their appearance now and then in the same, or nearly the same direction; but in Central America the great depth of soil that covers every part

of the mountains, except the crests and ridges where the veins *do* make their appearance, prevents any accurate observation being made of their directions until further researches give more certainty. The order of nature seems to be perfectly inversed with regard to the directions of metallic veins in Central America and in Chili respectively. In Chili every great copper vein (veta réal) takes its direction as nearly as possible north and south (true; not by compass) and the inclination of the vein generally dips towards the eastward, but at various angles. The vertical vein, or the nearest approaching to it, is generally considered the most valuable and lasting, but is rare in Chili—now, in Central America, the copper veins are generally vertical, and all the large ones I have seen run exactly east and west. The above remarks relate solely to copper mines, but the difference between the gold and silver ones in the two countries (at least all those I have examined myself, and I have both discovered and taken the bearings of many) is equally striking. In Chili the gold and silver mines generally run from east to west; but in Central America every one I have seen tend from north to south.

Whether these different directions of distinct metallic veins arise from a different species of volcanic action in the two countries, nearly three thousand miles apart, would require a cleverer head than mine to determine; but I know that, to me, an earthquake in Chili always seemed to proceed from the south-west towards the north-east and the Cordilleras; although generally the noise, sometimes the roar, was heard as if coming from the Andes before the shock was felt. It may seem strange to speak of the progress of such an instantaneous event, yet in a hilly country the scattering of the stones and dust, and the agitation of the trees and shrubs *does* mark its passage. In Chili I have felt very many, especially in the province of Coquimbo; and I once counted upwards of thirty shocks in six hours, taking all, as far as I could judge, the same direction. In Central America I could never even guess from what point of the compass an earthquake proceeded, or what course it took, but they are far less frequent and nothing like as severe as in Chili.

In Chili the inhabitants divide the character of their numerous earthquakes into two kinds; the commonest and less severe is

the "Temblor," or trembling; and the other, more frightful both in name and its ravages, "Terremoto," or earthmoving; the first superficial, and the second felt at great depths. I was relating, a short time past, to a military friend at the head of a government scientific department, on how many occasions I had had an opportunity of observing the effects of earthquakes at the bottom of mines; and how very differently the two sorts above mentioned were felt there, and on the earth's surface; from which I naturally enough drew my own conclusions, but was stopped in the development of them by the following remark: "We do not want conclusions or opinions," said my friend, "we want facts; give us facts, and then we can see if those facts agree with our principles, and we can draw our own conclusions." Now I will relate the facts I gave him, and give a very small part of my conclusions.

1st. I have been repeatedly at the bottom of a deep mine during a Temblor earthquake, and have invariably heard the noise pass high over my head, and seldom felt any motion, although on regaining the surface I have been informed there had been a smart earthquake.

2nd. I have been twice at the bottom of a mine during a Terremoto, and a greater difference could not well be felt; the earth under, over, and on every side was convulsed, stones detached themselves from the roofs and sides, and *sauve qui peut* was the order of the day.

Now, I thought that a fair conclusion from the foregoing facts might be that the first was merely superficial, and the second more *ab imo pectore* of the earth, and that they were produced by different causes. "Granted, for the sake of argument," replied my friend; "but I should like to hear some facts connected with the causes." I had only one fact more to give, and that related to the "Temblor."

3rd. Although many earthquakes are not preceded by rain, yet in some provinces, such as Coquimbo, and further to the north where only four or five showers fall in the year, the first rains after a long drought are almost always followed by a severe Temblor, and my conclusion was, that as the first sort of earthquake was evidently superficial, from its passing over the head of a person in a mine, the earth's surface, for some little depth, and the atmosphere had become well charged with

contrary electricities, and that a shower of rain, or sometimes a heavy dew, had proved a connecting medium, and had produced a shock, the violence of which depended upon the intensity of the charge. "And what do you think is the cause of the other, or Terremoto?" "Quien sabe! who knows!" was the answer, and an excellent one it is to every question a person cannot, or will not reply to.

But to return from this digression to the subject of this chapter. The copper ores that I have seen in Central America are almost all uncombined with sulphur, or any other combination that requires calcining to be got rid of; they might all be smelted in a common blast furnace, with the aid of equal quantities of iron-stone, which lies in large quantities on the surface of all the hilly country. This is the common method used in Chili for this species of copper ore, the copper produced is remarkably pure and malleable; it is called "Cobre de labradores," or workman's copper; it never requires tinning when made into pots and pans for all sorts of cooking. The copper ores are what the Spanish miners call "Metal de color;" metal being the term they use for

ore, and are mostly red and blue oxides, and green carbonates, with now and then the brown and pigeon-breasted; they cut easily and smoothly with a knife, and yield from twenty-five to sixty per cent. I have never found any native copper in Central America, though in Chili I have often found beautiful specimens, especially from a mine that belonged to me in that country; and I never found a trace, except one, of any copper mine ever having been worked, or even attempted; and the exception was a mere hole six feet deep, evidently of late date. The ancient race who lived in this country long before they were driven out by the Mexicans, who in turn succumbed to the Spaniards, have left no trace of copper workmanship, though they have of gold and silver; and in some of the districts in Central America there are remains of rather extensive gold and silver mines, and one or two of cinnibar; they are generally, contrary to the case in the copper ore, combined with a large proportion of sulphur, and are invariably so hard that it is wonderful how much has been done without gunpowder, for there is not a single mark of a blast. They have been abandoned for ages, and it will be

long, very long ere they are worked once more.

The difficulty of finding a pair of grinding stones and renewing them when worn; cutting them, transporting them through trackless forests, and making a mill to turn them; together with the want of quicksilver, and the treachery of the government would prove too much for the most enterprising; but there is a fair quantity of gold collected in Central America, although in such a way that it does not speak much for the industry of the upper and middle classes, who might organise a better mode of working.

Some adventurers, generally of the very lowest class both in manners and morals, proceed to the auriferous streams, that run through the south part of the Honduras nearest to Segovia, for two or three months during the dryest part of the year, and when the rains have entirely subsided. Their baggage is very light and easily carried on a donkey or half-starved mule, for they only provide each for himself and his female helpmate, a small load of Indian corn, barely enough for the pair; some tobacco, a small stone for grinding the corn, an earthen pan or two, a hatchet, and a small leathern bag

to put the gold in *when found*. They also take a few half gourds dried, to wash the earth in, and a grass hammock to sleep in, and away they start, driving their animals before them, each man carrying his machete or short heavy broad sword, and some, bows and arrows. The part of the country is almost uninhabited, and, on their arrival at the different streams, they generally separate, and each pair chooses a spot often miles apart, where they commence operations. The first thing is to build a "Ramada," or hut of branches, as the name signifies; but they always select a place where two good-sized trees are near enough together, to enable them to swing their hammocks between them. With a few poles and branches with the leaf on, a hut is made in two or three hours; the man then makes a pile of dry wood near at hand, and leaves the entire care of the household to the woman, who grinds the corn, and every day makes a few cakes, looking like thin pancakes, which are toasted on a flat earthen pan over the wood ashes. Their drink is a little maize meal and cacao nut ground together, mixed with water and stirred up in a gourd; and thus the pair vegetate for two or three months, supported by

the hopes of living well for the remainder of the year. The man is always within sight of the hut, in case assistance be wanted in such a wild spot; and he digs holes into the ground near the stream, and after having piled up a heap of earth close to the water, washes it in the half gourds, when, after repeated changes of water, and the spot chosen having proved a good one, a little fine gold dust is often visible in the gourd. It requires a great deal of nicety to balance the gourd backwards and forwards, up and down, and round about, so as to get rid of the earth; and it is still more difficult at the last washing, to manage to leave the gold altogether, at the very end of the remaining deposit, which is generally of a black or dark grey colour. The grains of gold are often large enough to be picked out after one or two washings, and often of a size to be discerned whilst digging, and a man in good luck may find enough gold in a week to keep him comfortably the whole year; but money easily got generally soon goes; and on the return of the lucky pair to their town, it is too often quickly spent in gambling and low debauchery.

The adventure altogether is a sort of

gambling, which is inherent to most men, and especially to Spaniards and Indians ; but the stake on one side is not large, being only labour and privation, and on the other the prize may be considerable, though the player mostly returns with his small leather bag in a state of collapse.

The silver mines that I have found have fine, broad, but rather irregular veins, and the ore is combined with a great quantity of sulphur and a large proportion of lead. Both the ore and the stone are very hard, but the former is remarkably clean ; and though, for want of a silver assaying apparatus, I could not get a good assay, yet by the means in our power they would produce about fifteen marcs of silver the ton. About twenty tons of clean ore was extracted, broken up to a proper size, and piled up ; they are most likely lying there still, covered over with some fine specimens of Central American vegetation, and the pile itself a fine specimen of Central American legislation.

The mineral riches that are deposited in the bosom of these mountains are no doubt very great ; but the working of the mines is so difficult, from the ignorance of the workmen, who have to be taught everything, their

invincible idleness, and the vacillation of the government, that I believe it will be long before anybody will be found to advance capital for prosecuting such a forlorn undertaking: and certainly not before civilization has made some progress, not in the wild forest and mountain, but in the cities and towns of a people who consider themselves in a forward rank of the best specimens of humanity, but who are in reality as inferior to the wild but generally honest son of the forest as the "Gamin de Paris" is to the true peasant of La Vendée.

I shall now proceed to other subjects, which, I trust, will prove more amusing to some of my readers than the dryer ones which have naturally preceded them; I mean descriptions of the haunts, habits, and modes of killing or hunting the wild beasts of all sorts which surrounded us on every side. Many miles from any other hut, and more than twenty from the nearest small village, I had opportunities of making observations in the wild forest that seldom fall to the lot of an Englishman, and that, too, during a space of two years. I had generally two Indians in the smaller hut, and one slept in a corner of my large one, which, being thirty-six feet by

eighteen, was consequently very roomy; but we seldom passed many nights without hearing the roar of the panther, or more commonly of the puma lion, very near our "ranchos," and our dogs, who were very fierce, were continually rushing into the surrounding woods after sunset in pursuit of cuyotes,* or other wild animals. It is true that, about two miles off, I had about twenty Indians located on the top of a mountain, from whence one or two descended several times a week for a load of provisions; they had built themselves "small ramadas," which did very well for them in fine weather, and, at the commencement of the rainy season, they retired to the villages until it was over. There was also an establishment of a few cattle-herds about seven miles off; but, beyond these, it was rare to see a human being except a *tigrero* (panther-hunter) and a very few Indians dotted here and there, but whose huts, far apart from each other, were difficult to find.

* Cuyote.—The central American wolf; but supposed to be a large breed of dog, run wild, perhaps, from the time of the first Spaniards.—See chapter on Cuyotes.

CHAPTER V.

HUNTING.—THE LASSO.—WILD CATTLE.

AN Indian in this country has no idea of *sport;* he neither knows the name or the thing, and when he hunts it is, very unlike the English foxhunter, either for the purpose of replenishing his purse or, in the shape of food, his interior. The first he manages by sometimes catching horses or mules, that have gone astray, and joined a troop of wild horses (*cimarron*, as they are called), by killing a panther or puma, for which a certain sum is paid besides the skin, or by hunting bees, the wax selling at about sixpence the pound to make tapers to place before the Virgin and the legion of saints; the second he gratifies by killing deer, turkeys, wild pigs, &c., for his own consumption, and in some cases to protect his maize-field. But an Indian never hunts for mere sport; he may be excited by a gallop over hill and dale and through forest and stream, but he always keeps in view the *main chance;* and he would no more think of hunting or shooting for the

sake of the thing than he would dream of taking a ride for the mere pleasure of riding without any ulterior object.

There are many sorts of hunting practised by the Indians in this country. One mode, in which they are *not* very expert compared with the Gauchos and Guassos of South America, consists in simply riding down cattle or horses, and *lassoing* them on the gallop. The Central Americans are very inferior to the Chilians, or any of the dwellers in open countries, in the use of the lasso; this inferiority is chiefly owing to the immense extent of forest, with very little clear land except on the mountains, and some savannahs near their foot. The gigantic trees of the forest invariably overshadow a high, thick, and, in some parts of the year, an impenetrable underwood. In this underwood it is impossible to whirl a lasso over the head, much less throw it; and it is only on the open spots or savannahs that it can be used.

The best time for hunting cimarron or wild cattle and horses is just after the underwood and long sacate grass have been fired and burnt, and the following first rains have softened the ground sufficiently to allow the "rastro" or trail to be followed on the gal-

lop. The wild horned cattle of Central America are by far the wildest of any that have come under my notice, though not so savage as many that I have seen in the sierras of Spain; they inhabit the thickest and most inaccessible coverts; they are vigilantly watchful by day and by night, and their great power of smell enables them to scent the approach of danger a long way off, especially from windward. They are often seen by those who know their haunts standing in the rivers a little before noon, but, on the slightest alarm or taint of man in the air, they make immediately, in a body, for the most impenetrable underwood, through which their great weight enables them to make their way; and seldom stop, even when not hunted, until they have placed a good distance between themselves and the cause of their flight. If they are hunted, the trail is first examined, and then followed at a good pace through the underwood, the horses getting some aid from the species of path pressed down by the herd; at the first burst the game leaves the pursuers far behind, but at last the condition of corn-fed horses begins to tell, and the last mile is generally run in view; but

seldom before a long, desperate ride through an entangled thorny covert.

The great aim of the hunter is to drive the cattle into any open savannah or plain near at hand; but many of these savannahs are useless for lassoing, being so studded with large thorn trees that there is no room to swing the lasso round the head; the object is therefore to drive the cattle into a clear savannah; then to separate them and attack them singly.

The narrative of a day's hunting in this manner will describe the sport better than any general observations, and I will take, for example, the first one I enjoyed in Central America, though I had attended many very large "Rodeos" in Chili.

Having lately arrived from the latter country, where I had resided nearly four years in the wildest part, I had brought with me, as before mentioned, Chilian accoutrements, such as saddle, &c.; excellent lassos, with strong girths and massive iron rings to attach the lasso to; and, in short, attended the *meet*, to which I had been invited, with everything in good order. My horse was an excellent one for the country, and, during the few weeks I had possessed him,

had become pretty well up to the sharp bitting required for Chilian lassoing; adding to this, that he had been born and bred in the forest; and, on my part, with all humility, a pretty fair practical acquaintance with the lasso, I anticipated a good day's sport.

We mustered about ten or twelve, besides myself, at the appointed time, and I certainly envied them the excellent defences they had provided against the thorns of the underwood; they had deer-skin sleeves and deer-skin breast and back pieces, like a herald's tabard, only coming high up on the throat, and having the edges laced together on each side; guards of cow-hide curled over from the ankles to above the pummel of the saddle, and attached to the forepart of it, effectually protected the legs and thighs; and a wooden box to trust their feet into, as stirrups, completed their equipment; and what perfectly amazed me was to see the lasso made fast, not, as in some countries, to the overall girth, and in others to the pummel of the saddle, but actually to the horse's tail. I had heard of the practice before, and having seen it used for leading horses and mules, concluded it was used for no other

purpose, but never dreamt it could be meant thus to check a strong bull in his wild career! On inquiring what happened when the bull gets the best of it, the answer was cool enough: "He goes away, lasso, tail, and all."

"Live and learn," thought I, examining the way the lasso was secured to the tail; but, without making any observation, waited quietly for an opportunity of witnessing the trial of horse *versus* bull. The hair of the horse's long tail is doubled up and packed all round carefully with long coarse grass (*sacate*); the end of the lasso is then wound round both grass and tail for about six round turns, and then secured, leaving the lasso to act from the end of the bunch, very much in the same way that a fish-hook is tied. However, I had the pleasure, before I left that part of the country, to see many of the herdsmen adopt my method, and as I supplied them with iron rings, they soon made their overall girths out of strong bull hide, and, I have no doubt, saved many a horse's tail.

After waiting an hour or two to receive reports from two or three scouts who had been from daylight seeking trails, an old

Indian at last came in, and told the leader of our party (a very old half-caste) that there was a herd of Cimarron cattle in a wood near the great river's (Rio Grande) side, and not more than a mile off; but he was afraid that they had been disturbed either by man or "tigre."*

There was a broad, but in that time of the year shallow river, except occasional deep pools, running through the forest, and to this river we made our way. We entered the stream about a mile below the expected haunt of the cattle, with everything in our favour, as we had to proceed up wind and up the stream; the wind being of importance in getting near to the cattle and the stream, to prevent our horses muddling the water, as also to drown the noise of their splashing. After working up stream in this manner nearly a mile, avoiding the pools, which are almost always occupied by a tenant in the shape of an alligator, we turned a rather sharp elbow of the river, and found ourselves suddenly about one hundred yards from the herd of Cimarron cattle, whose trail we had been carefully searching for on both banks of

* In Central America the panther is called "tigre," or tiger, and a known tiger hunter "tigrero."

the river. They were drinking and splashing up the water, but directly they caught sight of us, not one second did they deliberate on their mode of proceeding, but dashed with one accord into the covert, making a crash very like what the traveller may constantly hear around him on every side when the first furious north winds succeed the annual fires, and first heavy rains, and the falling of huge trees in every direction makes the forest rather unsafe.

Away they went; and away we went after them, along a trail as broad as the wake of a steamboat, but very inconvenient for the heads and shoulders of the riders, as the cattle scarcely clear the way above the saddle, and always run with their heads low.

I made a resolution, that if I got home I would not hunt again in a blue cloth jacket, for mine was torn to rags before the first half mile. The great object now was to turn the herd, as there was no savannah or open ground for many miles in the direction it had taken, and the forest spread to the foot of the mountains, which are one mass of large stones with high sacate grass growing between them. A clever lad, mounted on the cleverest and

fastest mule I ever saw, seemed to have, previously on some former hunt, done what he now did, for on arriving at a part of the forest where the underwood was rather thinner, he left us, and we saw no more of him for some time. Still we followed the trail as hard as we could press through the wood; but after a good half hour's gallop a screech from right a-head informed us that the lad had succeeded in heading the cattle, and turning them away to the left; and on arriving at the spot where they were turned, we found that the herd had taken an old trail, that led to near the spot where we first entered the river. They could not have taken a better direction, for we knew that there were several clear savannahs a-head: and so it proved; though we had still a long chase in store for us; but this chase became more exciting as we were evidently nearing the game; and as we slid and scrambled down the bank into the bed of the river, the whole herd was in view, about three hundred yards in front, galloping furiously down the stream, and sending as much spray into the air as a whole scholl of black fish. The cattle lost ground, however, for as the pools got more frequent, the banks higher, and the

sandy shores between them narrower, they jostled each other so violently that their progress was much retarded, and one or two of us had already loosed our lassos from the saddle, when the left bank suddenly declining almost to the water's edge, in the whole herd went again to the forest. However, the wood was not more than half a mile broad at that spot, and we pressed them so hard that they soon emerged from it into a large savannah, but so studded with thorn trees that it was impossible to use the lasso. However, there was good smooth land to gallop over, and consequently the pace was much better, and when the cattle reached the opposite wood they were almost in lassoing distance. In they crashed, and in ten minutes broke out again into a fine large savannah, of more than a mile across, with only one fine tree in the centre of it; the cattle were evidently tired, and the few that were close up rode into them to separate them. I had stuck close to an old dun bull, who seemed the chief of his clan, and was assisted by an Indian, whom I had engaged, and who remained with me till I left the country; but before we could well get out of the "ruck" (as the racing men call it), a

black cow was lassoed by an Indian, with his lasso tied to his horse's tail, and she very nearly overturned my horse by the violence with which she was rolled over. Such a she-devil as she turned out to be, I never saw; she was jet black, and had lost one of her horns; but it is impossible to describe what a fury she was; but I had no time to lose, for I had resolved to have the bull if possible. I was on the left-quarter of the beast, and my Indian on the right, both swinging our lassos round our heads, when he asked me to throw, as he was afraid of his horse's tail; I having given him a handsome iron grey a short time before.

I lassoed him exactly by the horns, and my young horse behaved as well as if he had been born and bred in Chili; for down came the bull completely stunned, and as his heels flew up my companion lassoed his hind-legs, so as to stretch him out. Before the bull had recovered the shock we had dismounted, and the horses keeping the strain on him, we disengaged one of his hind-legs and secured it by a hide thong to his horns, and having cast off the lassoes, left him on the ground, and went to give assistance where wanted. The remainder had been

very unsuccessful, having all missed, except one who broke the neck of a calf; so we had a live bull and cow, and a dead calf. On returning to the cow, she was standing up with half a dozen lassos over her, and the same number of horses standing with their tails pointed straight at her to restrain her from running at every live thing she saw. A council was then held to decide whether the hunt should be proceeded with, as the cattle that had escaped seemed much exhausted, and fresh horses might easily have been procured; but an old man reminded the remainder that we had two wild beasts to lead four or five miles, one of whom was more like a "tigre" than a cow, and so it was concluded to lay the calf on a horse, and secure the old live ones for leading. The old bull was easy enough to secure, as he had one of his hind-legs tied fast to his horns: we then made him fast to a horse's tail by a short lasso some three yards long, and by another longer lasso made fast to the pummel of a horse that followed him; the thong that made his hind-leg fast to the horns was then just slackened enough for him to put his foot to the ground, but with much limping; so that they proceeded as

follows :—first the leader, then the animal, and behind another hunter bearing such a press and weight on the bull as to keep him from charging in front, or performing any other eccentric movement. The partial confinement of one leg, together with the exhaustion produced by such a hot gallop, made the bull submit to his fate with a sullen resignation. Not so the black cow ; she was thin and in good running condition, and as they had not tied her leg up she was erect and looked like a great black spider in the centre of a net, as there were half a dozen lassos at least diverging from her to the horses' tails. No person would approach her, and they did not seem to know the process used in South America on like occasions. The way is, to lasso the animal over the hind-quarters, and making it move, get the hind-legs within the noose of the lasso ; when riding off at a sharp gallop will throw the animal a heavy fall. The cow was thrown with great violence, and a hind-leg tied to her single horn and broken stump before she had recovered from her second fall ; she was also tethered to a horse's tail, and an Indian behind her, keeping her back ; her leg was then just so far liberated as to allow her

to walk on slowly, but disabling her from injuring man or horse. It was about three o'clock when we started to tug these wild beasts four or five miles, and as the sun sets at six o'clock, we had time to arrive before dark, but the many fights we had with the black cow detained her an hour later than the bull. They were both secured to separate trees, as it was necessary to keep them two or three days in a state of tranquillity before killing them, as the fevered state of their blood would otherwise have rendered them unfit for food in a very few hours. After twenty-four hours had elapsed the bull took the wetted grass that was thrown to him very kindly, but nothing could induce the cow to accept any thing: tied as she was securely to the tree, she rushed at any man or dog that approached, and those that brought her wetted grass to assuage the thirst she must have felt, were equally treated. One of her horns was broken, and as her face and neck were striped with parallel wounds, I concluded she must have lately done battle with a tiger or panther, and I have no doubt with complete success, for such a savage beast I never met with in all my wanderings.

The hides of cattle in Central America

generally weigh three to the hundred weight, or about thirty-six pounds each. The cow's hide weighed about that average, but the bull's more than half a hundred weight, and was very thick. Many hunts of the same nature I have since enjoyed, but I cannot say that they are so spirit-stirring as those in Chili, where there is an open country, finer horses to work with, and a bracing climate instead of the enervating moisture of this, but there is also an excitement in shooting and hunting in Central America unknown to most parts of South America, and that is like fishing in the sea; you never know what you are to catch. In Chili, the small quantity of game that exists, or rather the very few kinds, are well known, but in the forests of Central America no person can predict the game, prey, or adversary the hunter may meet with.

I will now introduce my reader to another mode of hunting, used in some parts of this country with great success, and might be used with greater by adding the lasso wielded by the hand: it is employed for catching wild cattle or horses, and the account of a day's hunting may, perhaps, give the best idea of it. Having lost some mules, and having

in vain searched "through the forest and o'er the meadows" for several weeks, the gratifying intelligence arrived, that they had been seen in company with a troop of wild "Cimarron" horses, which had long infested the neighbouring forests, where they kept close all day, and only went out to the savannahs by night, returning to covert at sunrise. An old "Tigrero" (*anglicè*, panther hunter,) accompanied me to the ground, and having examined it, and it proving suitable to his views, it was resolved that a party should meet an hour before sunset, to make preparations for a hunt early the next morning. He then marked the most suitable trees on the opposite side from the trail, remarking, that if a "Cimarron" horse saw a notch on a tree, he would avoid it. At the appointed time he met our party, and told us he had seen a troop drinking in the great river, and had purposely frightened them to keep them from our preparations. The party then proceeded to fasten the end of a lasso round some suitable strong branch, about twelve feet from the ground; leaving the noose somewhat like a hare or rabbit-wire, but about five feet diameter, and kept open by the surrounding bushes: in like manner, five

or six lassos were suspended, one over each well-marked trail, which proceeded from the river about one hundred yards distant. The party then crossed the river, and noosed every trail that descended to the river from that side, so that by sunset ten or twelve lassos were set, and the party broke up, under the understanding that we were all to meet again the next morning, an hour before sunrise, and muster as many hands and lassos as we could collect.

Accordingly, all our horses were tied up for the night, fed on Indian corn, and about two hours before daybreak my Indian and I started to the rendezvous. Smoking our cigars to keep the pestilent forest damp out, we were both surprised at our horses suddenly stopping and snorting, and, as I was in front, was also much surprised by seeing in the pathway what I took for an enormous snake, of about thirty-five feet in length, lying zigzag, and which seemed to be, by its silvery appearance in some places, a boa-constrictor. I pointed it out to my companion, and, as the moon was clear, he immediately whispered "Bova!" which means boa; but, jumping off his horse, he left it with me, and crept into the wood as stealthily as a snake

itself, and soon made his appearance close to the head of the supposed terrific animal, laughing very heartily, and called me to advance, leading his horse; both horses evinced much aversion, and no wonder, for we found out afterwards that a party of Indians had killed three boas the evening before near the same spot, and, dragging them into the path, had pegged them head to tail in one long line, and a formidable length the three united appeared in the pale light. We were both astonished at our horses being alarmed, as it was the only instance we had either of us ever seen of a horse being frightened at any snake: a dog, likewise, is devoid of that fear.

But, to return to our horse-hunt. We met early at the same spot as overnight, and on inspecting the trails, lassos, and banks of the river, found everything undisturbed, and that no animal had been near the spot; so we started for a savannah about four or five miles distant, where we were assured that we should either find the troop grazing, or recent traces of them.

It was of little importance their being approached up or down wind, as the object was to drive them rapidly towards the river passes, where the nooses were prepared for them;

so, after making a *détour* to get the further side of the river, they were seen grazing on a flat piece of land, studded with a round clump-shaped tree, that bears a fruit like a very large and most fragrant apple, but nauseous to the taste. On seeing the approaching party, the whole troop, horses and mules, started off at score and made for the forest. But a hunted horse has not the same advantage in a thick covert that cattle have: the short horns, massive forehead, and ponderous weight of the latter, especially of the bulls, who generally form the advanced guard, bear down the entangled briars and underwood much more easily than the horse is able to do, who runs with his head higher, and consequently gets more resistance from them round his neck. This troop, which consisted of five horses and five mules, kept well together; and during the first half hour's hard riding, in which time they were turned two or three times, they were pressed strongly towards the pass of the river where the lassos were hanging; they all passed the nooses on the nearest side of the river without any accident, or even disturbing one, which was most likely owing to their having been so hotly pursued that they had no time

to choose their own trails. Down they plunged into the river, and, by giving them a little more time, we were in expectation that some would get into the lassos laid for them near the opposite bank; however, the only one who got his head into the trap was the leading horse, the sire of the troop, and he got a desperate fall, which turned the remainder off to the right and left, so as to escape the remaining lassos. A young lad, who had joined us during the chase, and who did not know exactly where the lassos were placed, got an awful purl by galloping his horse's head right into one of them; he was sent flying into a clump of aloes and cacti, which broke his fall indeed, but it was some days before he could get rid of all the thorns he brought out with him. One man having been left on the spot to watch the captive horse and lassos, the remainder followed the troop, and soon forced the whole of them to break covert on to a large flat piece of ground. All the other horses escaped, more through our anxiety to recover the mules, for they were nearly done up; but the mules were soon lassoed, and we soon saw that they had all once been tame and broken, which is known by their stopping short directly the lasso is

over their heads, evidently dreading a repetition of the severe falls they had experienced during their first apprenticeship. Three of them bore my brand, but the other two not being marked, I took possession of them *pro tem.*; and very useful animals they turned out, not having a chance of ever being claimed.

We all retraced our steps to look at the captured horse; he was a fine black horse, evidently born and bred in the forest, and about five years old; and liking the cut of him, I offered the party eight dollars (about 1*l.* 12*s.*) to keep him myself, which offer was gladly accepted; one man, whom I knew very well, engaging, if I sent him some help, to drag him to my "corral" the next morning. However, the horse made his escape in the nighttime, and was heard of no more in that part of the country, so I lost my money and the horse also; the latter I was sorry for, as he would have made a valuable hunter, from his size, strength, and woodland education. The forest was searched for several days afterwards in a circle of at least five miles, but no trail or trace of him could be discovered, though there were trails of Cimarron horned cattle, and also a fresh one of a panther.

Most likely, after he had escaped he had been frightened by a panther, and had put some ten or fifteen miles between himself and his great terror, perhaps up a stream. It is singular, but very true, what a difference there is in this respect between a horse and a mule: the first may have had a panther spring at him and miss him, or, as often happens when the panther springs from the ground, driven his heels so hard at the wild beast that he gets a good start, and never stops until nearly exhausted, and often in that state falls a prey to some other wild beast; but the mule, on the contrary, often pays dearly for his stupidity near the spot where he is first alarmed; he rushes away with great speed for two or three hundred yards, and then turns round, snorting and glaring wildly about him. The panther in the meantime creeps through the bushes, and often succeeds in getting another spring at the poor beast.

Another way of hunting Cimarron cattle and horses is by quietly following their trail, getting acquainted with their haunts, especially their watering-places and sleeping-rings that they form in the forest, and then shooting them down. It at first sight ap-

pears an useless piece of cruelty to shoot a wild horse, and so it would be unless the skins were much wanted, and they inhabited a country like the Pampas; but in the forest it is widely different, for there is no animal, not even the panther, so mischievous as the wild horse. If horses and mules are turned out for a night to feed in the forest or on the savannah, there is little dread of losing more than one, and, that one rarely, by the panther; or the casualty of losing a beast's services for six months by the bite of the horse-spider on the coronet of the foot, when the hoof falls off; but if your animals chance to fall in with a troop of Cimarron horses, they follow them to all their haunts, soon become half wild, and it is fifty to one against ever seeing one of your own again, but greater odds against catching one out of the whole, and it is no joke to be left in the woods without any beast of burden; therefore, cruel as it may seem, the safest way, when there are no means of catching wild horses or driving them out of your country, is to shoot them down wherever they are met with.

Having given a mere outline of the above modes of hunting wild cattle and horses, I

shall proceed to describe some of the numerous ways of hunting other animals, trying at the same time to give a relation of the nature and habits of those animals, illustrated by anecdotes connected with the chase of them. These anecdotes may perhaps also make the reader acquainted with some of the habits of the *hunter* as well as the *hunted*.

I have previously remarked, that the term *sport* is unknown to these hunters; they hunt from necessity, but it is not from a love of sport, but for their own interest or for the flesh-pot.

CHAPTER VI.

DEER STALKING.—DESTROYING DEER.—DEER SHOOTING.—KING OF THE VULTURES.—SIGHT OR SMELL.

The commonest species of deer in Central America is a very large kind of roebuck. The males have short horns, about ten or twelve inches in length, with two or three short tyne on them. Their weight runs from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and sixty, or one hundred and seventy, pounds, when well grown. I have never shot any weighing more than one hundred and seventy pounds, of this species, but I am sure I have seen bucks heavier, though I could not get them to scale: also, I must remark, that it was but seldom there was an opportunity of weighing one; for many were shot and left where they fell, after having cut off the two legs. In such cases, it is useless taking any other part, unless for immediate use, not even the haunch, as any part with bone interstices becomes very soon uneatable.

There is nothing to distinguish the common way of stalking these deer, or any other kind,

from the way practised in Europe; but it is much easier to approach them on horseback, especially when crouching behind the horse's neck; but I am now going to describe a mode of stalking very much used in the interior, and by which more deer may be killed than by any other method with which I am acquainted: I believe, also, the description will be novel to most of my readers. It is much better done by bow and arrow, than by rifle or smooth bore, for the shot being generally given about twenty yards off, the arrow is as sure as the gun, makes no noise, and has the advantage of remaining buried in the stag, and, as it were, impeding every motion; for a stag can neither run nor turn with an arrow in him almost to the feathers, but a ball enters on one side and goes out on the other, and unless it hits a very vital spot, a stag may, and very often does, go a long way before he drops, and in such a case is generally lost.

A young good-tempered ox is selected as a stalking beast, and though one would think that the treatment his education requires would be enough to spoil the best of tempers, yet it never does; the ox gets more docile than before, and in the end evidently takes a

pleasure in circumventing the game. This ox is first tied up to a tree by the horns, and he is then beaten at intervals on the horns, near the roots, until they are sensibly loosened and sensitive at the sockets. Should he be restive, he is kept without food or water, and when the roots of the horns have gained a proper sensitiveness, the ends of a strong thin cord, made from the fibres of the aloe, are made fast, one to each horn like the reins of a bridle. He is then made to move round the tree, by being given a little more length of tether, and guided in his turnings by this cord, which serves exactly as if he were bitted. He very soon learns his lesson; his horns get well, but he still retains the feeling of guidance by these reins; and, lastly, to complete his education, he only wants to be shewn the reason for hammering all this knowledge into his brain. He is taken to the woods and savannahs, and in a very few days he learns his work, though he may not be so steady or cunning as an older hand, or rather horn. The Indian, his teacher, places himself close to the shoulder of the ox, and walking alongside, holds the reins in one hand, and his bow with a long arrow in the other, having, perhaps, one or

two more stuck in his belt. When he sees a stag either on the open ground or in the cover, he directs the ox in such a way, that the animal's shoulder is always between him and the stag. The deer gets alarmed, but seeing only the accustomed appearance of an ox, relapses into much more security: the ox then, at first when he is being taught, and afterwards of his own accord, approaches gradually the victim, sometimes making a circle round it, until he has got within twenty yards, feeding all the time, if he is an old ox, and approaching the poor deer in the most hypocritical manner. When within reach, the hunter drives an arrow up to the wings into the game, and, unless there are other deer in sight, calls to his dog, who has been patiently lying down a long way off. The deer can scarcely move, being so transfixed, and is soon pulled down, opened, drawn, and laid across the ox to carry home, while the dog gets part of the offal.

It is really curious to watch the scientific mode in which an experienced ox conducts the operation on an open plain; he must take a pleasure in it, or else acts the part to perfection. No sooner does he perceive a deer on the open plain, than down goes his

head, and he nibbles, or pretends to nibble, the grass, walking in a circular direction, as if he were going round and round the deer, but the cunning file always takes a step sideways for every one he takes in front, so as to be constantly approaching his victim, but in such a manner as to excite no alarm.

In a large open plain the ox will make two entire circles, or more, round the game, before he has narrowed the inner one sufficiently to enable the hunter to take aim within proper distance; and the first notice the unsuspecting stag receives is an arrow, generally behind the shoulders; a gun-shot is best directed at the neck, but an arrow as above, for it impedes more the movement of the deer.

An experienced hunting-ox is best left alone, as he is far more cunning than any hunter, and always keeps his master well hidden; he is only checked by a small pull when within shooting distance. I have never hunted in this manner myself, which is sometimes done with a rifle; but I have watched it from a distance that could not disturb the sport, with great interest.

No quadruped, except perhaps a cat, is more tenacious of life than deer; the distance

they sometimes run after having been shot through a vital part is astonishing; and more of the deer kind mortally wounded, get away, and are lost to the hunter, than any other kind of game; but the vulture soon claims it, and marks the spot where it fell by its circling flights. As above mentioned, the neck is the best place to fire at a stag, and the nearer the head the better. I once fired at a stag behind the shoulders, when he leapt up high in the air, and fell down, but getting up again ran with great speed in a large circle round me, but seeming as if blind; at last he dropped dead, and on opening him I found a large ball had passed through his heart, quite destroying it, and yet he must have gone a quarter of a mile in that state; but I never knew one get away ten yards when well shot in the neck.

Another way of destroying deer, for it cannot be called *sporting*, but only retaliation for depredations, is practised by Indians, who may have cleared away a plot of forest and sown it with maize. This piece of land must be pretty well fenced, or otherwise the wild boar, the dante (tapir), and deer, would destroy a crop, especially when young and tender, in one night. The fencing is gene-

rally made by driving posts, made from the branches of the lopped trees, into the ground in a double row, and filling up the intervals with brushwood and smaller branches; but in a large fence a weak point is soon found, or made, and the deer easily leap over the breach that pigs have commenced.

The trail that they leave on alighting in the field, gives the first hint of where they may be expected the next night, and before dark several strong sharp-pointed stakes are firmly fixed into the earth, with the points directed in such a position as to receive the deer on them at the conclusion of their jump. Down comes a small herd of deer, say three or four; the stag and hind, with one or two fawns, for it is just the season for young maize, and, unlike most deer, these pair and keep together; they take the leap they took the night before in safety, and one or two are literally impaled alive. A man is sometimes keeping watch at some distance; he runs up, finishes the ones that are taken, and if they prove to be the old ones, his dogs soon kill the young ones; the spikes are then replaced, and are ready for another invasion.

These ways of destroying animals may

be accounted barbarous; but a person who thinks so should imagine himself in the Indian's position, who has hewn down the trees, burnt the underwood, made his fence, and planted his maize; and perhaps finds all destroyed in a single night that he had provided as part subsistence for his family during the year. He would kill them or trap them, as many a farmer would wish to kill or trap (and often does) the hares and rabbits that nip up his young wheat near large coverts in England. The great cruelty of the case, however, is when no watch is kept, and in this case, which is the most frequent one, the poor deer remains probably suffering great agony for a long time; and often the cuyotes, or wild dogs and wolves, tear them piecemeal from the stake, but it is scarcely more cruel than leaving a rabbit in a trap all night with its legs broken and mangled.

The best time for shooting deer is during a long-continued fall of rain, with boisterous weather; not a mere shower, however heavy it may be, for that is the worst time, but during what the inhabitants call a "temporal," which means in Spanish a storm or tempest, but which they apply to a *set-in*

rain of sometimes two or three weeks' duration, but without regard to its being accompanied by wind or not. The reason is this: the constant pattering of the rain on the leaves of the trees and the droppings on the ground, together, sometimes, with the howling of the wind through the branches, prevent the deer from retaining their usual security against the panther and puma lion: this security is the wonderful acuteness of their organs of hearing and smelling. Their anxiety makes them wander about in an obvious uneasy state, looking about in every direction, and very frequently brings them under the rifle of the hunter in places where they are never seen in fine weather.

A few months before I left the country a pestilence (*peste*) broke out among the deer, and they went down to the river's side by hundreds to die. This murrain in general spared the cattle, though some died; but one could scarcely go a mile along the banks of any large stream without seeing and smelling the carcasses of many deer, and a few cattle. The very black vultures, "Sopilote," or John crow of the West Indies, would have nothing to say to them, and, though such universal scavengers, that no

animal is too foul for them to feed on, they circled over head and round about, but never descended to the abundant repast lying before them. The alligators, also, neglected them, though their general habits are very far from being fastidious, and every pool in a river or good-sized stream is generally sure to be occupied by one. What the cause of the murrain was could not be discovered, but the hunters and woodsmen ascribed it to disease of the liver, and they remarked that all the deer they had killed of late had their livers in a very rotten state. We suffered very little within four or five miles of our ranchos; but in the low grounds the forest was almost cleared of deer.

Having mentioned the vulture, I cannot let the opportunity pass without remarking the extraordinary respect, fear, or whatever it may be called, shewn by the commoner species of vulture to the king of the vultures. In Peru I had been told that it might frequently be witnessed in that country, but never had my curiosity gratified; but one day, having lost a mule by death, he was dragged up to a small hill not far off, where I knew in an hour or two he would be safely buried in vulture sepulture. I was standing

on a hillock about a hundred yards off, with a gun in my hand, watching the surprising distance that a vulture descries his prey from; and the gathering of so many from all parts, up and down wind, where none had been seen before, and that in a very short space of time. Hearing a loud whirring noise over my head, I looked up and saw a fine large bird, with outstretched and seemingly motionless wings, sailing towards the carcase that had already been partly demolished. I would not fire at the bird, for I had a presentiment that it was his majesty of the vultures, but beckoned to an Indian to come up the hill, and shewing him the bird that had just alighted, he said, "The king of the vultures; you will see how he is adored." Directly the fine-looking bird approached the carcass, all the "olloi polloi" of the vulture tribe retired to a short distance; some flew off and perched on some contiguous branch, while by far the greatest number remained, acting the courtier, by forming a most respectful and well-kept ring around him. His majesty, without any signs of acknowledgment for such great civility, proceeded to make a most gluttonous meal; but during the whole time he was employed, not a single

envious bird attempted to intrude upon him or his repast until he had finished, and taken his departure with a heavier wing and slower flight than on his arrival; but when he had taken his perch on a high tree not far off, his dirty ravenous subjects, increased in number during his repast, ventured to discuss the somewhat diminished carcass, for the royal appetite was certainly very fine. I have since witnessed the above scene acted many times, but always with great interest.

The above account unavoidably introduces another digression that has been a subject of much controversy; viz., the cause of the "gathering of the vultures." Is that cause sight or smell? Although many respectable authorities have decided in favour of smell, it seems so improbable, not to say impossible, that I am sure, if any judge and jury would try the cause only by the evidence brought forward, they would return a verdict in favour of sight. I will bring forward a few of the arguments:—An animal just killed, or even fallen from exhaustion, and not yet dead, can give out no stench, yet in a few minutes there will be often a large flock of vultures at the spot where not one was previously to be seen, and they arrive equally

from down and from up wind. The fact is, that these birds generally soar so high as not to be observed; but their piercing eye immediately detects the fallen animal, and he makes a straight, rapid flight towards the spot. Now, whenever a vulture flies straight and rapid, the others that are hovering on high invariably follow his course, and on arriving over the spot where the carcass lies, their circling flights makes another signal for those vultures who may not yet have seen the first.

I believe it is Mr. Waterton who says, that he has perfectly hidden a carcass under trees and bushes, and yet the smell has attracted vultures from immense distances. I have tried the same thing; but perhaps Mr. Waterton was not aware that vultures watch dogs and beasts of prey, and follow them, and that when near the scent may assist them.

I remember once, in Chili, a donkey being drowned, during a heavy rain, in a stream that might have been crossed the next day without wetting the ankles. He was dragged under a very large, thick tree, and was left undisturbed by the vultures for two days, until some village-dogs discovered him, and

they had hardly been occupied half an hour with him before the spot was crowded with condors, who drove away the dogs, and soon gobbled him up. Now, I think that this case is a very fair argument, out of many as strong, in favour of sight; the piercing eye of the huge bird soaring in the clouds had caught sight of the dogs, and immediately he winged his way in a *straight* flight, followed by all who observed him, and were on the spot in a very short time, though they had neglected the scent for two days.

Sight I believe to be the cause of the "gathering of the vultures," for, having lived for six years in countries where vultures abound, and having examined their habits very closely, I have often seen this opinion confirmed. The enormous height they soar at gives them a widely extended view, their keen eye enabling them to perceive a dead animal from incredible distances, and their instinct teaching them to watch the movements of dogs and other carnivorous animals, as well as to watch the flight of their own species.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TAPIR.—THE JAVALINO.—THE PIG SIEGE.—THE SIEGE RAISED.—ANECDOTE.

The largest of the indigenous natives of the forest in Central America is the tapir, called by the Indians "Dante."

As most large zoological associations possess one, there would be little use or profit to the reader in describing him; but it may be as well to mention a few of his habits and nature of haunts.

A full-grown tapir in his native forest is a much larger animal than any I have ever seen in a state of captivity; he is about the height and length of a large donkey, but much more massive, with very short legs. His habits are generally solitary, and he seems to delight in wandering about alone, at least for the greatest part of the year. He seldom rests near one spot for any length of time; indeed, were he to take up his residence near any spot cleared for maize, he would soon be hunted down, as no fence can withstand his weight and strength; and they

do as much damage with their feet by trampling the Indian corn down, as by their monstrous appetite. Generally speaking, there is little chance of finding a tapir when a party is expressly made for hunting one, unless his trail is found and carefully followed; but they are often met when least expected, and in places that seem the least suited for them. The tapir cares for no carnivorous animal when full grown, for their hide is so thick as to be pretty near pistol proof, and would certainly defy the claws and teeth of the panther. A friend of mine was much surprised one day to see a tapir issue from a wood close to him; he pulled out a pistol and fired at him, but without any apparent effect; the second one, however, hit the beast in the eye, and down he dropped stone dead; the ball of the first pistol was found imbedded close under the skin, which it had scarcely penetrated.

An Italian acquaintance near the coast had a very pretty young one, about the size of a Chinese pig; he followed his master about the premises, but no further, like a dog; but though he was taken every care of, the poor animal died; the intense heat near the coast was too much for him; he wanted the purer

and more bracing air of his own country, which is more than two hundred miles from that part of the coast.

When young they are easily tamed, but seldom live to gain their full growth in captivity; they are very fond of cow's-milk, and soon acquire great affection for their master or feeder. They use their elongated upper lip in some respects like the elephant does his trunk, by laying hold of branches or long grass, and turning them into his mouth. They are found mostly about the wooded hills of Segovia, but often during heavy rains or storms wander far into the lower country.

In Central America there are two sorts of wild pig, one called the "Javalino," which is of the large wild boar breed, and the other the "Savalino," which is a small black or dark brown pig, and known in English, I believe, under the name of Musk Pig. Both species are gregarious, and keep together in large herds, most likely for mutual defence against wild beasts. The latter species, which has something the appearance of an English porker, has a lump on its back behind the withers, which must be removed immediately the animal is killed, or the flesh would soon become most abominable.

The first of this kind I ever shot, the lump was cut out from him as soon as he had left off struggling; and throwing him on my horse, I took him to the ranchos and had a leg cut off and roasted. Never was such a delicious looking little leg of pork set before a ravenous hunter; nor was apple-sauce at all indispensable; but no sooner was hunger satisfied than the musk taste made me experience the most violent sickness for a few hours I had ever felt, and from that day I have had a great dislike for even the sight of pork. When one of these pigs is shot, the others make off as fast as possible, and a second shot is rare, unless a right and left is given in succession; but very different is the other large and awfully savage breed, for they all congregate round their fallen companion, and then proceed instantly to take summary vengeance, if they can, on the aggressor, and they fear neither man nor beast.

If a javalino is shot from horseback, the best way is to gallop off as fast as you can, and return in an hour with assistance to carry away the heavy brute; by which time they will have most likely left that part of the country. If on foot and in an open

country a herd is met with, the safest plan is to avoid them altogether and have nothing to say to them ; but in the forest it is sometimes a very different affair, as the following anecdote will shew.

I was one day hunting alone, on foot, with a double-barrelled smooth bore, one barrel loaded with ball, the other with Number-two shot, in a rather (for that country) open wood, when a large boar made his appearance, about sixty yards off, and not seeing any of his comrades, I let fly the ball-barrel at him and tumbled him over. He gave a fierce grunt or two as he lay, and a large herd of these boars and sows immediately rushed out of some thicker underwood behind him, and, after looking a few seconds at the fallen beast, made a dash at me ; but they were a trifle too late, for, on first catching sight of them, I ran to a tree, cut up it for life, and had only just scrambled into some diverging branches, about ten feet from the ground, when the whole herd arrived, grunting and squealing, at the foot of the tree. It was the first time I had ever been *tree'd*, as the North Americans call it, and I could not help laughing at the ridiculous figure I must have cut, chased up a tree by a drove

of pigs; but it soon turned out no laughing matter, for their patience was not, as I expected, soon exhausted; but they settled round the tree, about twenty yards distant, and kept looking up at me with their little twinkling eyes, as much as to say, "we 'll have you yet." Having made up my mind that a regular siege was intended, I began, as an old soldier, to examine the state and resources of the fortress, and also the chance of relief from without, by raising the siege. The defences consisted of four diverging branches that afforded a safe asylum to the garrison, provided it was watchful and did not go to sleep; the arms and ammunition, "*de guerre et de bouche*," were a double-barrelled gun, a flask nearly full of powder, plenty of copper caps, a few charges of shot, but only two balls; knife, flint, and steel, a piece of hard dried tongue, a small flask of spirits and water, and a good bundle of cigars. As to relief from without, it was hardly to be expected, although a broad trail ran about half a mile from my perch; and as for a sally, it was quite out of the question; so I did as most persons would do in my situation, made myself as comfortable as possible, took a small sup from the flask, lit a

cigar, and sat watching the brutes and wondering when they would get tired of watching me. But hour after hour elapsed, and as there seemed no chance of the pigs losing patience, of course I began to lose mine: they never stirred except one or two would now and then go and take a look at his dead comrade, and return grunting, as if he had freshened up his thirst for revenge. All at once it occurred to me, that though I could not spare any lead, but must keep it for emergencies, yet as powder and caps were in abundance, it would be a good plan to fire off powder alone every few minutes, and follow each shot by a loud shout, which is a general signal for assistance; and, as one barrel was still loaded with shot, I picked out a most outrageously-vicious old boar, who was just returning from a visit to his fallen friend, grunting and looking up at me in the tree, and gave him the whole charge, at about twenty yards off, in the middle of his face. This succeeded beyond my expectation, for he turned round and galloped away as hard as he could, making the most horrible noise; and though the remainder, when they heard the shot, charged up to the foot of the tree, yet the outcry of the old boar drew them all

from the tree, and away the whole herd went after him, making such a noise I never heard before or since. Remaining up the tree for several minutes, until all was quiet, I loaded both barrels very carefully with ball, and slipping down to the ground ran away, in a contrary direction to the one they had taken, as fast as my legs could carry me.

In about an hour's time a party of us returned to the spot on horseback and carried the brute home, after cutting him up, as he was too heavy to carry whole.

He was a large, strong-made beast, but seemed more nimbly and less massively formed than the boar of Germany or Spain; the colour was not so brindled, but more of a dirty yellowish brown; the bristles were also far from being so strong or thick, owing, most likely, to the heat of the climate. There were no means at hand for weighing him, but he was estimated at about three hundred and fifty pounds, which is much under a full-grown European boar in good condition: the tusks were long, pointed, and very sharp edged; and the flesh (this was before the dinner off the musk-pig) rather hard, but very well flavoured. Had the head received the same scientific preparation that a German or

Strasbourg artist would have bestowed on it, no doubt it would have rivalled a Westphalian *téte de sanglier*.

These are the only two species of the pig kind that came under my notice, but a respectable cross-bred Indian told me that, several years before, a large herd of about sixty pigs came down into an immense savannah, about forty miles more to the north, and that he and a few Indians followed them on horseback with spears, lassos, bows and arrows, and one musket, and that they succeeded in killing every one : they were a different breed from the above, but not nearly so savage as the javalino, and perhaps were a previously domesticated breed escaped into the woods, as in some of the South Sea Islands.

Before leaving the subject of the wild boar and his habits, an anecdote, told me by an old ally and friend, the " Tigrero" or panther-hunter, may be acceptable, as shewing the courage and savageness of the brute far better than anything I have met with myself.

We were hunting together on foot, when, arriving at an open spot in the forest about forty yards across, with a single tree in the centre, he stopped me and told me he had a

curious story to tell me connected with that place, and that if I chose to sit down on a fallen tree at the edge, we could rest awhile. So we lighted our cigars, and after a puff or two he began this little zoological tale, the truth of which I cannot vouch for, but the man was well worthy of credit.

"Don Jorge," he began, "I have purposely brought you here to shew you the spot where a curious accident befel a tigre a few years since. I had crossed the trail of a tigre, but as it was rather stale I took little notice of it at first; but as the trail led towards the bed of the river, which was on my road, I began to take an interest in it. The trail left the river and entered the wood, and I followed it to this very spot, but never was I more astonished than at the sight before me. You see, Don Jorge, that large shooting branch," pointing to a horizontal limb that shot out at right-angles from the isolated tree, and about eight feet from the ground; "well, from that branch was hanging part of a tigre, with his hind claws stuck deep into the bark. His head, neck, and fore-arms had been torn off and mangled as far as the shoulders, and a young pig, badly striped by the panther's claws, was lying

dead underneath him. I saw at a glance how it had happened, as the ground all around was beaten in by the feet of a large herd of javalinos. The tigre had been crouching on the bough, and the drove passing under him, he had hung on by his hind claws sticking into the soft bark of the branch, and swung himself down to pick up the young grunter; but before he could recover himself he was seized by the old ones, who had torn and mangled him as far as they could reach. When I returned home," continued the Tigrero, "I related to my old father, who was then a tigrero, what I had seen; and he told me that, when a youth, he had seen the same thing, though how long ago that may be, *quien sabe*, as I have sixty-five years upon my head, and well counted too." He was a fine powerful man, with scarcely a grey hair, and could do a day's hard work, on foot or on horseback, that might shame many a much younger man.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BULL AND PANTHER.—PANTHER HUNTING.—RENCOUNTER.—THE DEATH.—ANECDOTE.—CURIOUS INCIDENT.

THE carnivorous beasts of Central America are in general very inferior, both in size and strength, to those of Africa or Asia; the only exception to the relative species of the old world is the panther, who is by far the most ferocious and boldest beast in America. There is a good specimen of a moderate sized one in the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park: he is a fair sample of the massive build of the panther, and is a remarkable contrast to the lengthy appearance of the Asiatic tiger next to him.

No animal springs more quickly, and no wild beast attacks man more audaciously than the panther when pressed, and he is equally bold and resolute towards other animals when hunting for his food; but he is free from one peculiarity or vice that distinguishes the Puma lion, as well as the lion of Africa, and that is, that he never follows or dodges the footsteps

of man. In the event of suddenly meeting a man, he will, unless too close, generally make off into the wood; but if he sees his retreat cut off, or if even pressed by a dog, his temper is roused, he will charge in the most determined and furious manner by a succession of tremendous springs. The "rastro," or trail, that the panther leaves is very much like that of the Puma lion; but there is one small difference that denotes to the eye of the experienced hunter, and no other, which animal has "passed that way." The panther (and here let me say I must use the words tiger and panther as synonymous) puts his foot flat to the ground, and raises it so equally that a perfect print is left on wet soil or sand; but the Puma, with a larger paw in proportion to his size, on raising his paw throws a little of the sand or earth behind the ball of the foot; and, though the difference is very trifling in appearance, it is a great one to the hunter who is in pursuit, as the habits also differ widely.

The panther does incalculable damage to the cattle and horses straying in the forest, but more especially to the young; but the old bulls, and sometimes the cows, get the advantage of him.

A bull, belonging to one of my acquaint-

ances, had gored so many cattle, that he was lassoed, and his horns were then squared or blunted at the points to prevent him doing further mischief. A few weeks afterwards a panther killed a cow on the savannah; and from the trampled state of the ground, and the terribly torn condition of the same bull's head and neck, it was very evident that he had done battle for his cow. He was secured, his wounds were plastered up, and his horns pared very sharp; he was then turned again on to the savannah, where the dead cow was still lying, the vultures and wild dogs having been kept away from the carcase during the day. "Well," said my acquaintance, "I will bet you, Don Jorge, this valuable watch," (pulling out an old turniped-fashioned one, worth about fifteen shillings) "against one thousand dollars, that there will be a fight this very night," evidently valuing his watch at one thousand dollars. Of course I declined his bet; but, sure enough, as was expected, the panther returned to his feast in the night-time. And there must have been a very furious battle between him and the bull with the sharpened horns; for the next morning a very large tiger was found dead near the carcase of the cow, and pierced through

and through by a great quantity of wounds. The greater number of these wounds must have been given after death, as at daybreak the bull's anger was by no means suspended; he returning every now and then to the body, and, rushing at it, drove his horns clean through it, kneeling on it and butting at it in desperate fury. Besides the wounds he had received at the previous encounter, he got very badly wounded in the last one also; but it was so dangerous to go near him that it was only upon going for refreshment to the stream (of which he had great need) that he could be lassoed and his many gashes closed, mostly by sewing them up. I am sorry to say that this bull retained such a *penchant* for the use of his horns that they were very soon reblunted.

When the panther attacks large cattle, he most likely takes them by surprise; couching on a low bough of a tree, he jumps on the shoulder, and fixing three of his claws into the sides and neck, and his teeth near to the jugular vein, with the remaining fore-paw he gets hold fast of the animal's nose, and forces it down to the chest. If he succeeds it stops the speed of the cow or ox, and at the same time swells the jugular veins, which he

wishes to bite through. All cattle killed by the panther are sorely mangled about the nose.

The panther is often hunted by very small dogs: when a trail is discovered, and it is pretty fresh, the young dogs are brought on to it, to find out whether they acknowledge it or not; if they are likely to turn out good trail dogs, they immediately roll themselves over and over on the trail, and it is reckoned a good sign that they will behave well in future. They are generally small dogs, and of course are not meant to attack a panther, but merely to follow his trail, and either to *tree* him, or, if he sits at bay, to surround him and bark until the hunters arrive.

These panther hunters generally hunt in pairs: one of them is armed with two spears, formed from hard wood sharpened at the point, but sometimes pointed with iron. One spear is about ten feet long and the other about three feet shorter, but they are both held close together for fear the longer one may be snapped. The other has either his bow and arrows or some sort of fire-arm, but as fire-arms are very scarce, it is generally the former. When the panther is tree'd, or at bay, the spearsman advances, followed

closely by his second, and kneeling on one knee, plants the butt of both spears firmly against that knee, and directs the points towards the beast ready for his spring. The man with the gun or the bow stands close over him, and fires at the panther just as he takes the last spring: sometimes the shot is enough to stop him, especially if hit in the centre of the head or in the neck; but, if not, the animal gives a tremendous roar, and makes a furious spring at his assailants; and now comes the nervous part of the conflict. Should the panther spring with his fore-legs wide apart, as he almost invariably does, there is not much danger; as he spits himself with the longest spear, and often with the shorter one also, and the hunter may remain without any fear quite close to him; but, which sometimes but rarely happens, the tiger springs with his forelegs close or crossed, he will then with a blow of his paw break or turn away the stoutest lance, and in such a case the hunter is in what is called a *considerable fix*. The only remedy, then, is to fight it out with the *machete*, or any other arms at hand. A short account of one of these hunts will best explain the way of proceeding, and, as it in every particular so

different from the mode of East Indian tiger hunting, may be new to some of those fine fellows in India to whom nothing comes amiss, whether it is tiger, boar, Affghan or Chinaman.

A yoke of tame oxen had been fastened together by the horns, with thongs of hide, giving them enough play to feed. Early the next morning an Indian came in to say that the yoke had disappeared; that there was a good deal of blood on the ground where he found the trail, and that the *rastro*, or trail, was as big as the stream hard by.

My old friend the Tigrero, being then close at hand, was sent for, and a party, consisting of himself with his spears, and two others, one with a double smooth bore, and the other with a single one, and attended by a few little cur-looking dogs, took up the trail about eight o'clock in the morning. The large dogs had been all shut up, as they could be of no use, and would have surely been killed.

The trail was four or five yards broad, and shewed fierce struggling up the side of a steep hill, and at the top of the hill, over which many vultures were wheeling and circling, the two oxen were found, one dead, much

mangled and partly eaten; but the other was without a mark on it, and it was no doubt the live animal that deterred the vultures from finishing his defunct companion: from the spot where the bullock had been killed, to the top of the hill, could not have been less than half a mile, but there was only the trail of one panther; a large heavy foot-mark; and at the top of the hill two more trails were found, evidently of the female and cub, or "cachorro," as he is called. What amazing strength the male must have exerted, not only to have dragged the ox he had killed up such a steep, but also the live one, struggling, as the trail shewed, against his savage leader; he must have been half paralyzed by fear.

The little dogs were then put on the scent, and merrily they went away with it, though the trail was visible on the sacate, but very difficult to follow without dogs; but at length, after about an hour's fast walking and running, the party arrived at the foot of a sandy mount, where the trail was so clear, and other signs so fresh, as to leave no doubt the depredators were close at hand. The little dogs were kicked back into the covert, and told to keep quiet; the party then ascended

the mount as fast as they could, without being blown, and on gaining the summit, after having followed close on the trail, a large male panther, a female one, and a stout cachorro, were seen about thirty yards off, rolling over and over on the sand, and cleaning themselves after their late bloody repast.

The female and cub made for the further thicket immediately, and one barrel of the double gun, and the single barrel, were both discharged at her, but she got to the jungle. Very differently did the male behave; he faced the party, and walked steadily towards them, growling furiously, until about ten yards off, when he received the contents of the remaining barrel in the neck; but, as it turned out, too near the breast to produce an instantaneous effect; for, nothing daunted, he suddenly crouched, and made a tremendous spring, preceded by a double roar, which roar I wish I could describe; it is like "Ugh! ugh!" pronounced like two small sharp claps of thunder. He sprang, as nine out of ten spring, with his forelegs well open, as if he was going to grasp something or some one, and received at least four feet of the tigrero's lance into his body. The point entered in the middle of the chest, and actually spitted

him to at least four feet depth or length, but with one blow from his powerful fore-paw, he broke the lance off near his body as easily as if it had been a carrot; but as his spring had been stopped, and the three hunters had jumped aside, they could watch him in comparative safety, as he could not turn to follow them. He at length slowly, and with difficulty, got round, but not ten yards from the hunters, who took the opportunity to load again; and he then tried to gain the shelter of a bush in the centre of the hill top; there he laid down, but very slowly, as every movement must have given him very great pain; but when he was well sheltered under the bush, he gave every now and then a very peculiar cry, which was nothing like his common roar; but as the old Indian said, was crying for help from his female, and was recalling her to his assistance, but she came not; and for a very good reason, for had she heard him, no doubt she would have flown to him. Blood was flowing from the animal's mouth and nostrils; his cry got weaker and weaker; he tried in his suffocation to rise, but could not, for his strength was gone, though vitality remained some minutes more; and at length he laid his head between his

fore-paws, and, after a few choked groans, expired: his couched form as he stiffened would have made a beautiful model for the sculptor.

Another spear having been cut and set, the little dogs were called up, and laid on the trail of the pantheress and cub, but on arriving at the edge of the thicket, she was discovered lying on her side, about two yards beyond, stone dead; she must have received a mortal wound from one of the two barrels that were fired at her, and was hit in the neck close to the head; so no wonder she did not respond to her mate's call for rescue; had she been alive, though badly wounded, she would have done so. Though the cachorro was hunted till nightfall, neither man nor dog could find a track or trace of him, and he most likely escaped by getting into some hollow tree, as there were many about.

The party then returned to relieve the poor living ox from his unpleasant situation, which could not have been done before, as there was no body to do it. He was led down to the stream, and the quantity of water he drank shewed the feverish state he must have been in from fear and exertion, and the way he kept close to the habitation of man for some time afterwards shewed

that the feeling of self-protection, if not gratitude, actuated the poor ox.

In connexion with panther hunting, I cannot help relating a story of a very vaunting Spaniard, which story I should certainly not relate, had I not been convinced that these pages could never by any possibility be seen by him, or any of his friends, to occasion him annoyance.

One evening a Spanish traveller from the coast arrived at a rather large rancho on the borders of Segovia, and asked shelter for the night from the owner, who was in charge of a herd of about two thousand cattle half wild; the greater part of them were safely ensconced in a vast natural amphitheatre of steep rocks, with only one entry, and that very difficult of access; but a few hundred were dispersed in the forest on the lower ground.

The traveller had eaten for his supper a good fat fowl, and having produced a bottle of *aquardiente*, was, with the help of a little hot water and cigars, making himself exceedingly comfortable. At another apology for a table sat two Englishmen, who had done, and were doing precisely the same thing, and were making themselves equally at their ease,

when the herdsman, having lighted his cigar, began to speak about the ravages a tiger had been committing in the woods, not far from where they were sitting. The Spaniard, whom I will call Don Miguel, and who was evidently making his *début* in the forest, and that only *in transitu*, began to declare that the tiger was a humbug, *un engano*, a mere cat; that he had seen one in a cage at Cadiz, and that it was only the want of courage and enterprise among the natives that prevented the whole race being exterminated. Several Indians had by this time joined the audience, and one old man, with that natural politeness that often characterises a savage people, remarked that, "though the Caballero had seen a cat in a cage, he might perhaps not have seen a *tigre* in the forest ready to spring, with his eyeballs like two red hot coals, and roaring like thunder; and he thought that the Señor might perhaps make a mistake between two different animals." To this the Don would by no means agree; but, excited no doubt by the subject as well as the "hot with" that he was imbibing, swore he should like to see the "tigre that would not run away from him;" and pulling out a long Toledo sword that was buckled to

his waist, invited the party to read the inscription on the blade:—those who could read did so for the benefit of the rest—"*No me tiras sin razon; no me envaynas sin honor*,"—"Do not draw me without cause; do not sheath me without honour;" which inscription seeming to have a great effect upon the audience, the Don gave himself a few thumps upon the breast, and remarked he was a true Spaniard and a descendant of the conquerors of the whole world; which was tacitly agreed to by all parties; the latter assertion being not worth while refuting in a wild forest.

The head herdsman made him a very quiet remark, that the tiger had that evening killed a calf within a mile of the rancho; and, though he had been driven away, no doubt he would be at the same spot the next morning, and that it was close to the path he intended to travel; upon which the Spaniard pronounced the tiger "a doomed animal," "*un condenado*."

Very early the next morning the same parties had to follow the same route for three or four miles before they separated. Accompanied by the herdsman and two more Indians, they arrived at an opening of the wood

that looked like a broad avenue, but covered with short wild indigo. The herdsman had before pointed out a flock of hovering vultures; and, looking down this avenue, shewed the party, who were hid from view, the panther tearing away at the calf, but with his tail turned towards the horsemen, and very quietly told Don Miguel that now was his time, and hoped he would dispatch the enemy.

To do the Don justice, he dismounted, drew his long sword, and walked towards the panther, who was about one hundred and fifty yards off, the remainder of the party sitting quietly on horseback, looking on, but quite concealed. After having walked about half the distance, he stopped, brandishing his sword, and bawled out to the beast, "*Ah! tigre! tigre! Afuera! Afuera!*"—"Be off! be off!" The panther only jumped over the calf, so as to face the Spaniard, and began growling so that the party could plainly hear it. The Don finding it of no use to remain where he was, advanced a little further, and again flourishing his *toledo*, began to adjure him in the most expressive terms to be off, adding a great quantity of those sayings in which the Spanish language is so fertile, but

which scarcely bear being transcribed: but it seemed that at last the panther's patience was fairly exhausted, for seeing only one man before him, he gave a sharp roar, and went right at the Don in a loose disjointed sort of a canter, something like a calf's gallop: when he was about thirty yards from him, whether the Spaniard found out that a *tigre* was quite another affair from the cat in the cage at Cadiz, or whether a sudden panic seized him, which may happen to anybody, the sword dropped from his paralyzed hand, and at the same time he gave such a dreadful piercing shriek, that the panther, either from the effect of the fearful cry, or from seeing the whole party galloping as hard as possible to save the poor man, turned tail and was soon out of sight in the covert.

Luckily, in the Don's saddlebags, there was the remainder of the bottle he had regaled himself with the night before; but it was a long time before he could speak, or in fact do anything but take short pulls at the bottle. The parties separated about two miles further on, but not one word was mentioned about the tiger; there was a hearty laugh after parting, but not before, though it was very difficult to restrain.

Before leaving the subject of panthers, I must relate a very curious accident that happened to an old tigrero, about a year before I left the country. During some of my wanderings, I happened to arrive at a cleared piece of ground, where there was a rancho built, and went to it to rest during the midday heat. I found the owner of it an old man, but disfigured in the most frightful way possible to conceive ; he had little or no flesh on one side of his head and face, and his right shoulder and side were also dreadfully torn ; the wounds were all healed, but frightful to look at. I asked one of his sons to get his horse and accompany me when I started, as I had never been in that part of the forest before, and was alone. As we rode together he told me the reason of his father's misfortune.

" My father," he said, " was a tigrero, and had killed so many tigres, that he had got a good number of cattle, and we lived very comfortably ; but the " peste" (murrain), got among them and destroyed them all, but one cow and her calf ; so we collected our horses and mules and resolved to seek another " localidad." We selected this spot, and having cleared away the ground, built our

rancho, and turned out our horses and mules, together with the cow and calf, into the forest. We had scarcely been a week settled, when my father happened to be returning from a maize field he was fencing not far off, and on arriving at the clearing saw a tigre spring at his only remaining calf; he had no arms with him, which was a very rare thing for him; but he ran to the panther, who did not see him, and seized it by the tail and actually pulled it off the calf, calling out loudly for his three sons to bring their spears. We all ran out directly, but my poor father who was pulling backwards, tripped over the trunk of a tree and in a second the panther was over him tearing great strips of flesh from him with his claws. We killed the tiger and pulled him off our father, who was to all appearance dead; he recovered at last, but will always be terrible to look at.

The next chapter will contain some remarks on the puma lion and tiger cats.

Note.—Every man who kills a "tigre" is entitled to a cow, or six dollars.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PUMA.—PERILOUS ESCAPE.—THE TIGER-CAT.—CAPTURE.

THE Puma, or, as he is called in Central and South America, the Leon, is a far less dangerous adversary than the panther; he is smaller and not near so bold, even when hard pressed; indeed, when pressed, he still almost always tries to escape, which the panther never does when once he is at bay, and that is the reason that for one leon that is killed in the course of a year, at least a dozen panthers are destroyed. There is one peculiarity, however, in their habits that distinguishes them very remarkably:—the panther, as remarked before, never follows the footsteps of man; if he meets him by chance he will fight or escape, but he never pursues him; but the puma will, and almost always does, follow the trail of man, especially near sunset; should the man stop, the puma will stop: should the man advance towards him, he will retire; but when the traveller continues his journey he will hang on to his foot-

steps, perhaps looking forwards to a chance during the night; and a chance he does sometimes get by following some weary foot traveller and catching him asleep.

An accident of this kind occurred very near my ranchos to a sort of government messenger called a "Proprio," who had been sent by the *soi-disant* Government of Nicaragua to the equally estimable Government of Guatimala, and, wishing to travel on neutral ground, took his way by the south of Segovia.

He had called at the ranchos, and I had offered him food and shelter for the night, as he had travelled on foot a very great distance that day; but, after taking some refreshment he started, against our advice, a little before sunset, hoping to reach a cottage about ten or twelve miles off; but he never did, for he was found next day about eight miles on his road dead and partly eaten. We concluded that he had been very tired, and, overtaken by the pitchy darkness of the forest, had lain down to sleep close by the trail; also that he had been followed by a puma, who had tracked him and caught him asleep. The trail shewed it had been a leon, and not a panther, that had done the deed, for there was, for upwards of a mile, the trail of the

puma's foot, with the small peculiarity that distinguishes it from the panther's, and already mentioned, *viz.*, the throwing behind a little dirt or sand after the print of the ball of the foot, which the panther does not do, but leaves a clean trail.

I believe that the African lion possesses the same peculiarity of tracking the human footstep, though perhaps without any immediate purpose of attacking the man, and I have also been told that a careful observer will find the same dust thrown back in the trail as the puma one.

It is impossible to obviate the use of the personal pronoun on all occasions, however desirable, and more especially when the relator is describing what only happened to himself; so, without any further excuse, I proceed to tell an anecdote of a puma:—I had a horse so perfectly broken to firing from his back, that in a partly open country I always used him for all sorts of shooting, instead of going on foot. Looking after deer one day, I crossed a very broad but then shallow river, and ascending the other bank, met two little children, of about five years of age, carrying between them an earthen pot to fetch water from the river. Knowing that

there was only a single hut about half a mile off, and no other for many miles, I stopped them, and asked them where they came from, and who sent them. They replied they came from the said rancho, and that their aunt had sent them for water. Passing on, and thinking how negligent it was to send such mere infants through such a wild forest, where even a wild cuyote or a tiger-cat might have destroyed them, I determined to go to the hut and acquaint their father with it, for I knew, as a woodsman, he would be aware of the danger, which the aunt was not, and I had a regard for the man; but scarcely had I made up my mind when my horse came to a sudden stop, as he always did on viewing a stag or any large game. I looked towards the spot where his ears were pointed to, but was certain, from his low snorting and hard breathing, it was not a stag; but it turned out to be a very large puma-lion laying upon a great branch some twelve feet from the ground, that actually spread over the path these two children had passed by. My horse was so steady that I almost used to believe that he held his breath when he heard the click of the rifle-lock, and the *leon* was knocked off the branch, but where he was

hit I could not exactly tell, as he made for the underwood close at hand. As the beast had taken the direction of the river I got alarmed about the children, and hesitated whether to ride to the hut for the man's dogs or back to the river, in case the wounded beast had taken his way towards the children; but, deciding on the last, went as fast as I could to the river, and pulling the two children on to the saddle, took them to the hut, where the Indian had already arrived, alarmed by the report of the rifle. The children were gladly received, and the father, with his dogs, was on the trail in a few minutes; the dogs acknowledged the scent directly; but no long pursuit was required, as the big brute lay dead about a hundred yards inside the covert. He was shot in the best spot, that is to say in the neck, a few inches below the head. The children must have had a narrow escape, for whether the puma was on the branch when they passed or not it is impossible to say, but he would have been pretty sure to be there on their return. He was a filthy, aged brute, with teeth as rounded and blunted as a finger; he was scabby and mangy all over, but of a large size; I was, however, surprised to see his

long claws so sharp. He was pulled to the path side, and in a few hours the vultures had cleaned his bones most thoroughly. A few days after I put his bones into some form, and they remained on the path side for many days, until the cuyotes found them and made *no bones* of them.

Though I heard the puma lion crying almost every night in the forest close to my rancho, and though the good dogs I had were continually rushing into the covert after them, this above-mentioned one was the only one I ever shot in that country. Their cry is not like the roar of the true lion, or the roar of the panther; it is what a person might conceive to issue from an enormously overgrown tom cat, with several extra pairs of lungs. I had no means of measuring the old one I shot; he was about the height of a large mastiff, but a great deal longer in the body.

A puma will not attack a full-grown bull or cow, unless he happens to catch one bogged in a *pantano*, or slough, and then he does the same as the condors of Chili do, who will very soon despatch a bull in a deep bog, that prevents resistance: he is very mischievous amongst the calves, and even two-year-old cattle. A stag has not the remotest chance

with him, and there are few horses he cannot master, if he gets a jump on their back from the branch of a tree; but, in general, the Central American puma is a larger and more savage breed than I have seen in Chili or other American countries.

There is a great variety of smaller tiger-cats that do much mischief to the poultry and tame birds belonging to the inhabitants of the woods; small when compared to the panther, they are large and dangerous compared with the cat, and also are great enemies to deer, both young and old.

A very large tiger-cat had a haunt near the rancho of a red friend, and vain were the endeavours to kill him. He had been constantly seen, tracked, hunted, and laid watch for, but all to no purpose; at last we resolved to build a trap for him, which was done in the following manner:—strong sticks were driven into the ground, so as to form an oblong quadrangle of about six feet by three, the sticks being placed rather close together and a roof made of the same. One of the small ends was left open, with a door suspended over the entry in such a way that, upon any animal seizing the bait, which was a live cock, the door would fall, and, closing the

entrance, the animal would find itself a prisoner ; the said door's falling to be announced by the ringing of a small bell, lent by me for the occasion, and which was to arouse us all.

The poor cock began to crow, as usual in warm climates, at midnight, and ten minutes had hardly elapsed before the bell was heard, and we all got up and ran towards the trap to behold the prisoner, but, on arriving at the cage, it was empty ; the door had fallen, the bell had rung, but was then silent, and the only noise heard was the scream of the poor cock as he was carried away into the woods.

The next morning the trap was altered, the slides of the door taken more care with, the spring better set, and, towards nightfall, another cock was tied up to the further end of the cage. About midnight the cock crew, and a short time after the bell rang, and continued to do so very violently, giving pretty good assurance that the cage was tenanted by something more than a cock. Running out with our split pine torches, the cage was soon found to be occupied by a very large specimen of the tiger-cat kind. When the lights came near him, he dashed at the bearers of them with great fury, shaking and trying to break down the bars, but they were too

strongly rooted in and secured; and at last a pistol-shot put an end to his violence. I am glad to say the second cock was scarcely touched. A more beautiful animal than this cat appeared on the following morning it would be impossible to see; the belly and ground was a pale yellow, the back almost black, with a succession of black spots in regular stripes from the back to the belly, but the spots diminishing most beautifully and regularly as they approached the stomach.

After he was skinned, the flesh looked so very white that I had a piece of his back cut into thin slices and broiled over the wood-ashes, but it was so tough that it was impossible to masticate the smallest mouthful. The dogs refused it, but the vultures finished the carcase in a very short time. This cat was about the bulk of a moderate-sized pointer dog.

CHAPTER X.

WHY A DOG BARKS.—THE DEER AND THE CUYOTES.—CUYOTE SIEGE.—ANECDOTE.—DROWSINESS CURED.

THE origin of the "cuyote," or wild dog, in Central America is not known, and never will be: they are often called wolves, but they are not wolves, and yet they are very different in their habits from dogs. The cuyote cannot bark, but his howl resembles that of a dog baying the moon, and also very much the cry that is often heard from dogs in a barrack yard when they hear the sound of a bugle. They seem to be of the large Cuba bloodhound breed that were at one time much used for hunting down the natives; I have had them very young, and brought them up with dogs who would face anything, and yet they always proved dunghill when anything in the fighting line was going on. They were afraid of facing the meanest depredatory animal, yet they were always carrying on a cunning stealthy war against the poultry and tame animals they ought to have defended;

and I have been obliged to shoot them all before they were nine months old, though they experienced the kindest treatment and had plenty to eat, for they never could be induced to accompany their master in his wanderings, when they might have been on short commons. Many persons have tried to reclaim the cuyote to the second and third generation, and all have failed as well as myself.

A remark made by an old Indian on the subject struck me very much. "Why won't these cuyotes bark like other dogs?" I said to him, pointing to one I was trying to reclaim; "and why do they only howl, and the pups grunt?" His answer was, "Now, look at that dog—he cannot bark, and never will; for he is of a cuyote breed, and won't learn." —"Not learn!" said I, "what do you mean?" —"No," he replied, "not learn; for, if he was of an honest breed, he would bark, to try and imitate his master, or at all events the other dogs: but all barking proceeds from dogs imitating their master's shouts."—"The master shouts to frighten *away* cattle from his maize-ground—the dog barks directly; the master shouts to drive *in* his cattle to the corral, and the dog barks also; in short,

the dog imitates his master when he barks: he tries to speak, but cannot."—"I live," he continued, "in a place surrounded by great numbers of cuyotes, but I never keep any of my puppies that do not bark at an early age."

The cuyote is a formidable adversary, and, in a close encounter, there would be little to choose between him and a large wolf; I have seen a good many during my lifetime, of both, and I think that the cuyote is much the heavier and more massive, but, as for courage, both are arrant cowards unless hard pressed. He is generally of a reddish or yellowish colour, and stands about as high as a large Newfoundland dog, but with short hair; and though the ears are naturally rather pendant, they can be pricked forward until only the tips hang down. I have often seen a cuyote on a savannah standing up on his hind legs for a few seconds to obtain a good view of all around, and then the ears look long and pointed.

A pack of cuyotes will hunt as regularly as a pack of hounds, and, should they throw up the scent, make casts in every direction: they never gallop when they hunt, but, like the wolf, run in a long swinging trot, and trust to time and perseverance. It is truly

pitiable to see a poor stag, with his tongue swollen and lolling out of his mouth, take to water, cross and recross the rivers, and shape his course up and down the stream to destroy his scent and make the pack throw up. It is of little use; the gaunt cuyotes appear shortly on their long trot, and, on arriving at the river, some take one side and some the other, some go up stream, and others down; and the successful party acquaints the remainder of the scent being recovered by a peculiar howl. It would be no use for the hunter to shoot the stag if he passed close even, especially if he had been long hunted, as the flesh would, from being so heated, in that climate turn putrid in two or three hours. But it is possible sometimes to save the poor beast's life; for, except the first time, when, not being aware the deer was hunted he got a ball from me, I have always let him pass, and, hiding myself near the trail, given a couple of shots to the leading cuyotes, which is quite enough to make the remainder turn tail and give up the pursuit. If the poor stag has been long on foot, he seldom benefits by his escape; he makes to the nearest stream, and a circling flight of vultures soon gives notice that the struggle for life has been

too long and severe, and he has died by the water's side.

A strange story has been frequently told me by Indians at different times, and in far apart places, relating to the habits of the cuyote. The different accounts agreed in every material point, and only varied as the localities would; and I relate one of them as I heard it from an old Indian; but first must remark that a great enmity exists between the cuyote and the panther, and whenever the latter falls in with a pack of the former it generally ends by his death. A pack of cuyotes will not take up the trail of a panther they may cross and follow it up, but they will do so when seriously offended by any act of the panther; for instance, should the spotted beast find himself suddenly in the midst of a number of cuyotes, he would very likely knock two or three of them over with his tremendous paw-blows, and escape with all speed; these wild dogs close on his trail. The panther gets tired first, and then takes refuge on some bough of a tree eight or ten feet from the ground: the dogs soon discover him, but as he is not to be reached, a siege or blockade, in form, is established, and is always successful, unless the pack is alarmed

by the approach of man:—the following is nearly in the words of the narrator:—

"The tigre was tree'd, Don Jorge, and the cuyotes were about fifty in number, and they kept continually walking round and round the tree where the panther was sitting, uttering now and then a fierce growl. I saw this in the forenoon," said the Indian, "from a high tree which I had climbed up in search of honey; and towards sunset I mounted the same tree, and the tigre was still there, with the cuyotes under the tree; but only about half the number, as the others had most likely gone in search of food, but at sunset they returned and took the others' places, who then took their departure. I went to my rancho, and at sunrise was again at my post, for I was very curious to see how it would all terminate: the tigre and the cuyotes were still there, but the smell even where I was was horrible; and if I could smell it so strong, what must the tigre have done, who was only a few feet above it; at last he took a leap into the middle of the pack, and though he killed and disabled a few, he was soon pulled to pieces."

I cannot vouch for the truth of this strange story of a siege, but have often heard it

corroborated; and I have no doubt the panther was worn out, and very much disgusted.

The wild dog is very subject to hydrophobia, and when this frightful malady makes its appearance in a pack there is no telling to what disasters it may lead. A mad cuyote loses all dread of man or tame dogs, seeks dwelling places, enters villages, and flies at everything he sees: many instances annually occur in villages amidst the woods of cuyotes entering them both by day and night, and committing great ravages, as all the tame dogs they bite must be destroyed, and few months elapse without some rumours of deaths of human beings occasioned by their bite.

They are sometimes bold enough, of which I will give an instance:—One fine moonlight night I started on a journey to avoid the heat of the sun, an Indian guide riding a few yards in front of me; having passed through a dense forest, we emerged into a large savannah, which seemed to be pretty well stocked with wild beasts, if we might judge from the howling in every direction. I had kept my eye upon a very large cuyote that had followed us some hundred yards,

partly hid by some low, straggling bushes that fringed the path, but when these bushes were passed he came coolly round the last one, and walked deliberately between the two horses, and seemed as if he was deciding which of the Indian's naked legs he would choose. Pulling out a holster pistol, I sent a ball through his body that knocked him over on the side of the path, but though he was not quite dead, he neither howled nor made any noise. The report of the pistol put a very sudden but short stop to the discordant concert in the savannah.

I had frequently taken journeys through parts of the forest with a very amiable and enterprising English gentleman. He was one of the most indefatigable and also abstemious travellers I ever met with: no bed was too hard for him, no food too coarse, and no drink too poor for him; but he had one peculiarity that, as soon as ten o'clock at night arrived, no earthly power could keep him awake, and he could not keep his saddle without a short sleep: he did not require more than two or three hours' repose, and would then be quite ready for any hardship.

One night, travelling with him and an Indian servant, the said hour of ten arrived,

when he said he could go no further, for in another minute or two he should tumble out of his saddle, and that he only wanted a few minutes' sleep, after which he would be ready for the rest of the night. Picking out the clearest spot we could find at hand in the forest, we dismounted, and my friend, throwing his pillions, or sheep-skins on the ground, was fast asleep before we had even decided what to do with the horses, so we left him where he was, and the Indian and I led the three horses to the nearest spot where they could pick up a little food, and having secured them with our lassos, returned to the sleeper, carrying our own pillions and my pistols. On arriving at the place where he was lying, we found him in rather a perilous position, as at least a dozen cuyotes were round him, with their noses sniffing and smelling at him, but *he* perfectly unconscious of their close vicinity: we both flung our sheep-skins right in the middle of the group, which startled them, as well as my sleeping friend, who, jumping up, was rather surprised at finding himself in such company. It was well we arrived when we did, for they seemed to be on the point of pitching into him, and I was afraid of making use of my

pistols, for they were so close to him. However, away they went, and my friend's drowsiness was very effectually cured; so, rebridling our horses, we travelled all night, and found ourselves early the next morning at breakfast in his well known hospitable house.

CHAPTER XI.

A DYING MONKEY.—MONKEY GAMBOLS.—THE RACOON.—THE OPOSSUM.—PHENOMENA.—ELEGANT BIRDS.—THE PARTRIDGE.—BIRD-NOTES.

THERE is no great variety of monkeys in Central America, but in the forest those few varieties abound. In general they are a very wandering race, for a troop of monkeys may arrive at a spot, stay a few days and depart, nobody knowing from whence they came or where they are gone to; and in this respect they very much resemble the racoon. Very often in my travels I have had the luck to take the noon of day rest under a clump of trees by a stream's side, with a large troop of monkeys over my head;—how different are their playful ways, their leaps and antics, assisted so much by their prehensile tails, from the solemn buffoonery of the Gibraltar tailless ape! I have never but once fired at a monkey and would never do it again, except at a troop of plunderers,—and then a good example is not lost on their little community; wantonly shooting them is cruel and useless; but

let us always except from the list of the cruel those who are making collections of skins for stuffing; those who have fruit-grounds, and wish to keep them far away; and above all, those who are hungry, and like a tender roasted monkey, which, setting prejudice aside, is as good a dish as it is possible to eat. But if a sportsman for mere sport's sake could see, as I have seen, a monkey with a rifle-ball through him, laying on his back on the ground, putting his hand upon the wound, and then raising the hand to the glazing eye to look at the blood, together with the anguish plainly shewn by the almost human distortions of the face, he would never fire at one a second time, or, if he did, his heart must be of strange stuff and in a strange place.

The Baron von Humbolt, I believe, speaks of a large monkey which congregates in large groups on the same tree, and utters most horrible groans and unearthly cries. This must be the same monkey that inhabits the forests surrounding the great lake of Nicaragua, and is an exception in his habits to the wandering disposition of all the other species.

I have never met with this kind in any other place than the above-mentioned forests,

where they seem stationary; but, contrary to the Baron's account, I have never seen more than one, or at the most two, on the same tree. They generally appear to choose trees about a hundred yards apart, and there the great red bearded monkey sits making, what seemed to me a booming noise, but very horrible and without much variation. The cry is responded to by others, and taken up again by those more distant, and the forest resounds and echoes with the most unearthly sounds. The first time I passed through a forest peopled, or tenanted, by this monkey, a young horse that I was riding got so frightened that he was trying to dash into the underwood in every direction, and it was only the enormous spurs and sharp bit of Chili that could persuade him to keep the path.

Some persons call this monkey "Mono Colorado," or red monkey, and others by a name I forget; but I asked a woodsman one day what the Indians called it, and he said "Jibbon." Now, can that name be the same as Gibbon, which, I believe, is that of a monkey in the old world?

All the other species of monkey have no fixed residence; they wander from tree to tree; from river to river; from forest to

forest; and from province to province: they are seen one day in one place and the next miles off; but they always travel by night.

There is no prettier sight than to see and watch the gambols of a large troop of monkeys playing in the enormous trees that grow near the rivers; and many a day while resting my horse and myself during the fierce noon sun (being scarcely fifteen degrees from the line), laid on my back in the shade, after the mid-day meal, and lighting a cigar, I have much enjoyed their amusing pranks: every movement they make in the wild state is amusing; their extraordinary bounds from branch to branch, sometimes catching with their hands or feet, and sometimes with the tail. I never molested them except on the occasion alluded to, and with any party I had any influence over, used it to save them: for I am sure, after witnessing the gambols of these interesting animals for an hour or two, I resaddled my horse and rode off with a lighter heart than before.

The affection they shew for their young is very remarkable, and I once saw an instance of it I shall never forget:—A person with me wishing to secure a young monkey alive, fired at the mother in whose arms it was, thinking

she would fall and the baby be unhurt;* however, the ball only broke her arm, when she shifted her child to the other arm, and tried to climb but could not. She then placed the little one on her back, and, with the assistance of another monkey, who was also wounded, raised herself from branch to branch of the surrounding trees and, I was very glad to see, escaped.

However affectionate they may be one to another, they are treacherous beasts in general; a great many called tame, will, on no provocation, bite very severely. I believe there are many officers, and civilians also, who remember old "Bob," the great ape chained up in the forty-third barrack-yard at Gibraltar; though petted and never teazed, he would often bite the hand that fed him. Eheu! poor Bob! he was bit in the lip by a small dog, and died forty hours afterwards of hydrophobia: — there are many who still remember his dreadful fits and sufferings.

The racoon is called by the Indians "Pisote," and so much do some of his habits re-

* The easiest way to procure a young monkey is to look out for a she monkey, with a young one in her arms; if she falls down she is generally between the ground and the young one, who is seldom hurt.

semble those of monkeys, that the first troop of racoons I fell in with I took to be monkeys until near enough to make out the difference. The animal is too well known to require description, but a short notice of their wild habits may perhaps be acceptable. They wander about the country in troops of fifty or more, and, like the monkeys, are seldom seen many days near the same spot; they are often seen playing on the ground, but much more often in the trees; and as they are much used in some parts as food, and I had not the same compunction at shooting them as the monkey, had many opportunities of examining them both before and after cooking. There are two sorts of racoon, yet they are precisely the same species; there are those that go about in troops, which are generally lean and dry, and those that are found by themselves, now and then, and are really excellent eating; but any roasted racoon is an excellent substitute for going to sleep empty.

From one cause or another, which I could never discover, a racoon separates himself from the troop and turns hermit, and thus gains the name given him "Pisote solo." I had long been looking out for a "solitary racoon;" but though I had met hundreds and

hundreds in troops, I had never been able to find a true hermit; for a racoon separated from his troop *by accident* is not a "Pisote solo." But one day, having just cleaned a double-barrelled smooth bore, and loaded it carefully with ball, inside my rancho, an Indian, who was at work also inside the rancho mending a lasso, listened a short time and whispered "Pisote solo." Looking outside I saw a fat lazy racoon climbing leisurely up a small tree left in the middle of the clearing. Now here was an animal that I had been some months in search of, actually walking into the larder. Sending a bullet through him, he came out of the tree much faster than he went up it, and he went away very slowly, leaving such a bloody trail behind him, as plainly to shew it would be his last. Two good dogs were upon him in a few seconds, and brought him back, but they also brought back on their own sides a few scratches, or rather gashes, that required sewing up. The Indians say, only one dog should be run at a racoon. Their bite is very severe, something like a badger's, but their principal defence lies in the power, length, and sharpness of the claws, and they often make short work

with a dog by cutting the veins of the throat with them.

This was a true solitary racoon; he must have abjured the gambols of the troop, and sedulously taken to a hermit's employment, *viz.*, eating, drinking, sleeping, and getting fat. There had been no racoons near the place for weeks, and he was far heavier than his livelier brethren; also, when the skin was off, the fat was half an inch deep on his back, and half of him roasted the same day proved a most excellent feast for several persons: the weather would not allow of its being hung up for a few days, which no doubt would have improved it. The meat was like excellent roe venison with plenty of fat, which that sort of venison does not possess.

Though I shot many others by themselves subsequently, yet I am sure the above was the only true "solitary racoon" that I saw within range of my gun, and that the others had only been separated from their companions by accident.

The sight of the first opossum I ever killed strongly incited me to make myself acquainted with the natural history of this strange marsupial animal; but with all my trouble I could obtain no more information

than I previously possessed from books. I was trying to breed some of the magnificent wild turkeys, and had set a hen in my own rancho upon two of the large turkey eggs. I was awakened in the night by the cries of the hen who had been pulled out of her nest and carried bodily off. Thinking it was a large snake, I jumped out of my hammock, and picking up my machete, ran out of the rancho, and by the clear moonlight saw the hen making her way to the woods at a great pace, but evidently *nolens volens*, for she was making a great fuss about it, but there was no appearance of a snake. Having overtaken her, I found her abduction was performed by a long pole-cat looking animal, who never saw me, so eager was he on his prey, and so I dispatched him with a slash on his head; and sticking the machete through his neck, carried him back, and threw him down near the rancho, thinking he was only a specimen of the larger weasel kind; there was not much the matter with the hen, who resumed her seat on the eggs. The next morning, about sunrise, a servant came up to where I was washing, and asked me to go out and look at the beast I had killed. I went out and saw an animal of about the size of a large pole-

cat, with the same small head and thick neck; the colour was a yellowish white, but my attention was directed to a pouch under the belly, where there were five young ones, still alive. They were each hanging by the mouth to a separate translucid tegument, through which the blood might be easily seen flowing to and from the young. I tried to separate them, but found they were fixtures, and they were still moving their limbs, and the blood was still circulating several hours after sunrise, when the red ant, having found them out, the old one was thrown into the stream: how much longer they might have remained alive it would be difficult to say. The Indians told me that the young grow in the pouch, and may be found, from the size and shape of a peppercorn, until fully formed and ripe to drop off, which the above would have done in a few days. After birth the young make the pouch their hiding place in case of alarm.

I have killed them since, with the young in the pouch, from the size of a pea until nearly fully formed, but never have been able to find out the exact time of their appearance in the pouch. Accident alone will reveal it; and by accident I mean killing one at the moment the transition takes place.

There is a fair quantity of rabbits in the forest, especially near the mountains, but they are preyed upon by all classes of carniverous animals, and also by the larger sort of snakes; but there is a larger sort of animal, looking half pig and half rabbit, which is very superior eating; I believe it answers to the animal known as the "agouti." The flesh is white, and makes an excellent dish in the woods, as its own fat assists the cooking.

Before passing to perhaps the more amusing subjects of alligators and snakes, I wish to conclude this chapter with a few remarks on some of the principal birds of the forest, and will commence with the wild turkey.

There are two species of wild turkey in Central America, differing widely from each other, both in appearance, and value as an article of food. The commonest is the almost black turkey, with a grey spotted breast and red crest; their form is elegant, and their movements resemble the peahen; they are abundant near rivers or water, and it is not difficult to bag five or six in a day's shooting; but the flesh is dark and rather coarse when roasted, but makes splendid soup, very like hare soup, and slices cut raw from the breast

and fried in a pan, are capital. They are fond of living in very high trees on the banks of rivers and streams, and do not shun much the ranchos built in the forest.

The other, and much rarer, is a most magnificent bird, and gains the greatest perfection at the foot of the mountains. The male bird is splendidly plumed in white and metallic lustred greenish black, with a superb orange-coloured crest on his head. The female is very different in appearance, and also possesses great beauty, but of another class; the colour of her plumage is more a mahogany, but variegated on the breast and neck like a pheasant, and she has a fine black comb, or rather crest. They are as good to eat as beautiful to look at, but are very difficult to get near to, as they are extremely shy, and avoid human habitations; but when they are caught young, or hatched under a hen, they soon become so tame as to be quite troublesome. Passing one day under a clumpy, thick tree, I was startled by a great commotion in the branches, when out flew a fine cock turkey, which I knocked over with one barrel; the report sent out a hen bird, which shared the same fate from the other barrel; thinking there might be some

young ones, I climbed up the tree, and found a nest with two large eggs in it: the nest was very clumsily made, but strongly secured by being placed in the fork of several diverging branches; the eggs were much larger than those of the common turkey. I took them home and put them under a hen that wanted to sit, and they almost wore her patience out, by sitting so much longer on them than is required on hen's eggs; not to mention her being run away with one night by an opossum; but her patience was at length rewarded by the appearance of two fine turkeys.

These birds were never touched by our own dogs or by those belonging to Indians accustomed to call at the ranchos; but a stranger arrived one day, and his strange dog made a dash at them and killed them both, though they were in the midst of poultry he did not touch; however, our dogs very nearly pulled him to pieces for his pains; but it was vexing to lose them in such a way, as no doubt the pair would have bred.

I made the same remark of this bird as upon deer, that they are more easily met with during heavy, stormy weather than in fine weather. One week a party were de-

tained by the swollen river for a few days, and came up at last to the ranchos for shelter and food, and a miserable, starved set of mortals they looked. I had no food to give them, but got my horse and gun and started out in the heavy rain, and came back within an hour with a fine stag and two of these fine birds.

The partridge is abundant, but never leaves the forest, and is not seen on the savannah. It is unlike any other partridge I have seen in America, but very far better eating; the only time they can be easily killed is for about two months after the burning of the forest underwood, at which time only can they be discovered on the ground; and if the hunter wants partridge for dinner he must condescend to shoot them *there*, for they will not rise, and if they did, could not be shot in such a cover. Snakes, cuyotes, foxes, and tiger-cats are their only enemy, for an Indian would never waste a charge of powder and shot on so small a bird.

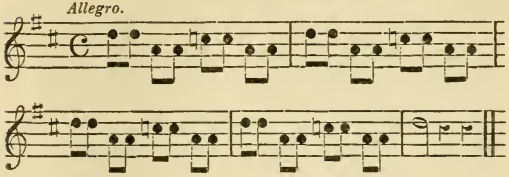
There is also a wild, moor-looking fowl found in some of the woods, about the size of a black-cock, but slighter made, colour brown, with a handsome black tuft on the head: it is a game-looking bird, and very well flavoured.

There are also a great many species of birds in the forest with very beautiful plumage, but very disagreeable voices, such as the red makaw, parrots, parroquets, little love-birds. The variety of the parrot tribe is very great, from the large green parrot to the most diminutive. They are all of the green species, and the young of the large are much better to eat than young pigeons. The smaller ones, roasted like larks or fried in a pan, are also very good, but it seems cannibalish to eat an animal who can learn to speak English.

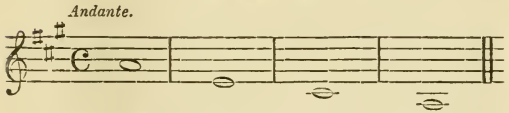
The traveller, passing from the "tierra caliente," or low, hot plains, to the "tierra fria," or upper table-lands, both sees and hears many strange birds; but the plumage is almost invariably finer than the voice. One bird, however, I heard a few times, had such a remarkable song that I learnt it by whistling, and on returning home took the notes from a guitar, and wrote them down; I also wrote down the curious call of another bird, that sounded exactly like the lower octave of a clarionet, running down the scale from the key-note to the third, fifth, and octave, slow but rich and powerful. I never could see one of these birds, though I have

often searched for them; the tone of the latter was superb in his four notes, and the former so correct in his semitones that I am induced to give them as I learnt them: I call the latter Clarionet-bird, and I hope I have not usurped a name already given to some other bird.

FIRST MENTIONED BIRD.



CLARIONET-BIRD.



There are likewise a few ducks to be met with, and among others the large muscovy duck, which is a very fine bird, but in general they are rare, and are only met with on broad streams, where the water is very shallow, on account of the alligator. Central America is the only country I have ever been in where I have never seen a snipe.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ALLIGATOR.—THE CURSE OF NET-FISHING.—AN ALLIGATOR NETTED.—LASSOING AN ALLIGATOR.—A DOG AND AN ALLIGATOR.—ALLIGATOR EGGS.

THE alligator of Central America is distinguished from the crocodile of the East by outward appearance; but they agree, I believe, in their habits. One distinction is, the formation of the jaws, which are longer, thinner, and narrower in the alligator than in the crocodile, though there is not much to choose in the length and sharpness of their teeth. Another distinction is the comparative softness of the alligator's skin about the throat and lower sides of the neck; it yields to the thrust of a spear or sword, and is about the consistence of thick buck-skin, the jugular vein running on both sides close beneath it.

The rivers that during the rainy season are generally violent, impassable torrents, subside during the remaining part of the year into rushing, but shallow streams; yet, according to the nature of the river's bed, deep pools are met with at shorter or longer intervals.

The intervals between the pools are generally from a quarter of a mile to one mile, rarely more and often less. Every deep pool is as sure to have an alligator for its tenant as a fresh-spun web to contain a spider. And now, I confess feeling it more dangerous to attack the subject of alligators in print than I have ever found it to be with the live animal, for they are very easily destroyed, unless they are very large, and in that case are seldom met with, unless in the lakes and largest rivers.

Few persons forget how Mr. Warterton was handled by critics for the graphic account he gave of his ride upon an alligator; for my part, I believe his description to be perfectly correct, and my belief does not only rest upon the high character given him by all who have the pleasure of knowing the gentleman, but also on the knowledge of the animal itself, acquired by a long residence near its haunts. The only possible danger Mr. Warterton could have been in, was from a blow of the tail; but the beast was doubtless too much occupied with the anchor in his mouth to use that powerful limb. In the water, the alligator almost always stuns any large animal swimming, by a heavy blow of his tail, and then seizing his prey, drags it down to the bottom;

but the buoyancy of the water helps him to turn and use that limb in a way he cannot do on shore.

Again, I have never known or heard of an alligator biting any man, even in self-defence, unless with the object of food, and when he has the man at disadvantage, such as when swimming, when he drags him to the bottom and drowns him ; his teeth also are not made for any bite, such as severing an arm or leg, like those of the shark, but are well adapted for holding his prey fast and tearing it in pieces with the aid of his claws. Another peculiarity of the alligator, which reminds one how the ostrich is said, when hunted, to thrust his head into the sand, thinking that seeing nothing he is himself unseen ; and that is, when he takes to water ; let it only cover him, and he be at the bottom, he thinks himself as secure as if he had twenty feet of water over him.

These few remarks on the habits of the alligator, are not given as a prelude to any individual risks run, during a long residence in the woods, for of all wild animals, killing them is the safest sport ; but as one to a few anecdotes illustrating the habits of the undoubted lord of the river.

A party of Indians told me one day that they had got a fishing-net from some Segovian travellers in exchange for some provisions, and an arrangement was made to go and drag some of the large pools in the Rio Grande (great river). The party consisted of six or seven Indians, naked, with the exception of an apology for drawers; three of them were armed with axes; light heads on long handles; the others carried the universal weapon, the machete, and I was the only one on horseback with the lasso, without which I never got into the saddle.

On arriving at the nearest pool, it was decided to try it first, and then proceed up the river, taking the pools in succession, which were here about a quarter of a mile apart. Now, the great curse of net-fishing, in these rivers, is the alligator, who, if he gets enclosed in a net, either breaks his way out and destroys the net, or, as he generally does, by keeping perfectly still, renders it necessary to get him out of the net. The breaking through was easy enough to understand, but it was more difficult to comprehend how the other was performed, though often assured it was of common occurrence. However, the net came up easily enough from the first pool,

and the produce amounted to about twenty fish, of from one to three pounds weight, but not of any species I had seen in Europe. The second pool was drawn in the same way, though no doubt there was an alligator in each, and the party then proceeded to the next, which was larger and deeper than the former.

One bank was nearly perpendicular, but with a good passage between it and the water, which was on that side deep; the opposite bank was flat and sandy, with a very gradual deepening of the water; both above and below the pool huge boulder stones, that in the rainy season are covered with a raging torrent, allowed the net to be carried round as usual, and the two ends brought together to the sandy beach. All hands then turned to drag the net in, and the nature of the ground allowed my horse and lasso to take one of the ends, while the remainder of the party took in the other: when the bag of the net had arrived on the slope, there was a dead stop, and the men whispered "lagarto" (alligator).

Now, thought I, is the time to see the operation performed of taking him out of the net; but no man seemed to hesitate about what to do, for the nearest one to the lasso

unbuttoned it from the net, and entered coolly but slowly into the water just outside the net, peering into the clear water. He then managed to drop the noose so that the beast put its fore-leg into it, and having gently drawn it close, retired quietly out of the water. Directly he was on shore, they called to me, who was ten or twelve yards off, with the lasso rather slack, to gallop up the slope, while the axemen stood at the water's edge with their axes uplifted, and the moment his head appeared on the beach, they brained him without resistance or even struggle.

The horse pulled him on shore with scarcely an effort, and without nearly the strain that a yearling colt would have made; but if both his fore-legs had been firm on the ground and the lasso round his neck, I doubt a horse being able to have pulled him up; but with one paw lifted up in the air, he had no chance.

The net had a fair quantity of fish in it, and other pools were dragged with various success, but no more alligators were netted that day: the one killed was not large, and was about nine feet in length. In the great lake of Nicaragua and the river St. John's, and, indeed, in all the rivers that run to the

Atlantic, the alligator is much larger than on the Pacific side, that is to say, in Central America; for further south, in the Guayaquil river, they attain a monstrous size; but on the western shore they grow in the large rivers to a very great length, and when the waters are high, and travellers can scarcely get their horses across the fords, it is pitiable, the fright the poor dogs are in, as they well know their danger.*

Alluding to lassoing one of these monsters round the neck recalls an anecdote to the point.

There was an alligator, who had taken up his abode near a ford, had given a dusky acquaintance of mine a great deal of vexation, and had occasioned him much loss by pulling into the water calves, and even cattle, that came to drink. He told me that one day, being on horseback, he caught the alligator in shallow water, a good way from his accustomed pool, and having his lasso with him, but attached to the pummel of his saddle, he galloped after him, as he was making for his haunt, and lassoed him round the neck, and tried to drag him to a tree on the

* Dogs are often pulled down while swimming close alongside of their masters.

bank, but his horse was completely overpowered and brought down on his knees. He had no remedy left him but to follow the beast and try to get rid of his lasso, but it was too fast to the saddle, and he was dragged right through the pool and out at the other side. He tried to cut the lasso with his machete, but it was so blunt he could not cut through the hide-thongs, so, *nolens volens*, down stream they all went together, through pools and shallows, till he remembered he had a knife in the pocket of his sheep-skin, and after some trouble in getting at it, managed to sever his tow-rope.

"Never, Caballero," said he, "did a man take such a journey,—sometimes in the shallows,—but the bottom all large stones and rocks; then splash into deep water; then deep mud; then stones over again; and, worse than all, I knew if I had gone a very little further, there was a fall of water as high as this rancho, and I to have gone down it without having even confessed myself! No, señor, there never was, nor ever will be again,such a *paseo* (promenade)." However, my dark friend did at last circumvent his enemy, and I will continue his tale in his own words.

"For nights after, Don Jorge, I could not sleep, or, if I did for a moment, awoke, fancying going again on my *maldito* voyage down the river, sometimes soused to the bottom of a pool, and sometimes tumbling and rolling about among the big stones, until at last I took such a violent hatred to this particular alligator that I used to lie awake all night thinking how to be revenged. I used to go to the pool every morning to try and get a sight of him, and one morning I did see him; but what made me still more angry, was to see the loop of the lasso still round his neck, for all the world like a necklace: he must have gnawed off the remainder about a yard from the noose. I then went home, loaded my long Spanish gun very carefully with two balls, and, taking with me a cur of a dog, who could do nothing but yell and howl, I returned to the pool and tied the dog to a tree close to one of the alligator's paths. I then took a long string, and, making it fast to the cur's leg, hid myself behind another tree, and began to pull hard at the string, and the dog began to howl lustily. In a short time the *lagarto's* nose appeared above water, and then his eyes and head: both dog and alligator must

have seen each other pretty clearly, which made the dog howl more than ever. The beast, after looking round to see if the coast was clear, made straight for the shore, and was just creeping up the steep bank to seize the dog, when I fired my long barrel at him, not five paces distant, and sent a ball just into his eye; he was dead before you could say 'Ave Maria,' and, Don Jorge, I slept soundly that night, and gave the cur-dog a good supper."

The old fellow often repeats the tale, but the pantomimic way of relating his journey down the stream rendered it very amusing to me. The mixture of *bonhomie* and pomposity rendered him always entertaining. One day he ordered his son to mount a horse and go in search of another one I wished to purchase; he returned without him, and the alternate anger and kindness of the father diverted me much; at length, turning to me, he said, "I do not know what to call him." He would not call him an ass, mule, or lazy dog, because he would have involved himself, as the father of the animal, and that would have been too much for his dignity, but he compromised by saying, "Don Jorge, my son has eaten a he-mule for his breakfast."

Like John Gilpin—

> "When he next rides down the stream,
> May I be there to see!"

The fresh-water shark is very abundant in the lake of Nicaragua and the rivers running out of it towards the eastward; many of them are just the same as the sea-shark, and are equally ferocious, but there is one species that the Piragua men call the "tigre tiburon" or tiger-shark, that is very much spotted, and unlike any I have seen at sea.

Wherever the alligator and shark are both found, the turtle are also found in great quantities; they bury and conceal their eggs in the same way as the alligator, and often close to each other. They generally choose some dry spit of sand in the middle of the river or some very salient point, and having scooped out a hole, deposit their eggs, and cover the spot up so carefully that it is very difficult to discover them without much practice.

On discovering a nest of either kind, the first thing is to find out whether the eggs are fresh or not. If the alligator's eggs are fresh, they are taken, as the Indians eat them; but if they are not, they are always

destroyed ; but if the nest contains turtle's eggs, if fresh, they are also taken ; but if not, they are very carefully covered up again and the sand smoothed over, both of which proceedings are very considerate for Indians.

An alligator's egg is strong and nauseous, but turtle eggs are very delicate.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PYTHON.—VULTURE PERFORMANCES.—BOA CRUSHING A ROEBUCK.—FIGHT BETWEEN SNAKES.—HABITS OF THE RATTLESNAKE.—ANECDOTES OF RATTLESNAKES.—THE CORAL SNAKE.—A CORAL AND KITTEN.—THE IGUANA.

CENTRAL AMERICA actually swarms with snakes of every size and almost every description. Some very venomous species, such as the *Cobra capella* and others of the East, are unknown here, but they would be well matched by the *Campanilla* (rattlesnake), and, still more deadly, the *Coral*. The Indians consider the rattlesnake as the only viviparous one in the country, but there must be others, as there are many sorts of vipers.

The two commonest sorts are the *Bova* or boa-constrictor, and the black snake, but the boa is found much oftener than any other species. Near towns and woodlands much frequented, they are seldom found more than six or seven feet in length, and never thicker than a man's arm ; they are found of all sizes less than that, down to a few inches ; but go

a few hundred miles into the forest, and animal nature is much changed. The tiger-cat that infests the woods near towns, is still in the forest, but the "*tigre*" rare, in the former place, becomes common enough in the latter. The deer are better grown; the snakes are very much larger, for with them size is gained by age. The forest scorpion attains a size, and power of sting, not possessed by the house scorpion; in short, in the interior they run little chance of being molested, especially by man, and therefore attain their full growth. The boa-constrictor is often found of fifteen feet in length, and some few two or three feet more, with the thickness of a man's thigh. I have been told, however, that nearer the eastern coast they are found much larger and of a blacker colour, which snake, I suppose, is the "Python," but never saw one: however since my return home I saw one in France, of an enormous size and weight; it was carried about as a show in a sort of caravan, and I was told it was called a python, and was brought from the Mosquito shore.

The first acquaintance I made with a fair sized boa was in riding over the top of a range of hills with an Indian servant, occupied in tracing the direction of a rich vein of copper

ore, which made its appearance every now and then on the surface of the ridge; when one of those dark black clouds, that fly across the sky every afternoon for three months in the year, charged with whole batteries of lightning, and literally floods of rain, was gaining the meridian so fast, that we agreed to take shelter under a shed built over the mouth of a new shaft; the shed containing a large heap of dry sacate grass for repairs in the thatch. We reached the entrance just as the storm began, and hurried into it, leading our horses. We had both drawn machetes in our hands, as is the usual custom in the country, especially when fire-arms are not carried. I was leading the way in, when a great big coil loosed itself from the grass on which it was lying, and made a dash at the entrance, evidently solely to escape; however, I hit it with my machete pretty hard on the head as it passed, and it coiled itself up again on the *desmontes*, or pile of rubbish thrown out of the shaft: its head was erect in the centre of the coil, with the blood running down from the cut it had got in the head; but the Indian, whom it had very nearly knocked down in trying to escape, took up one of the spare rafters for the roof of the shed, and dealt it such a double-handed

blow, that he broke its back, so that it could not move from the fracture downwards to the tail. After a few more blows from both of us, we regained our shelter thinking it dead.

Two days afterwards I had occasion to pass the same spot, being alone; there were a good many vultures about, and I concluded that they had made a meal of the snake; but, on approaching, I found it much better than when we left it, but only in the upper part, the lower being still paralyzed.

A few of the larger vultures were standing close to the head, as if only awaiting death to fall on; and yet they durst not do it while the head was still erect and the eye living; though I have seen them begin on a poor broken-down horse long before life was extinct. Two or three blows from my machete finished it, and having a string-measure with me, I drew it out and found it was fifteen feet six inches in length, and eighteen inches round the thickest part of the body; but it must have fasted some time, besides having passed two days in such a miserable state. Repassing that way a couple of hours afterwards, there was nothing but the skeleton left, without the slightest particle of flesh or skin.

Vultures make clean and quick work of what they undertake.

One more anecdote of the boa, and we will proceed to another description of snake.

An Englishman and an Indian were passing along by a very narrow trail through a thick forest, when a cry was heard in the wood like a child in great pain, or more like the noise a hare makes sometimes when in the fangs of a dog. They neither of them knew what it could be; but, pulling out their pistols, and tying up their horses, worked their way into the wood in the direction of the cries, which were still heard. About a hundred yards inside the wood there was a rather thinner space, and as the cries seemed nearer, the party approached with more caution, until the Indian caught the other by the arm and pointed to an object that had already caught his eye: it was a boa crushing a young roebuck—young, but still with short horns. If the sculptor of the famous lacoon had had an opportunity of studying nature, he would have simplified the folds of his serpents: it is true the elegance of the varied twinings would have been lost, but what would be lost in beauty would be gained by the strength of truth. There

were only two folds of the heaviest part of the snake's body fairly round the body of the deer, just behind the shoulders; one fold over the other to increase the weight and power concentrated upon one spot. The head and neck of the boa passed under the neck of the deer, and rising high on the other side, held fast by the teeth upon the back of the deer's head. The tail had two turns round a young tree close by.

So furiously was the boa engaged with his prey, that he never remarked the observers; it is true they were well concealed by the underwood, but no doubt, if he had not been so well occupied he would have been aware of their presence, and glided off. On a proposition to pitch into the snake and save the deer, the Indian answered by walking very gently off and signing to the other to follow him.

On regaining the horses, the Indian remarked that it would have been madness to have fought such a large, irritated brute like that, as one or other of them would most likely have got such a squeeze he would not soon forget. This was about seven o'clock in the morning; so, after marking the trees carefully with the machetes, the party went

on to an Indian village, where they had some business, and on their return, about four o'clock in the evening, stopped once more at the notched trees.

Dismounting, they proceeded cautiously towards the spot where the unequal contest had been going on in the morning, and nearly upon the same spot, extended straight on the ground, was the porpoise-looking brute, with one of the small horns of the roebuck protruding from one corner of his mouth, and the other seeming as if it would perforate the neck every instant: the tail was still coiled round a small tree, though not the same as in the morning, and the centre of his body looked like a nine-gallon cask. "Stand clear of the tail," said the Indian, and a few blows from their sharp machetes soon finished him: he was perfectly powerless; tried to throw up the deer, but could not, and made no resistance. When stretched out he measured six good paces.

The smaller kinds of boa may be met with constantly: they prey on rabbits, lizards, and other small animals, and also climb trees in search of birds' nests, and soon empty them of their contents.

The black snake is the next in size and

strength to the boa, but is far more agile. Neither of them are poisonous, nor have the moveable fangs; but the black snake is quite harmless to man, except in frightening those who are not acquainted with his habits, for he is the most vicious and ill-tempered of all the species: he will fly at any creature, and springs much farther than any other snake; a full-grown one may measure nine or ten feet in length. The most curious peculiarity of this snake is the mortal antipathy he has for the rattlesnake, and they never meet without a pitched battle, which, if they are anything like equal in size, always ends in favour of the black snake. Whether snakes bite each other in fighting I cannot say, though most probably they do not, from having no room to dart, but if they do, the venom has no effect upon the black snake; though I have read an account of some experiments being made at Boston on the rattlesnake, who was irritated to bite himself, and died of the effect. I was witness to a fight between two of the snakes one afternoon; it is the habit of all snakes to go to drink at the small, hidden streams at about four o'clock in the afternoon, and a rattlesnake and a black one were both descending op-

posite banks when I saw them. The little stream was about a yard broad, with a good sandy arena for the champions on either side, and the black snake began by springing over the stream, when they joined instantly in conflict. They twined themselves together like the caduceus of Mercury, but it was evident from the first that the rattlesnake had not half the muscular power of the other, and in less than half an hour's fight the first was dead, when the black snake swallowed him with the greatest ease, and was not long about it ; it is true that the black snake was much the largest, but I have been told the result would have been the same had the proportions been equal. The conqueror looked nearly twice as thick as he glided slowly into the thicket, and I determined never again to kill such a very meritorious animal.

The rattlesnake is viviparous, and the young are born about two or three inches long, with only a single rattle under the tail. The Indians assert, that the birth of the young always costs the mother her life, which they say is the reason that whenever a large rattlesnake is killed it is always a male, and that no female is ever killed of a larger size than could be attained in a year's

growth. How far they are right it would be difficult to discover; but it is universally believed in all parts of the country. As every one knows the bite is deadly, and it is very rare for any one to recover, there would be little use in enumerating the cases that have come under my observation; but there is one peculiarity about the rattlesnake that very few persons are acquainted with, and perhaps the following little anecdote will best describe the way I became acquainted with it.

Passing through a large straggling town not far from the coast, and knowing there a dusky caballero, who had once held a high position in the Commonwealth, but, luckily for himself, escaped being shot, I paid him a visit, and finding no one at the door, walked into his *reception-room*, such as it was. In the middle of the room was a large rattlesnake, playing up and down the back of a chair: immediately on seeing me he slid down on the floor, and coiling himself up, with his head and neck in the centre of the coil, began to rattle furiously.

It is a great mistake to imagine that the rattle is a warning for men to avoid them: when they are moving about they make no noise, and they never sound the rattle but

when they are irritated and ready to spring; never when crawling about in the woods.

Not fancying much my companion in the room, I shut the door, and seeking about, soon found the owner of the house, who welcomed me, took me back to the same room, and having called the snake "picaro," and other friendly slang names, told him to go into a corner. He then related how the snake had been given to him some three years past; how he had extracted his fangs, and that he was as tame as a kitten.

Having arranged to take our "Onze"* with him the next day at noon before starting, the horses were only ordered at one o'clock, and I walked to his house, where I found him with the same snake on his lap, rattling furiously and held fast by the neck by a servant, my friend being occupied with a pair of pincers in the reptile's mouth. After the operation was performed and the

* In many places of South America, as also in Central America, it is usual to take some slight refreshment of fruit at noon, but they call it the "onze," which means the eleven o'clock. An ex-president of Chili explained to me, that formerly it was the custom at noon to take a glass of brandy, or other spirit, and that it was called "onze," from there being eleven letters in the word A-g-u-a-r-d-i-e-n-t-e.

snake loose, I inquired the nature of it: he told me that the snake was in the habit of climbing up his chair at breakfast-time, and that that morning he had been so importunate for milk, that he had given him a good rap on the head with a spoon, and that he had sprung on the floor, coiled up and rattling furiously, erected his head, shewing two fangs projecting. Having quieted the snake, he took him, a few hours afterwards, by the neck and was extracting the second pair when I entered; they had not grown from the place where the former ones were extracted, but from higher up in the upper jaw, and seemed as if intended to supply the place of the first pair in the event of their being broken or injured: the last pair were moveable and hollow, the same as the first, and both had the small bag at the root containing the poison. I am sorry to say that this snake was killed by a strange Indian, who, entering the room, found no one to answer his call, but the serpent with his rattle: not knowing it was tame, he killed it with his machete, and deprived the worthy owner of a semi-sagacious companion, who could readily distinguish between his master's friends and strangers.

Anecdotes of rattlesnakes are very numerous, but it would swell this little work to a greater extent than contemplated to relate any of them; however, I have a promise from a person in that country to acquaint me if he can ascertain anything to be depended upon respecting the viviparous birth of the young occasioning the mother's death.

The next snake I would mention is, I believe, *one* of the most deadly, if not *the* most deadly poisonous snake in the world. The Cobra Capella, or any of the Eastern snakes, gives a man, after he has bitten him, time to make a short will, and if a Roman Catholic, to confess himself, if he can find a priest; but the *Coral* gives no such time. Should a man be bitten, he falls almost immediately; his blood curdles into a thick coagulated state, and he dies in a very short time, becoming putrid soon.

The Coral snake is of a red coral colour, with rings of some other colour round the body; these rings are of the same colour in the same snake; but, if ten were together, perhaps each would have different coloured rings, though the ground colour would be the same in all, *red*. The Coral is also differently formed from most snakes: the body is of an

almost uniform thickness from head to tail. I have killed many dozens of them, generally about daybreak, when they are going home; their food seems, by the few I have opened, to consist of small lizards and very young birds. Many remarkable escapes have come under my immediate notice, but I can only find room for one, almost miraculous.

Two travellers were benighted in a huge marsh, and, retracing some of their steps, gained a small rising ground, that had, at least, the advantage of affording a drier bed than the deep mud.

The horses were tethered, and, after a woful scanty supper and cigar, they laid down, and, being very tired, did not awake till the sun was well up, when they resumed their journey. About a league from the hillock they had passed the night on, another hillock was passed, and low groans were heard to proceed from a man lying on his back at the top of the rising ground. Seeing the horsemen, he beckoned them to approach, which, after a little hesitation, they did; though a decoy is often laid in that manner. On approaching, they were told that while he was asleep a snake had crept up his loose drawers; that

it was then lying on his stomach, and that he had seen part of a *Coral*. He was naked, except a very short loose pair of drawers and a coarse poncho over his head, but the form of the snake was very visible under the drawers. Having dismounted, the travellers put on thick gloves, and taking a pair of scissors from the saddle-bags, cut through the drawers carefully until the head of the snake was seen fast asleep, when one of them seized him by the neck and drew him off the poor man's stomach. The Coral was a large-sized one, nearly three feet in length, and of the uniform thickness from head to tail of a stout walking-stick. Colour, coral red with yellow rings: the only danger was, the animal biting the man, for there was none to the other two, as the Coral cannot strike half his own length, and that very slowly.

The poor fellow said, that he had passed two or three hours that had appeared to him longer than two or three weeks of any *temporal* (set-in rain and storm) he had ever been in; and that he had called to one or two passers by, but they had all avoided him, thinking he was a decoy for marauding Indians. He was completely prostrated in mind and body, and it was some minutes be-

fore he could stand or walk; however, an Indian (one of the travellers) put a calabash of something stronger than water to his mouth, and after one or two hearty pulls he was able to move on. This "Snake-trap," as the Indian persisted in calling him, a year afterwards evinced his gratitude to the same party by introducing them, one scorching hot day, to his wine-cellar in the forest, which consisted of about a dozen felled palm-trees in full wine-bearing, which pleased the Indian very much, drinking his health, "Salud! Señor trampa culebra!" but it was taken as meant, in much good nature.

A British vice-consul, at a port in the Pacific, had a little kitten about four months old, which one day had a beautiful fight with a coral: she had followed her master to the custom-house, and on some dye-wood being removed, a coral-snake was discovered, upon which the kitten immediately gave it battle. Every time the snake made a dart towards her, a smart blow of her paw, sometimes right and sometimes left, knocked it away, and at last completely stunned it, but she still kept hammering away at the head and neck, until the coral was quite dead; the smallest scratch from the fangs would have killed her instantly;

but she was far too quick, and beat her antagonist by the most skilful sparring ever witnessed.

There are very many other poisonous snakes, such as the Tamagasa, and a very large flat-headed snake, with a thick lump in the neck close behind the head; but there is not room for a description of them; yet there is a curious fact connected with one species of snake that I should like to be able to account for.

This is a long, slender, and harmless snake of about three or four feet in length, and is generally found climbing on the bushes that grow about the sides of small sheltered streams; the colour is of a most brilliant green; but if one is killed and thrown into the sunshine, the colour gradually changes until, in an hour or two, it becomes a pale sky-blue. The change is very much like that indigo undergoes: when the indigo is taken from the pit, it is quite green, but by exposure to the air in very small lumps or rather wet dabs, it gradually becomes blue by the absorption of the atmosphere. Is it not possible that a similar change may take place in the colouring matter of this snake, after death, that vitality resists during life?

In my chapter of reptiles the "Iguana" may be mentioned, for they abound in Central America, more perhaps than any other country, and may be seen of every colour that it is possible to imagine, from dirty white to dirty black. Red, rose, crimson, blue, yellow, green, brown, and every intermediate tint may sometimes be met with in a morning ride, and precious ugly beasts they are. They are very like alligators, and (as of the Sauria tribe) have, no doubt, great anatomical affinity with them; but I mean the resemblance of some of their habits. They have a sort of scale all over them, and have the same formidable jaws and teeth on a small scale, and are very different from the large green lizard that is sometimes called "iguana;" they have also a property that the alligator possesses, of being able to walk at the bottom of a river, which they always resort to when near at hand, and hard pressed; and there, as the alligator does, consider themselves safe however little water may be over their heads or rather backs. I have never seen this observation remarked before. They have a sort of crest along the upper part of the back that is very like the back fin of a perch when elevated.

The iguana is most delicate to eat, after having overcome the aversion the ugly reptile naturally inspires; and if stewed with rice is so like an excellent chicken pillau, that one would turn iguana hunter for the sake of another dish: the eggs are also very delicate, and resemble small turtle eggs both in the taste and the integument that covers them.

The larger sorts of snakes prey upon the iguana, and follow them up the high trees and bushes, which makes it dangerous for a canoe or any boat to brush under the branches at a river's side, as frequently a snake is brushed off into the boat, and at first has it pretty nearly his own way: but it takes a strong powerful serpent to crush an iguana, on account of his strong jaws and teeth; and even a large snake sometimes gets very much mauled by this miniature alligator.

CHAPTER XIV.

REMEDY AGAINST POISONOUS BITES.—SCORPIONS.—SPIDER BITES.

THE effect of the scorpion's sting has been much exaggerated, though no doubt it is painful enough for a short time, but it seldom produces any bad effect, except causing a sort of a paralysis or numbness of the lower jaw and tongue, and that may almost immediately be removed by swallowing about a wineglassful of any raw spirit, though most likely the remedy would not have the same effect upon a great consumer of that article.

The Indians think that there are two sorts of scorpions, and call them "Alacran de la casa," and "Alacran del monte;" or the house-scorpion and forest-scorpion, but they are the same; and the apparent difference is, that the forest scorpion is generally a much larger and blacker animal, owing to its attaining its full growth, and I believe great age; while the house-scorpion is generally killed before it gains much size. I must say, however, there is a great deal of differ-

ence in the pain of their stings; and as I have been stung many dozens of times by both, have a sort of a right to know; the forest-scorpion's is a genuine sting, that, what with the pain and the effect it has on the mouth, makes you literally "hold your jaw" for a shorter or longer time, according, if a remedy be at hand or not; but the house-scorpion, unless he is a large one, does not sting much worse than an English wasp, and not half as bad as one of the country's wasps; but scorpions are nasty animals, and are always found where least expected; they are very fond of a dirty clothes-bag, and are often found among linen and the rugs put under saddles.

At the end of their long tail there is a small curved and very sharp sting, but hollow like the fang of a snake, with a small bag at the root, containing a very acrid and partly poisonous fluid. When a scorpion, by his feelers or claws, finds he has an enemy to deal with, he turns his tail over the back until the point is struck down with force in front of the head, and the pressure on the little bag injects a small quantity of its contents into the puncture made by the sting.

That the bag contains a sort of poison is

inferred from the mortal effect it has on small animals, and I have often heard that a sting on the stomach from a large scorpion will kill a pig. Upon man the effect is only sharp pain and the numbness above mentioned, but the larger the reptile the more serious are the effects, and some constitutions are very susceptible, while others are scarcely at all. I have never felt half the pain from a scorpion I did once from an enormous red forest wasp that stung me exactly on the tip of the nose; but that sometimes the effect is more serious the following little anecdote will shew.

I was talking to a friend near the coast one day on the subject of bites from snakes, stings from scorpions, and the nasty sloughing wounds occasioned by the centipede; he told me he had an infallible remedy for every bite or sting, except from a few snakes, such as the rattlesnake, coral, or tamagasa. This remedy was a very strong infusion of the root of a small plant called "guaco," and is made by carefully scraping the root very fine, putting a quantity of the scrapings into a bottle of brandy or some other strong spirit, and after submitting it to a very gentle heat, corking it well up; for the first two or

three months it ought to be shaken well two or three times a-week, and the longer kept the better. My friend had laid in a good store, made of strong cognac twelve years previously; it had become a very strong infusion, and had performed a number of cures: he was not then aware how soon his remedy was to be tested. Seeing one of the Indians attached to his plantation idling about, he told him to go and remove some loose timber that was lying near an out-house, and put it under shelter. The man came back in a few minutes, looking more like a blue Indian than a red one, and having only time to say he had been stung, dropped down in a sort of fit: my friend said it must have been done by a snake; but a bottle of this tincture was quickly brought out, and about a wineglass-full poured down his throat: he was then laid on a bench and covered up with a poncho, and in a few minutes he burst out into a most profuse perspiration and fell asleep. "All right," said my friend; "he is all right now." And several men having collected, we started off to kill the snake that was supposed to have bit him. On turning over the piece of wood he had been raising, we found, not a snake, but the largest and

blackest-looking scorpion any of us had ever seen before; having secured it alive, we brought it into the house and put it under a bell-glass to observe it; it must have been six inches long, and had claws as large as those of a small fresh-water cray-fish.

The man awoke in a couple of hours quite well, but rather weak from the violent perspiration, occasioned by the dose, and he then said it was a large forest scorpion that had stung him.

That the scorpion can sting without turning the tail over the back may be inferred from the following:—In saddling a horse in Central America, two or three clothes or skins, called "sudaderos," or sweaters, are always placed under the saddle; but hearing a shot in the forest, followed by a "hollo" (a sure sign of help being required), I threw the sudaderos, saddle, and all at once upon a horse tied up in front of the ranchos; girted him up, and bridled him, and jumping on him, tried to gallop towards the spot where assistance was required; but he would not go on, and kept kicking and plunging like a newly-backed colt. I was much surprised, as he was my favourite lassoing horse, and more so when he reared up, fell back with

me, and tried to roll. Suspecting there was something the matter under the saddle, I got him on his legs and took off the saddle, and found on the cloth next the skin two large scorpions: they could not have turned over their tails, as there was no room. The cause removed, the horse went willingly towards the spot, and the assistance wanted turned out to be to recover a large wounded armadilla.

The Indians believe guaco to be a very valuable medicine in almost every way it is used, but they consider the fresh root much superior to the dried. The serpent-eating birds seek eagerly the young, fresh guaco, it may be fairly supposed either as a remedy for a past or an antidote for a future bite. With man it has the effect, especially in hot climates, of producing, in a very short time, profuse perspiration. I have often tried an infusion of it in hot water when I have been lying in the hot, burning stage of ague, and when the skin is almost painful to the touch; a small drink of the infusion, followed by a plentiful one of hot cream of tartar, opened, in a very few minutes, the pores of the skin, and changed the state of dry, burning fever into one of languid ease.

The Indians also use it in case of spider-bites. A spider-bite may sound odd in European ears, and the wound is rarely met with on man or woman; but it is a sore plague to the owners of horses and mules: I never heard of horned-cattle being injured by them.

This disgusting looking animal, that does more harm in one night than seven or eight months of time can repair, is an immense hairy spider, with a large, round, but flat body, something like a crab; the legs are rather short for spiders; the body may measure three or four inches across; and the mischief this spider does consists in biting or sucking the coronet of horses' and mules' feet at night when they are feeding in the forest or on the savannah. The next day the coronet inflames, swells, and in a few more days there is the evident mark of the hoof separating from the foot: the poor animal suffers dreadfully, which may be inferred from the fact, that he will lie down and nibble all the grass within his reach, and will then rather go a day without eating than rise to change his berth. The hoof soon drops off, and a new hoof begins to grow over the sensible foot, as also does the wall or crust, but it is

at least seven or eight months before the animal is of any use.

Besides the loss of the beast's services for so long a time, he never regains his former usefulness, as the new hoof is never so strong or hard as the former one, which is a serious defect in a country where horse-shoeing is unknown.

The time of the year that these horse-spiders (*Araña de caballo*) do most mischief is during the dry season, before, in the first place, the fires; and in the second, the rains, make them disappear for some months. Having a large number of horses and mules, I was so far a sufferer as, at first, generally to have two or three on the sick-list; but having procured some coal-tar from the coast, I found that a slight application of it round the coronet, once or twice a-week, was a most effectual preventive against the spider touching them.

In the next chapter I mean to lay before the reader some remarks on bees, bee-hunting, &c., and also a few observations on some of the myriads of insects that infest this part of the world.

CHAPTER XV.

BEE-HUNTING.—ONSLAUGHT OF WASPS.—AGARRA-PATA.—THE JIGGER.

BEE-HUNTING is a favourite amusement and profitable occupation of the Indians at most times of the year, but it is mostly for a few weeks before Easter that they employ themselves in that way, on account of the comparatively high price they can obtain for wax at that time in the towns and villages; it being then in great request for tapers and candles to be devoted to the graven images of their religion. I say *their* religion, for though in the towns they profess to be of the purest kind of Roman Catholics, yet they grovel to saints, carved and painted as grotesque as a good Guy Fawkes in London on the 5th of November; and the only religion they have been taught is to pray to these caricatures, and to the Virgin; but above all, to make them presents and burn candles before them.

In Central America there are several sorts of bees, of different sizes, and with a slight

variation of colour, but all agreeing in their habits; some are almost as large as the European bee, and some very much smaller than the smallest house-fly; but they are all, without any exception, *stingless*. They all form their hives in hollow trees, and bee-hunting consists in following a bee from its feeding-ground to its domicile. A man ought to have a good eye to "*line a bee*," as the North Americans calls it, and he ought to know something of the habits of the insect. A bee on a prairie or savannah may be flying irregularly from spot to spot, and is never followed beyond the first flight; but when a bee rises well in the air to the height of fifteen or twenty feet, and then flies in a straight line, the bee-hunter knows it is well laden and is making its way home. As long as the ground remains open and clear of trees, it is not difficult for a sharp active fellow to follow the bee, at least to the nearest cover, unless the sun is in his face; but it is very difficult and almost impossible to follow it when it gets into the forest, as it flies over the underwood, and there is hard enough work getting through the underwood, without watching an insect overhead.

The tree nearest to the spot where the bee

entered the wood is then marked, together with the line it took *inside* the wood. If there are three or four bee-hunting, most likely each has lined his bee to the cover's edge, and also marked its direction. They then go to one of these marked spots, and walk a few yards apart, straight into the forest, in the direction marked out, watching for any hollow tree they may pass, and also for a few small birds that frequent the vicinity of hives, to pounce on the little bees. The Indians call them "honey-birds," or rather "honey-mouth" (Boca Miel). The object of the search is soon found, being generally within two hundred yards from the edge of the wood, unless the bees, as they sometimes do, build near a river's side for the sake of the water.

The hunter has always with him his hatchet, a large gourd for the honey, and a sort of havresac for the wax. There are very few axemen so handy as a woodman of Central America ; and in a very short time a fine tree is hewn down for the sake of a little wax and honey. In some places bees are so very numerous that they alight in numbers on the hands and face, and as they are very small are often taken for sand-flies, and are

brushed off or killed; and they emit, when crushed, a most fragrant smell.

The wasp is very different from the European wasp, being two or three times the length, and each variety of different colours, blue, purple, and dark red being the most common. They generally build their nests curiously suspended from the bough of a tree, and are very often found in the lime or lemon-trees that mostly grow by the banks of rivers.* There are some, however, that build their nests of clay, plastered against the side of a tree or in a fork of the branches, leaving an entrance near the bottom :—these nests must be well made, since the heavy tropical rains never wash them away, owing, most likely, to the clay being tempered with some strong glutinous substance. Those suspended from the boughs of trees hang down like a large oblong bag, and seem to be made fast to the branch by divers stringy-looking fibres. It is dangerous to disturb them, as they sally forth, often without provocation, and attack furiously both man and

* Though I have found hundreds of wild lime-trees by the rivers, bearing the most beautiful fruit, I have never seen a single wild orange-tree; and those that are cultivated near the towns are more peel than fruit.

beast: their sting is very painful; much more so than the common scorpion, for it goes much deeper.

A friend of mind, riding an excellent quiet mule, stopped one day under a lime-tree to pick some fruit: he had hardly given a couple of shakes to the tree when a swarm of wasps issued forth and attacked man and mule. There was nothing to be done but to gallop for it, the wasps following them over a savannah some hundreds of yards across; when the mule, on arriving at the edge of the next wood, quite mad with pain, made a dash into the underwood to brush off his winged foes. The consequence was that my friend, what with the stings, and the bruises he received by being carried, against his inclination, through the covert, was laid up for some time, and the mule suffered much for several days.

Another incident will shew that they will attack sometimes without any provocation. A fine young mule was tied up inside my "coral," near the ranchos, where there was not a wasp's nest near. On returning home from hunting in the afternoon, I saw the mule lying on the ground, and by her groans and struggles shewed she was in great pain.

A large swarm of wasps were hovering about her and stinging her cruelly. I immediately cut a good switching branch from a tree, and wrapping my head up in a poncho, so as only just to see, went to her assistance, and soon dispersed them. There is nothing like a springy branch for clearing away a swarm of wasps, as each sweep brings down a good many. Having made the poor beast get up, I led her down to the stream, and, bathing her all over, found she was perfectly covered with large lumps. She was in such a state of fever, that I was obliged to bleed her freely, and it was several days before she was well.

For four or five months in the year there is the greatest possible plague in the shape of an insect that infests the woods, savannahs, sides of rivers, and, in short, every spot except the towns and sandy places. It is called by the natives the "Agarra-pata," from the tenacious way it holds on by the claws. It is a species of diminutive crab, at first not larger than the point of a pin, but growing in a short time to the size of a pin's head. They congregate during the dry season on the extreme ends of leaves and points of grass, and whether a person is on horseback

or on foot, as he sweeps past the branches he brushes off some of these insects, which soon make their way in great quantities under the leather or skin leggings. They create such an intolerable itching by crawling all over the body, and burrowing with their sharp claws, as effectually to drive away sleep from the traveller, who has not the opportunity of taking off his clothes to get rid of them. Everybody travelling, during that season, carries with him a lump of well-worked wax, and when an opportunity occurs, such as a rest at noonday on a sandy bank of a river-side, where there are no agarra-patas, he gets rid of these insects by pressing the wax wherever a black spot is seen; the insect comes off in the wax, and this is the only way of getting rid of the nuisance. When the rains and fires make their appearance this plague ceases, and only reappears eight months afterwards. If the wild beasts, and more especially the cuyote, did not effectually prevent any breed of sheep or goats being kept in the more open parts of the country, the agarra-pata would very soon worry them to death.

Another curse to comfort, but which is confined to towns and villages, is the "nigua,"

or what the West Indians term Jigger. It was originally imported into the towns near the coast at the same time as the African negroes, and from the same places; but now it attacks all races indiscriminately: it is very like a diminutive flea, and burrows in the flesh, but most commonly under the toe-nails. If not taken out immediately with a needle (in which the Indian women are very expert), it digs itself a hole about the size of a pea and spins its nest in it, which nest consists of a finely-spun bag containing a quantity of small eggs. If, at this stage the bag be not taken out, the eggs are soon hatched, and the consequences may be serious; at the same time care must be taken, when extracting it, not to break the bag, as some eggs might remain in the wound. It is usual to fill up the hole with cigar ashes, but the Indians think it dangerous to bathe for two or three days afterwards, as they say it produces lockjaw; but when they are under the necessity of crossing water and wetting their feet, they fill up the hole with wax.

Children are often crippled for life by their mothers neglecting to examine them very frequently. Dogs gnaw the nigua out from their toes very cleverly; but when once they

attack domestic pigs, they must be extracted by men or their feet would rot and fall off.

It would be tedious to enumerate any more of these beasts, birds, reptiles, and insects, and so I take my leave of them, and although heartily glad to get rid of them bodily, yet I often wish for the possession of that wonderful small carpet in the "Arabian Nights," that transported the owner, who sat upon it, in a moment to where he might wish to go. I could not wish a *party* better sport than they would find within ten miles of my ranchos; but then I believe they would wish *themselves* home in time to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

STRANGE LOT OF INMATES.—BIVOUACKING.—HOW SOME PERSONS TRAVEL.—FONDNESS FOR SPIRITS.—STRIPPING FOR A STORM.—KEEPING ONESELF DRY.—A PAIR OF NATIVES.

IT is scarcely possible for any European that has not been in a tropical climate to conceive the force of an "aguacero," or storm of rain, that may last from half an hour to three or four. It is very different from the long steady rain that comes down now and then during the wet season for two or even three weeks in succession, without a moment's intermission. The latter is never accompanied by lightning and thunder except at the very end of the bad weather, when the grumbling of the thunder on the West Coast proclaims the speedy breaking up of the "temporal," as the long rain is called, and also the release of the impatient prisoners in the different ranchos or huts.

This confinement is truly insupportable. Every traveller or stray Indian that cannot pass the swollen rivers, or who cannot bear a

fortnight's rain without shelter, asks, as a matter of course, hospitality for the time the rain lasts, and also till the rivers are passable. As food is generally very scarce to those sort of persons, they generally make some inquiry respecting what rancho is most likely to afford them something to eat, and for that reason I have been frequently honoured for a fortnight and more with a most strange lot of inmates; they generally bring with them food for a day or two, and then they request for food, if they are half-caste; but if they are Indians, will sit and starve unless they are invited to eat. Often and often I have been obliged to go out with my rifle for half a day in the heavy rain to seek a deer or two and some wild turkeys, to supply the wants of my hungry visitors. Hunting in this weather is very unhealthy, but it is almost always sure to be attended with success, and also by ague or fever. Success seldom fails in such weather, as the deer, and indeed all game, are constantly on the move, which the Indians attribute to the pattering of the rain on the leaves, which, preventing game from being aware of the approach of wild beasts, makes them uneasy, restless, and constantly changing their position: the heavy rain also destroys

their power of scenting their enemies from afar.

The heavy aguaceros or stormy showers are, on the contrary, always accompanied by tremendous thunder and lightning; and the rain comes down in large sheets of water, as if every drop had fused into one another.

After having experienced one of these long "temporals," and having seen it, and also heard it finished off with the most violent and awful thunder-storm it had ever been my lot to witness, I took the opportunity of anticipated fine weather to make ready for a journey that might last for three or four days.

An Indian and I started the following day, but wishing the hot sun to dry the paths, we started rather too late than was prudent, to enable us to gain the shelter for the night we had promised ourselves. We trusted to gain an old Spanish ruin before dark, but night set in before we arrived there, and we had great difficulty in finding it.

This place we had fixed on for our night's lodging was an ancient ruin, but evidently of Spanish origin, on account of the piazzas, supported by columns, that surrounded every side of the oblong square, that barely marked

out the proportions of the old mansion. The house itself was entirely gone except the outer walls touching the corridors, which were from four to six feet high : the partition walls had also crumbled away, and large trees, of naturally very slow growth, were proudly erect in the very rooms where once Dons and Donnas had lived, and perhaps commanded. The corridor was nearly entire, having been built on two open rows of stone pillars, with a slab stone slanting roof, which appeared to defy time.

Having been there before, and knowing the place pretty well, we gained the spot in such utter darkness that we had nothing to do but tie up our horses close to us, unsaddle them, and give them a feed of Indian corn (that the spare horse always carried), and then tried to make ourselves comfortable for the night. Having struck a light and kindled a fire from a lot of dry wood, that was lying about, we lighted our pine splints and went to seek for more dead wood, at the same time putting the little copper jug, that every woodsman carries, on the fire, to make a little hot mixture, to prevent the wind from whistling right through us. When we returned with the wood a strange sort of lamentation

was heard from another side of the quadrangle; we listened, and soon found out the cause. "Oh! friend," said a strong sonorous voice, "what a night to pass without a drop of anything to drink!"—"Si Señor," answered another very squeaky voice, "No tengo poncho ni ponche," meaning he had neither a poncho to cover his outside nor punch to warm his inside. Taking up a pine splint, I went round the corner of the corridor, and there found the two speakers, who were surprised and rather alarmed, to see a man with a light in one hand and a naked sword in the other; but their previous melancholy was soon changed to *allegro* when they were informed that not only a fire and hot water were in the next corridor, but also the very liquor after which they were sighing.

They lost not one moment, but installed themselves by the cheerful blaze. Having performed the duty of host by supplying them with what they wanted, I began to examine my new acquaintances. Never was there such a difference in outward appearance as they presented, and the only resemblance that could be detected between them was upon subsequent acquaintance; and here let

me say, that the only object in view, in relating the remainder of the journey I took in company with my new friends, is solely to give an idea how some persons travel, who wish to save their health and clothes, and who have not much regard for decency. The great resemblance was the surprising fondness they both had for strong drink, and also the marvellous facility with which they carried it under their belts. The stout sonorous voice belonged to a sort of gentleman who might have seen fifty-five summers pass over his coal-black head of hair, about five feet nine inches in height, and pretty nearly the same round his waist, weighing at least twenty stone. He was truly enormous to look at, and yet with all his obesity I found afterwards that he had a certain activity in mounting and dismounting from horseback that shewed he had seen more agile days. The thin weak voice was the organ of speech of a very great contrast to the above; it was the property of an old-wizened looking man of less than five feet in height, and who could not have weighed much more than five stone; but, with the exception of two Moorish officers of the custom-house in the river of Tetuan on the coast of Barbary, I never met with the

equal of these two in the way of drinking. My stock of liquor for some days' journey was three bottles of rum, two of which the Indian carried in his "alforcas," or saddle-bags, and one was in my own, which I gave them, but it was emptied in a very short time, and I was rather puzzled to know where it had gone to, until the Indian told me they had drunk it nearly pure, and with only a little hot water, "para desenfriarlo," to take the chill off. I had turned into my hammock, but these two managed to get possession of the saddle-bags, and with the slightest assistance from the Indian, they finished off the other two bottles, and went to sleep on their saddle-cloths and sheep-skins, I verily believe not a bit the worse for what they had swallowed, though it must be told the spirit was not exactly proof.

The next morning broke with a drizzling rain, and was very raw, owing to the height we then were above the plains. A fire was lighted, water boiled, and I then discovered that the last bottle was empty, by my fellow-travellers lamenting there was nothing to mix with it. However, while they were sipping their hot water, flavoured with a bit of orange-peel and burnt sugar, and repeating how they

should enjoy something better such a cold morning, they were answered from another and opposite side of the quadrangle; and it then turned out that a muleteer, with two mules laden with aguardiente, had passed the night in the vicinity. I filled my three bottles for the journey, and my two facetious friends (for they were very droll, especially the fat one) filled a bottle each, and were soon seated before the fire again, where, after eating a little dried venison, they resumed their cigars.

I was wandering about the strange old ruins, and watching the weather, when, seeing it partially clear up, I returned to the party to say they had better get ready for a start, and saw their two bottles lying on the sides without corks, and concluded their contents had followed those of the night before; however, they were in no way affected by the liquor, but saddled their horses and made ready with wonderful agility, asked if we were ready; and having mounted, came and asked for an "estrivera," or stirrup-cup, without which they could have no luck on the journey. They took a pull of almost a quarter of a pint a-piece, and we proceeded on our journey at about eleven o'clock, trust-

ing to reach a populous village, or rather large straggling town, about two or three in the afternoon ; meaning, after a short rest there, to travel about two hours further. At noon my companions called on me for their onze, so called, as previously explained, from there being eleven letters in the word "aguardiente." We travelled on until about five miles from the said town, both my fat and thin friends keeping us in roars of laughter, when the Indian remarked we had better get our ponchos ready, as a very heavy thunderstorm was close behind.

My friend, looking up at the sky, jumped out of his saddle with surprising activity, considering his huge size, and followed by the thin one, asked the Indian if he did not know how to prepare for an aguacero ; to which the Indian replied, that both himself and his patron knew well enough how to prepare in the forest, but not in a cleared country, as it was not decent. "Vaya," said they both, and with a speed quite marvellous, they stripped, putting their clothes, linen, shoes, leggings, and the one poncho under their saddle-skins, or pillions ; they then replaced their broad-brimmed straw-hats on their heads, their large silver spurs on their

naked heels, and buckled their machetes round their ditto waist: they then mounted on horseback again.

There could not have been a more ludicrous sight than our two fellow-travellers. Fancy two men, with handsome skins, and trappings on their horses, but with nothing on them but large straw hats, huge silver spurs on their heels, and a short hunting sword strapped round their waists; and such a contrast of waists! the Silenus-looking fat man having his buckled close under his arms; and the thin one's belt hanging over his hips. There could not have been a better representation of Plenty and Famine.

In the forest it was my frequent practice to strip for a shower, and keep my clothes dry, on account of the ague wet clothes invariably produce, and also for the reason that there is no one to see you; but in a partially cleared country, where men and women are met with, and in the vicinity of villages, it is difficult to throw off every feeling of shame or modesty, and so we contented ourselves with taking off all our clothes, but putting on the large ponchos that cover all but the feet.

Down came the rain, as if hundreds of buckets of water were being continually

emptied over our heads, but our two friends only laughed at us for wetting the ponchos we should want to cover us at night, and made an excuse of the weather to get two or three more pulls at the liquor. We arrived within a short distance of the town, but the rain still came down in sheets, and as we pulled up under an immense tree, I thought it was for the purpose of dressing before entering such a populated place. Jumping off our horses, the Indian and I hastily put on some very necessary articles of attire, and asked our friends if they were not going to do the same. "No," said the fat man, "I am not going to spoil my clothes, or sleep wet to-night, for all the women in Central America, 'ni de Londres tampoco;' but," said he "amigo mio! my skin is completely wet through, and if it sinks deeper it will get to my bones, my heart, and stomach, and if you do not give me a good drink before we arrive at this town, then, Don Jorge, you will have to answer for my death." Of course there was no possibility of incurring such a heavy responsibility, and so, having supplied them with another pull, we commenced our rather comic procession through the town.

I had never been there before, but knew two or three of the inhabitants, and had a small parcel to deliver to the Padré of the town. It turned out that my fat friend had also a parcel to deliver to the same person, and so we made our way to the "Plaza," or square, in which the Padré's house was situated. In passing through the straggling streets there was great merriment occasioned by our two fellow-travellers: the loud remarks of the inhabitants standing at the doors were very amusing, especially those of the women. One woman asked how many yards of calico it took to make the fat man a shirt, and how many for the "hombrecito," for she thought the difference would make one for her husband. Another remarked that one looked like a javalino and the other like a sick savalino, alluding to the two sorts of wild pigs,—one very large, the other small; but all these remarks made no more impression on our friends than the heavy rain seemed to do, and at last we reached the "Plaza," and drew up before the priest's archway-like door. The old man came out to welcome us, but no sooner did he see my two fellow-travellers than, crying out, "Women, escape!—women, hide yourselves!" he began to reprimand

them very severely for their indelicacy, without, however, making the smallest impression. They got coolly off their horses, gave them in charge to us to keep dry, (as we were invited *in*, and they were not,) and, having asked for another drink, the fat man took his purse from the saddle-bags, and putting it into his straw-hat, sallied forth, attended by his lean companion, to purchase fruit and other eatables at a few stalls in the square. Having bought a very large quantity of different things, he and his small friend carried them to some stone-steps round a crucifix in the very centre of the Placa, and having sat down in the rain, commenced their meal.

I could see them from the gratings of the Padré's window, and a more curious pair it would be difficult to meet with. The little one had not much appetite, but my Indian told me that the fat one began with dried venison; he then finished twenty large plantains, and concluded with three melons. They then contrived to make the Indian go to them, and, as the rain had ceased, requested him to bring their clothes, and also sent their compliments for something to wash down their dinner with.

Having partially dressed, they very coolly paid their respects to the Padré, who soon recovered his good humour, and laughed heartily at the droll figure they had cut. The women also made plenty of amusing remarks, especially on the surprising way that dress and covering improved some shapes, but our two friends paid the ladies back in their own coin, and most certainly had the best of it, keeping the Padré and all who heard them in a continual roar of laughter.

I here took leave of my two fellow-travellers, and wish them luck and plenty to drink wherever they go. They certainly kept my Indian and myself in a fit of laughter pretty nearly all the time we were together, but we were almost tired of them at last. The fat one did not laugh aloud, but had a droll twinkle in his eye, and gave forth a quiet chuckling and curious grumbling, as if he were actually laughing inside his fat carcass: the little thin man, who looked up with great reverence to his fat friend, had the most shrill, ridiculous, crying laughter ever mortal heard. Famine was on a very inferior level to Plenty in the eating department, but in the drinking and smoking de-

partment, together with their facility of stowing away without being top-heavy, such an equal pair were never seen.

I soon afterwards made a water-coloured drawing of the pair on horseback during the rain, and can scarce look at it now without being amused.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE USE OF TOBACCO.—TUMBLE OVER AN ALLIGATOR.—RED-BEARDED MONKEY. — FRESH-WATER SHARKS. — MODE OF LIVING.—A TALE TOO TRUE.—SHE SLEEPS IN PEACE!—CARIBEE INDIANS.—REVIEW OF TROOPS.—HOME.

HAVING very nearly completed two years' residence in Central America, and that principally in the wildest part of the interior, I own I began to be weary of the half-savage life I had been so long leading.

A very severe wound I received on a hunting party decided me to set my face steadfastly towards the east, as soon as I should be sufficiently recovered to undertake a long journey on horseback and in canoes. I was undecided which course to pursue, but at last resolved to travel back to Leon; go from thence to the Pacific coast, for the purpose of making arrangements respecting funds, and, returning by Leon, proceed on to the Lake of Nicaragua, and take my chance of finding a "piragua," or large canoe, to take me to the east shore of the lake and down the river St.

Juan to the Boca, or mouth of the river, on the Atlantic.

I had been lying in my rancho for a week, very much exhausted, and weak from extreme loss of blood, when, finding myself a little stronger, I determined to start for Leon the next morning, as, at least, I could there get some little surgical aid, of which I stood much in need, being obliged to dress my wound myself.

Having selected my steadiest horses and mules, I started the next morning, taking with me everything I meant to take home, and leaving a great many things for the Indians who came in to take leave of me: two Indians accompanied me who had been with me from the first, but the journey was more full of accidents to me than all the previous ones put together. We had hardly travelled two leagues than my horse, always used for the lasso, and a favourite, from his sure-footedness, came down, for the first time, right on his nose. On the spur of the moment I disengaged the left arm that was bandaged to the side, to pull him up, and burst afresh the large artery that had been severed, and I had only time to dismount, when I had another fainting-fit. However,

we managed to get to an old deserted ruin by nightfall, and the night was passed by me in much suffering.

The next morning I mounted a very quiet mule, thinking she would never start or stumble; but as we were going along a narrow trail in the forest a crash in the underwood on one side frightened her, for she no doubt took it for a wild beast, and in she bolted to the underwood on the opposite side, bruising the wound very much: many other little accidents also occurred, which, when in health, no one thinks about, but are severely felt by the suffering.

By the time we arrived at Leon, what with loss of blood and pain, I could scarcely keep my saddle, and was agreeably surprised to find a North American surgeon, who had taken up his residence there for a short time. He came immediately to see me, and if ever this meets his eye, I here return him most grateful acknowledgments for his kindness and liberality, for he not only attended me with the care of a brother, but absolutely refused to take the smallest remuneration for his services, and when I went to Granada he accompanied me, for fear the wound should break out afresh. However, the doctor's

care, rest, and a strong constitution set me up in two or three weeks; and having gone to the coast, arranged all my affairs, and obtained two or three letters of introduction for Granada, I hired an Indian guide, took my leave of the cities and villages of the low plains, and started with my friend the doctor for Granada.

There is a sameness in travelling through Central American forests that renders the description of one that of all. Unlike forests in some countries, where often the trees have little save grass underneath them, and the eye penetrates far into the glades and recesses of the forest, these trees invariably overshadow a tall, dense, matted underwood, and render *one* path absolutely like any other. The only difference on the road to Granada is, that the ground is much more undulating, though still covered by the same sort of forest. These woods were absolutely swarming with game in the shape of deer, wild turkeys, and a sort of moor-fowl; but we only shot enough for the use of the party, consisting of six persons, including guide and servants, one of whom was an Englishman in the service of the doctor.

We travelled about twenty leagues the first day, and slept at a village where we

were able to purchase some Indian corn for our horses, but found the people the most morose set of beings we had ever met with in the country. They seemed to be all a bad sort of half-caste Spaniard, without an Indian among them.

When we started the next morning, we had scarce got three hundred yards on our road, when our guide, whom I had remarked seemed sadly out of temper, turned round and began to spit towards the village, reviling its inhabitants and the fathers and mothers from whom they descended, in the choicest "Chabacano." He would not tell me what had got his back up so high, but he seemed very irate, and said that, on his return, he would rather sleep in the forest than in that "Maldito lugar."

A well-known author writes, that "tobacco soothes the turbulence of the mind," so. giving him a few choice cigars, he soon regained his good humour, and began, when we were half way to Granada, to descant on the beauties, as he considered them, of his own country, for he was a native of Granada domiciled in Leon.

As we got nearer to his native place—"See," said he, "Don Jorge, what a fine road," pointing down to a good track about

fifteen feet broad; "there are no roads like this anywhere else."—"Certainly not," was the reply (it is always best to assent in such cases), "but what is the name of that beautiful lake on the left?"

"Quien sabe?" who knows,—was the reply of one who saw nothing beautiful in a magnificent sheet of water, surrounded by picturesque wooded hills, rocks, and mountains. "But see," Don Jorge, "here is a bresil-tree (logwood); there has been a great deal cut down and sent to the coast."

"I know it, but surely that lake must have some communication with the end of the Nicaragua lake; they are so near, and there seems a quebrada, or gully, that joins them."

"Quien sabe? Ah, this cigar, Don Jorge, is from the 'llanos;' you must have had it sent you from Granada,"—and so on.

I have always found that the most beautiful and romantic sites of nature fail to rouse up one single particle of enthusiasm, or even common admiration, in a wild, uneducated mind. I remember once travelling over about fifty miles of almost a desert in Chili, when my *peon* said to me, "When we get to the top of those small sand-hills we shall see the most beautiful view in the

world,"—and accordingly, in a short time, we saw stretched at our feet the pretty fertile valley of the river Limari, as rich in all sorts of vegetation as the desert we had just passed was sterile: it was fresh and green, with its clear river rippling and winding through the valley, which was dotted, as far as the eye could reach, with white cottages, even one or two gentlemen's houses, and a white church-tower. I asked the peon in what consisted the great beauty he had spoken of. He was astonished at my (to him) want of taste, and replied, "That valley would feed all the mules in the province of Coquimbo." The man was a muleteer!

My Granada guide told me that on the summit of the next hill we should see a beautiful view, and so we did; but I asked him the same question that I put to the peon, and, as I expected, the beauty of the view consisted in his native town, lying at our feet, while he entirely neglected the beautiful, —nay more,—the majestic view of mountain, forest, and lake, that was before us, on as grand a scale as nature can produce. We approached near the western end of the lake, but on the south side, and the opposite shore was clearly visible about fifteen miles distant,

backed by strange-looking volcanic mountains. On the east side the blue horizon was alone visible; and on the west, about sixteen miles from us, the north and south shores had contracted to a sort of canal, about half a mile in breadth, and which seemed to communicate with the former-mentioned lake. From this spot all the canoes and piraguas that are going to the eastward take their departures during the north winds, that throw a great surf upon the coast near Granada; but I had no time to explore, as my stay was only six days, which were fully occupied in seeking out a good piragua, with a trust-worthy crew of Indians, and laying in stock and provisions for a three weeks' cruize, though our voyage only lasted a fortnight. Granada, at the time I was there, was in a state of excitement, produced by a curious cause.

A Frenchman, who called himself the vice-consul, and who hoisted the tri-coloured flag over his store, or rather shop, had just returned from France, and among many speculations, had hit upon the following one:—He had found an old book in France, written during the time of the empire, when French hatred, and ignorance of everything

English, is well known. The speculator had it translated into Spanish, and arrived at Granada with a large edition of (*on dit*) two thousand copies, one volume each; price one dollar; to be sold in all the cities of Central America, for the instruction of the natives, to the prejudice of English, and for the benefit and glory of his own pocket and France.

The speculation was an excellent one, for the whole edition was sold off in a few days; it was bought up by French and Spanish merchants and shopkeepers, to disseminate through the whole country, and, as everybody believes, in a half-barbarous country, that what is in print must be true, so every one I spoke to firmly believed that this atrocious book was fact. Some idea may be formed of the book when the first line of it ran thus:—"*The English cannot fight; they can only assassinate!*" and the whole tenor of the volume was either the same or much worse. There is not a crime on the statute book that was not made to appear as the common mode of English life.

I went with others to the *soi-disant* French Consul's, and having paid my dollar, opened the book, and on reading the first line, told him in Spanish, politely but very plainly, and

before all the crowd, what a rascally liar he must be to circulate such falsehoods. After reading the book, I sent it by the guide, who was returning home, to H. B. M., vice-consul at Realejo, but I heard nothing more of it. Such a mode of doing a rival country harm could never possibly enter into an Englishman's steadier brain.

By the letters I brought with me I was enabled to make a bargain with the patron or owner of a good strong piragua, to take me down to the Boca St. Juan on the Atlantic, and if I remember right, the price was very moderate. I had a patron and ten rowers for a fortnight's voyage, to victual themselves, and I think I only paid five pounds for everything, but laid in my own provisions.

Having made an appointment to be at the above-mentioned canal-looking spot at one o'clock the next day, my servants and guide started with me on horseback early in the morning, as, by the road, the distance is more than twenty miles. My good friend, the doctor, also came to see me off.

On leaving Granada, the road for many miles is the lake's sandy shore itself, bounded on the left hand by a dense forest, and on the right hand by the lake; but the lake is

very shallow near the shore ; it forms a sort of long lagune, about a quarter of a mile broad, bounded on one side by the shore, and on the other by the heavy surf that breaks from the deep water on the shallow bank ; this lagune is clear and tranquil, and never more than three feet in depth.

Along the sandy beach that forms the road a great many alligators come out of the water every night to sleep, but they are all small, averaging about three feet in length, and are seldom seen there above five feet. The larger alligators avoid the vicinity of man,* and generally keep in deeper water, but they frequent much the north side of the lake, which is absolutely uninhabited, and where my rifle turned a good many of them over.

* I must except one instance in the city of Guayaquil, where a party of English merchants were engaged one night at whist during a tremendous long-continued rain, that had flooded the great river into the streets. One of the party, afraid of staying out late, went out into the flooded street on his way home, but fell over what he took for a trunk of a tree. His cries soon brought out lanterns and arms, when it was found he had tumbled over an immense alligator, who had come up with the flood, and was more frightened than the man who tumbled over him. The beast did not make the slightest resistance, and was easily killed.

It is a common amusement with the Indians or the muleteers to hunt these alligators, and it is curious how easily they are killed. When any one passes by the shore early in the morning, these animals awake and run to the water, but, as I have remarked previously, directly they are covered with water they fancy themselves secure, although only a few inches of water may be above them, and three or four men on horseback circling round them. They are killed either with a spear or a machete thrust, or cut at the soft place on the lower side of the neck: a large vein or artery runs under this soft spot, which, being wounded, the animal curls his tail towards his head, and soon dies. We killed several small ones on our way along the shore.

After three or four leagues' travelling along the lake, the road strikes off to the left, and runs for some miles through a very thick forest.

I had recognised, before we left the shore of the lake, the strange booming cry of the red-bearded monkey, that I had seen and heard a year before in another part of that coast. The cry is the most melancholy noise, breaking on the otherwise oppressive silence

of the forest, that it is possible to conceive. In passing through the forest we had an opportunity of observing several over our heads; they seemed to take no notice of us, and I made the same remark as I had done before, that they were all seated on separate trees, and at a distance from one another: perhaps Baron Von Humboldt saw them in another time of the year.

They seemed savage, unsocial, and sulky animals, very different from the lively monkeys that are so often seen in troops playing in the tree-tops. I was half inclined to send a ball through an old savage-looking one for the sake of his curious skin, but, reflecting that a canoe would be a bad place for drying a skin in a hot sun, passed on and arrived at the opposite side of the creek, from where my piragua was waiting. Here I took leave of some of my horses that had carried me many a weary journey, and made presents of them to those I knew would take care of them.

We had to cross over in a sort of ferry canoe, and on our arrival found six Indians, with their horses, were waiting for our departure. The six horses were driven into the water, and their heads made fast to the

gunwales of the boat, three on each side, and then we shoved off; but as the boat pulled much faster than the horses could swim, before they were half way across, they were being towed along half dead, and on their arrival could not stand for some time.

I now took a view of the piragua in which I was fated to live a fortnight. It was a large canoe of about forty feet in length, by about eight feet beam, with five thwarts for ten men to pull double-banked. It was hollowed out of a single magnificent tree, but the sides raised upon about two planks on each side.

The patron, or steerer, had a small compartment aft, in which he kept the provisions for his crew, his tobacco, and jar of spirits: my ramada, as it is called, occupied the part between the patron and the crew.

The ramada is a semi-circular shelter, made sometimes from leafy boughs, from whence the name; but mine was made of bent sticks covered with a tarpauling; it is a very useful shelter against the great heat and the fierce showers constantly occurring in the river St. Juan. It was one of these ramadas that occasioned the death of poor Captain ——, of H.M.S. ——, in the river Chagres; he

was climbing over the top of the ramada when he lost his balance and fell overboard.

My crew consisted of a respectable-looking patron and ten Indians, all dressed in white trowsers, white shirts, and red sashes; but after we had started and pulled up to the northern or weather shore, to avoid the heavy sea, all the rowers, but not the patron, stripped themselves perfectly naked, and remained so day and night until about a mile before our arrival at the sea-coast, when they again put on the trowsers and shirts. They had each a heavy poncho, which they put over them during the night, but never during the heavy showers that only come in the afternoon. On the south side of the lake there are two large towns, and some small villages, but on the north side there is not a hut or cabin; it is quite uninhabited and savage.

I here, for the first time, saw a great many fresh-water sharks, called by the same name as the sea-shark, "tiburon." They are very large, for they have never been molested, and are much dreaded by the boatmen; and one day that I was sitting in the boat, while the men were cooking their dinner on shore, I saw six or seven, with their back-fins well

out of water, swimming round the canoe, and when one of the men waded out to bring me my dinner, I shot right and left at two that were going towards him. He would not go back alone, but said, when they were all together there was not much fear; but they always go on shore with naked swords in their hands.

The wind at this time of the year blowing off the shore, we were able sometimes to use a square lug-sail, hoisted on a spar, without stay or support of any kind, but the hallyard made fast to windward, and the description of one day's living will serve for all.

An hour before sunrise, up anchor and away; just as the sun rose the men left off pulling, and, with all heads uncovered, the patron commenced prayers in a half-chaunting voice, which was now and then responded to by the crew: they then sung a hymn in very fair time and tune, but in unison, and after it was concluded, had a ration of spirits served out equally. The voyage was then proceeded with, either by rowing or sailing, until about seven or eight o'clock, according to the convenience of a spot for cooking breakfast. A sandy spot was always chosen, and while two or three

were cooking on shore, the remainder separated to look for alligators' and turtles' eggs, and also for the purpose of killing iguanas and other small game.

Their usual breakfast was boiled rice, with a little charque or dried meat, and they added to the mess whatever they might have killed, which, if it was iguana and stewed in the rice, was excellent. The breakfast over, the voyage was prosecuted until about midday, when the canoe was run on to a sandy spot and the same sort of meal done over again, but few of their meals took place without having some material addition made to it from the produce of my gun or rifle; such as deer, wild turkey, or now and then a wild duck or two, a bird very scarce in the country.

After dinner, under-way again until sunset, when the patron again chaunts his prayers, and they sing together an evening hymn to the Virgin Mary. They soon after come to an anchor, taking care to keep well away from the shores and from under trees, on account of wild beasts, and, still worse, snakes dropping down from the branches. After eating the cold remains of their dinner, they have another ration of spirits served out to them

(which they always take pure), and wrapping themselves up in their ponchos, stow themselves away on the thwarts or the bottom of the boat for the night.

I was much struck with the pleasing simplicity of their morning and evening worship, and the more so as I had never seen the slightest sign of any worship in the woods; the gross adoration of saints, carved and and dressed in the most grotesque, ridiculous mode, is just as barbarous as the fetish worship on the west coast of Africa. I can truly say I joined with pleasure in their devotions, and they were pleased to see it.

The third day of our voyage produced a very different change in the appearance of the lake; instead of the vast expanse of water, only bounded on the east by the horizon, we had just rounded a head-land, and our view was soon beautifully contracted by a large group of small islands. The largest of them could not be much more than two hundred acres in extent, and the smallest seven or eight; but there were hundreds and hundreds of them as far as the eye could reach: but so lovely were they, so luxuriant, so graceful in shape, form, and clothing, so beautifully reflected from the transparent

water, that no pen could do justice to them, though I have seen a pencil that could.

Each of these islands looked as if a fairy, or, at least, a romantic tale, was connected with it; and each appeared as if it might, at least, be the abode of happiness for those who cared not for the world's passing show. But how futile are even such fancied securities from the strange vicissitudes of fate, the following little simple but, alas! too true, tale will shew.

Passing by one of those islands, I pointed out to the patron the appearance of ruins and the remains of cultivation. He answered, "*Helas!* it is very true; and I often used to carry the produce of that gentleman's island to the Boca St. Juan, and bring him back European goods and silver money." I knew too well, *before*, the romantic story; for it happened the year before, when I was not far from that part of the lake's coast, but wished to hear it as the boatmen repeated it. I will give the story as it happened.

Once upon a time, not long ago, a German student fell in love with a German *mädchen;* but, as the course of true love never does run smooth, so father, and mother, and relations on both sides were against the union of two

simple souls, who loved each other dearly. They then resolved to break all the ties of nature or of friendship that bound them even to their old *fatherland*, and they both determined to go and live in some wild part of the world where, at least, they could live for each other. They had heard of this archipelago of uninhabited fairy islands; and, having turned all their effects into ready money, embarked for the Boca St. Juan: he there engaged a piragua to take himself, wife, and a large quantity of baggage up to the islands. As the German had engaged the piragua for a couple of months, the men assisted him in building temporary huts on the island he had picked out and taken possession of: he then authorised the patron to send him a major-domo and workmen, and they were left to enjoy each other's society.

The servants did arrive, and the head one, or major-domo, was a strong, powerful, half-caste, who brought with him a very good written character, though the event proved it was not deserved.

The German cleared his island, planted sugar-cane, had a small crushing-mill and sugar-pans, &c., and managed to send enough coarse brown caked sugar and poultry, either

to the Boca St. Juan or to Granada, to pay all expenses and save something besides. He even cleared a small adjacent island, and built a sort of four-oared gig to communicate between the two islands. He planted the second small island with sugar-cane, and was superintending it with his boat's crew, when the dreadful catastrophe alluded to took place in the larger one.

The major-domo had been strongly stricken with admiration for the fair German lady of the isles, and had told her so in very plain terms for several weeks before the tragical occurrence. She very foolishly never acquainted her husband with the fact, for fear he should involve himself in a quarrel with one who might be too much for him; but, the evening before the fatal day, she told her husband that she could no longer live in a place where insulting proposals were being constantly made to her. He promised to arrange it all the next day, and that the major-domo should be sent to the main land.

Early next morning, the German went with his boat's crew to the small island, leaving, very imprudently, nobody but the major-domo on the island except his wife. After two or three hours' work on the small island,

the party was alarmed by seeing a thick smoke arising from the larger island, and, manning the boat, they soon regained it; when, on arriving at the hacienda, to the horror of husband and Indians, the house was discovered on fire in several places, and the unfortunate young German lady lying on the floor with her throat cut from ear to ear, and with every evidence that she had been shamefully abused.

The major-domo, after committing this atrocious violence, had taken his own canoe and escaped to the south side of the lake, where he thought to find refuge in the thick woods; but he was shot down three days afterwards, but not in consequence of any exertions of the afflicted German. Poor fellow! he was perfectly stunned and overwhelmed by the blow.

> "It was a trying moment that which found him
> Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
> Where all his household gods lay shiver'd round him."*

And so it *was* a trying one for the German enthusiast; it was months before he could recover so far as to superintend his affairs. He then went to Germany, and, strangely

* Byron.

enough, returned to the Boca St. Juan the day I arrived there, and a rascally half-caste custom-house officer asked him if he had brought out another wife for his next major-domo.

He was going back to the island, and would never leave it, for his wife was buried there.

Poor young woman! she sleeps in peace; her bed is shaded by a few splendid trees; and many a beautiful shrub ornaments the little spot where she lies, free from the troubles that might have been her fate to endure.

The last day we were on the lake we kept under-way, till midnight, when we made the entrance of the river St. Juan and cast anchor till daylight. After prayers the next morning, we unshipped the mast, and it was hidden in the forest, to be taken up on the voyage back. All the rowers went to a pebble beach not far off, and came back with their ponchos full of large round stones; what for, I could not conceive, but waited patiently to see to what use they were to be put. After breakfast we started down the river, which, for the first mile or two, is about the breadth of the Thames at Kew, but soon narrows to about seventy or eighty yards. The use of the pebbles the crew had on board was soon

apparent: pulling about eight or ten yards from the left bank, we saw many iguanas on the branches of the bushes, and these Indians were such capital shots, that they knocked over several in the course of the day. After all their stones were exhausted, they asked me to try shot, and they soon found out that a double-barrelled gun obtained them more iguanas than their volleys of stones could; but it is rather dangerous work pulling in under the bushes to pick them up, as we brushed off several snakes from the branches into the boat, and the boatmen in general take great care to avoid all overhanging branches.

The third day on the river we came to the great rapid, as it is called, which, after a little preparation, we shot down; it is more than a mile in length and runs with great rapidity. When we were half way down, the stream overpowered us, and, instead of keeping the channel, we ran right on a heap of rocks in the middle of the river, and about a foot under water, and if the canoe had not been excessively strong, and framed out of a single tree, we must have been smashed to pieces, we hung in this position for about a quarter of an hour, when, by dint of exertion,

the after part of the boat swung round, and away we went stern foremost at a merry rate down the rapid, and got safely into still water.

Below this rapid the river (for it was in the dry season, though we had one or two tremendous showers every day) got very shallow, for, the lake being low, the river was so likewise. At last we stuck fast in the sand, and all hands, including myself, turned overboard, to dig a channel to the next deep water. We were two days digging the channel and hauling at the piragua, and had only got half way when we discovered an easier way, and going back by the channel we had dug, soon got afloat again.

On getting within two or three days' journey from the coast, there are a great many creeks that join the main river, and as we were breakfasting one morning, a small fast-pulling canoe, containing three men, made its appearance from one of them. The men seemed much alarmed on seeing us, and they all fitted an arrow to their slight-looking bows. Our patron said to me, "They are Caribees; do not say you are *Inglese;* for they are so dreadfully alarmed at the name of English, that there is no knowing what

they may do." On their coming within hail, they cried out "Inglese?" and on the patron shaking his head, and answering "No," they laid down their arms and came alongside. They were all naked, except a very slight covering round the loins, and were of a much lighter hue than any Indian I had ever seen before. They were more of a yellow brown; and the two young men who were fishing and paddling were well made, but rather fat; the third, a very old man, and who was steering with a paddle, was the most extraordinary-looking being I ever met with. His long white hair reached his waist, and covered his breast and shoulders, but his skin looked more like an alligator's back than that of a human being, and was of various colours. We gave them something to eat, and I then gave them some cigars, which they all enjoyed very much; before we started, however, I pointed to myself, saying *Inglese*, giving them to understand I was an Englishman. Their sudden alarm was excessive, for they sprung to their paddles, and hurried off with the greatest speed.

I tried to get at the story of these Caribees, and how they had got to that part of the world; and partly from our patron, but

principally from some Mosquito Indians on the coast, I learnt the following particulars about them.

A long time ago (when I could not make out, but I thought about a hundred years), these Caribee Indians lived on some of those small islands in the Caribean seas, that were the haunts and rendezvous of the pirates and buccaniers of that epoch. These pirates were mostly English, or from the North American colonies, and the habitual violence and barbarities they practised upon the unfortunate natives induced the latter to abandon their homes and country, and seek that quiet on the main land they were denied on their own islands. They landed on the Mosquito shore, and established themselves on the coast between the spot now called Bluefields and the Boca St. Juan; but the life did not suit them. The Mosquito Indians used to jeer at them for their want of skill and enterprise in striking turtle and taking their boats through the heavy surf, until at last, having discovered an inland lake connected with the river St. Juan by a creek, or "estero," as they call it, they abandoned the sea-shore and took up their dwellings on the banks of this lake, and sometimes, but not often, a few of these

Indians may be seen fishing on the river, rather far from home, in their small but fast canoes.

They have no trade, commerce, or even barter with other tribes, and certainly have a dread of the English, which has probably been handed down to them by tradition from their forefathers. Judging by the rather fat condition of the specimens we saw, they could not be in much want of food.

The morning we arrived at the Boca we got under-way two hours before daylight, and after pulling until sun-rise, the men laid in the oars and sung their morning-hymn, after which the patron chaunted a prayer different from what I had yet heard, and which was a thanksgiving for having performed our voyage in safety. They then washed themselves and the piragua and resumed their white shirts, trowsers, and red sashes, that had been carefully stowed away since our departure. We then proceeded on our journey, and soon landed at the Boca, which consists of a few miserable huts and a shed that does duty for a custom-house.

This poor village is built on the western end of a slip of low sandy land on the left bank, about two or three hundred yards in

breadth and about half a mile in length, bounded to the north and to the west by a dense jungle, with a small fresh-water stream at the edge, and on the south and east by the river and coast. Towards the eastern end stands a very curious but very comfortable dwelling, built of wood, and occupied by an old English gentleman of the name of Shepherd, who exercises great hospitality to any one in want of it, and possesses much authority among the Mosquito Indians all along the coast. He was kind enough to receive me until an opportunity should occur to enable me to proceed to the West Indies. I stayed with him five days, when a man-of-war schooner packet came in, and taking my berth, I sailed for Jamaica, touching at several places on the main—Salt Creek, Chagres, and Carthagena. I was lucky enough to meet at Chagres a vice-consul whom I had known on the Pacific coast, and we agreed to travel home together. We stayed twelve days at Jamaica; from thence went to Cuba, and on to St. Domingo, where, having to remain three days in expectation of a Falmouth packet, we had an opportunity of seeing a little about us, and had the pleasure of witnessing a review of troops and

National Guards to celebrate the anniversary of some saint or revolution; I forget which: such talking and squabbling in the black ranks I never heard, and I certainly never saw so much gold embroidery or gold lace on any officers of any army as upon the coats, trowsers, and caps of these negroes. They marched on to the ground by different regiments commanded by their respective colonels, but the covering serjeants of all had been sent on before to take up company's distances, and, when on the ground, each company filed on to its own covering serjeant, so that about forty or fifty companies coming from different directions were jostling and almost fighting, and it was a long time before they got into open column, right in front. Then came a general with his staff, who was afterwards to receive a greater general than himself. The command equivalent to our "Left wheel into line," was then given, but the companies' distances had been taken up in such an absurd way that some companies had at least half their files in the rear of its right company; and others left vacancies of ten or fifteen files; so after closing right and left for a good half hour, they were obliged to give it up, and form close column in rear of the right company, and

then deploy into line. That operation at last being effected, three guns were unlimbered on each flank, and the whole awaited the approach of the great man. At last he came, mounted on a small ewe-necked white horse, or rather pony, looking very like a goat, and, surrounded by a "Brilliant Staff," he advanced towards the centre, when the word "Present arms," being given, round turned the little horse and left the great man on the ground. They then marched past and then home, and we returned to our ship, but I could not help comparing what I had seen with my old regiment, the Forty-third, and thinking it would not be much for them to do to walk over them all. We shifted our berth on board a Falmouth sailing-packet, and, after a very fast passage, arrived in England on the same day of the year I left it, having been a wanderer in America for six years.

THE END.

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