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## IN THE NIGER DELTA.

### Horrible Superstitions Prevailing in that Part of Africa.

Lizard and Snake Worship—A Mother Rejoicing to See Her Child Devoured by a Python—Good Work Done by Christian Missionaries.

In the last issue of the "Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society," London, there is an unusually interesting article on "the Niger Delta" in Africa, of which the following synopsis has been made for the New York Ledger:

The Ijos represents to-day the ruling people of the extreme lower Niger, of Brass, of New Calabar, Bonny and Opobo. In times past they were fanatic adherents of a savage type of animistic religion. Like the majority of the Africans, they did not know or conceive of the existence of one supreme God, but embodied a number of natural principles in the forms of certain animals, or in a concrete representation of "fetiches" or idols.

Each little community had its "totem," or sacred animal, in whose species the ancestral spirit—the soul of the tribe, so to speak—was supposed to dwell. Thus in Brass they worshipped the python snake; in Bonny the monitor lizard. Only nine or ten years ago this animal worship was so real that the British authorities in the Oil Rivers were compelled to afford it a certain amount of recognition. Europeans were forbidden to kill the sacred lizard of Bonny, or the still more sacred serpent of Brass, or were heavily fined by their Consul if they infringed this prohibition.

On one occasion, in Brass, some ten or twelve years ago, an agent of Messrs. Hatton & Cookson's firm found a large python in his house and killed it. When the misdeed became known the Brass people made a descent on the factory, dragged the agent out of the house on to the beach, tied him up by his thumbs, spat in his mouth, and inflicted other indignities on him. Then they broke open the store, and took out £20 worth of goods, which they confiscated. The British consul, hearing of the disturbance, arrived in Brass, considered the case, and was unable to afford the agent any redress, because he was supposed to have brought the punishment upon himself.

At Bonny the monitor lizards became a sickening nuisance. They devoured the Europeans' fowls, turkeys, ducks and geese with impunity; they might lie across the road or doorways of houses with their six feet of length, and savagely lash the shins of people who attempted to pass them with their whip-like serrated tails, and if you wounded or killed one of them, there was no end of a dole. You were assaulted or robbed by the natives, harangued by the Consul on board of a man of war, and possibly fined into the bargain.

In other parts of the delta it might be the shark, or the crocodile, or some water-bird that was worshipped, but nowhere was this zoology carried to greater lengths than at Bonny and Brass. For its effectual abolishment, which has been of the greatest benefit to the well-being of Europeans and natives alike, we owe our thanks not to the intervention of naval or consular officials, nor to the bluff remonstrances of traders, but to the quiet, unceasing labors of the agents of the Church Missionary Society, who, by winning the natives from these absurd practices, have brought about such a change of affairs that now the python is promptly killed at Brass whenever it makes its appearance, and the monitor lizard is relegated to the woods and swamps. Indeed, as regards the latter animal, there was rather a curious revolution of feeling.

About four years ago, when Bonny Town was infested with numbers of these great, sluggish lizards, the missionaries screwed the courage of the Bonny converts (who then meant almost the entire population of the place) to the sticking point. A grand slaughter of lizards was arranged to take place on Easter Sunday. As soon as the morning bells of the mission church rang out a large number of Bonny men and boys armed themselves with machetes and sticks and commenced the slaughter of the lizards. By the end of the day there was not one left alive in the town, and so great were the numbers slaughtered that the stench almost brought about a sickness, and for four or five days the town was unapproachable.

But in slaughtering the lizards much else of the old superstition seemed to go, and that event marked the real revolution, and a turning towards better things on the part of the Bonny people. A change almost similarly abrupt put an end to the python worship at Brass. Before that time, if a python seized a child in the street in its coils and slavered it with its vicious saliva, the mother—so far from interfering to save it—must stand by and call out her thanks, and summon her friends and relatives to rejoice with her that the god-python had so honored her family as to devour her child.

### VENOMOUS REPTILES.

The Astonishingly Large Rate of Mortality from Serpentine Venom.

If the published figures are at all accurate, from twelve to twenty thousand persons die in British India from snake bite, largely from that of the cobra, which is a serpent of domestic habits. That the reptile was not long ago exterminated from all inhabited localities, says a writer in the Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette, is owing to the fact that it is worshipped by many of the natives. Even to-day in Malabar Hill, the most fashionable European quarter of Bombay, a short tune played on a musical instrument rarely fails to bring a cobra out of some hole or crevice, for native veneration is too much for English caution. The natives are the chief sufferers from this folly. Very few Englishmen have been bitten, for they do not walk out bare-footed, and usually take a cane to poke the grass through which they walk. We believe only four or five whites of prominence have been bitten by poisonous snakes in India since the opening of the present century, and one of these was a midshipman on a vessel in the Bay of Bengal. One of the deadly hydrads, or water snakes, had been fished up, and the unfortunate youth handled it without knowing that it was venomous. Had the Hindoos exercised common sense, there would now be few cobras outside of the jungles. Martinique and the neighboring islands of St. Lucia each report a mortality from serpentine venom rivaling that of India, for each of these islands is overrun with the fer de lance, a fiercely aggressive viper, which has the peculiarity of giving birth to sixty little snakes at once.

African explorers have their troubles with snakes, but they avoid the palm of danger not to them, nor to the lions or

leopards, but to the fierce wild buffalo bulls. During Prof. Drummond's recent journey to Lake Nyassa, two of his followers were tossed by one of these savage creatures, and it was almost a miracle that one of the wounded men survived the injuries to his shoulders and ribs. The puff adder, an apparently sluggish creature, resembling in build, though not in its gorgeous colors, the horrible black and clumsy cottonmouthed moccasins of our Southern swamps, has a pleasant trick of burying itself in the leaves and moss and of striking backward at any person who happens to come near it. The naia haje, a first cousin of the Indian cobra, but more aggressive and irritable, and the mamba, which runs down its victims, are the principal remaining poisonous serpents of Africa. There are green, black and flame-colored mambas, the last mentioned being often crested. The mambas sometimes reach a length of twelve feet, and are known to have chased a horseman for miles. Their bite is almost certain death.

A survey of the serpentine kingdom establishes the fact that the most poisonous snakes are afraid of human beings. The chief exception are the mamba, the naia haje and the great ophiophagus elaps, or hamadryad, of Burmah. This creature, which rivals the mamba in length, has an expanding head like the cobra and naia haje, but differs from both in some anatomical particulars and also in the fact that it is a cannibal, living principally on other snakes. One of them chased a Burman in the woods a few years ago. The man ran, and thought to escape by swimming across a narrow stream. To his horror, on reaching the farther bank he found that the snake had crossed ahead of him. In his despair he tore off his turban and threw it at the reptile. The latter was obliging enough to go for the white rag and waste his venom upon it, the man meanwhile making his escape.

The mambas are principally found in Natal, though they exist to some extent as far north as Zanzibar, and may even have spread as far as the desert. We have found no mention of their presence in Egypt or in the Sinaic Peninsula. There is nothing in their habits, however, which would exclude them from the Northern tropics and subtropics, for they flourish under similar climatic influences south of the line. We notice that an item in its travels to the effect that the "serpents" which killed so many of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt were guinea worms, scientifically known as the aracunulus. These fearful creatures bury themselves in human flesh, producing sores which often prove fatal. We doubt, however, whether they can be made to fulfill the demands of the Scripture narrative. We read in Numbers, xxi., that "the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and much people of Israel died."

Geology has made us acquainted with extinct reptiles with whom one would not like to meet, even were he clothed in a coat of mail and armed with a repeating rifle. From some of these monsters the dragons and griffins which figure in the folk lore of all nations were undoubtedly depicted. They have happily gone, never to return, as have most of the rattlesnakes which formerly infested our oldest States. To this day, however, an occasional rattler is killed in the Blue Hills of Milton, less than a dozen miles from Boston, and the sea serpent, an apparently solitary relic of the saurian days, every now and then makes his appearance in the ocean.

Recent travelers in Alaska have heard from the Indians, though their faith has not been strengthened by sight, that herds of mastodon are yet feeding in the almost inaccessible interior pastures of our new possessions. We hope the story may prove to be true, and that a paleozoic specimen may yet be on exhibition in our menageries. Our belief is not strong in that direction, however, though when one has seen the octopus, or devil fish, first brought into prominence by Victor Hugo, he is prepared to believe almost anything. The choice would not be a pleasant one, but in the alternative of being bitten by a naia or mamba, or of being cupped to death by an octopus, we think most persons would choose the former.

### AN OLD SALT'S YARN.

A Treasure Found in a Cleverly-Made Wooden Leg.

The Whale and the Clam—A Jonah-Like Escape from Death—A Novel Combination of Wine Cellar, Bank and Safety Deposit Vault.

An old man sat on the edge of the string-piece of a South street dock ingeniously splicing a hawser, and his only companion was a short, black clay pipe, from which he puffed spasmodically clouds of rank plug tobacco smoke with much energy and satisfaction. His age, says the New York Tribune, was about sixty; his hair long and gray, and about his withered but kindly countenance there were many signs of the hardships and privations he had experienced during "a life on the ocean wave."

Yet his appearance was not particularly nautical, aside from a sou'western and a few brass buttons which adorned an ancient "reefer." Nor would he have attracted much attention had it not been for an old-fashioned wooden leg which was devoid of all external covering below the knee except a coat of white paint. It was, moreover, his right leg or a necessary substitute for that useful member, and consisted seemingly of a straight piece of timber which tapered very awkwardly down from his knee into a thick brass ferule at the bottom.

There was no crutch beside him, and the reporter was curious to know how he managed to get about the deck of a vessel with such a primitive-looking limb, when he rose from his occupation and hobbled vigorously over a narrow plank from the dock to the deck of a rakish-looking little schooner, with a remarkable cat-like agility. Then along the deck and down into the Eliza Anne's cabin the tall, angular and eccentric figure disappeared for a few moments, returning to his work with a large jack-knife, with which he proceeded to trim off the waste or ragged ends of a neat splice.

"Kinder spy, for an old fellow with a timber leg—ain't it?" he observed, noticing the writer had been watching him.

"You are, indeed?" emphatically responded the astonished reporter, taking a seat by his side.

"Yes, and few on 'em's smarter nor me to this day at sea—as I always says to 'my eldest son, Bill, who owns part of that there schooner. But, of course, I ain't up to most scaling a riggin' or going aloft nowadays—which was the cause of my losing my right leg, and subsequent adoptin' of this here apparattus."

"How long have you worn it?"  
"Thirty—yes, thirty-two years ago last October, I was blowed off the yardarm of Cap'n Sammie's peerless clipper ship, the Dreadnaught—going to the east'ard. There was a gale, and all hands were piped up to reef and shorten sail, when the first thing I knew I kinder lost me footing on the 'stirrup' of the lower foretopmast yard, and was thrown on deck."

"And—"  
"And this here leg that used to be was so badly broken that it had to be amputated at the knee the next day by the ship's surgeon, and when we arrived in Liverpool I was taken to the Seamen's Hospital and laid up for repairs."

"Then," continued the ancient mariner, after regarding this wooden extremity with much admiration for several moments, "I became acquainted with another crippled sailor who died of consumption. 'Take this, Joe,' says he, pointing to this here leg. 'Tain't much, I know,' says he, 'but may be useful when you get well' and with that he died."

"Did it fit?"  
"Yes, to a T, and one day I was examining of its wonderful mechanical construction inside, when I found beneath a secret plug in the hollow part of the leg here a wad of bank notes that took my breath away. Two hundred and fifty pounds, sir, as true as I'm Cap'n Joseph Saltus, of Glo'ster."

"What did I do with 'em? Why, bless your heart, put 'em back again and never let on to nobody I'd found 'em for fear (in a confidential whisper) his poor relations'd hear of the discovery and expect me to settle up. Then, after I had been in the hospital two months, 'Cap'n Sam' visited me personally, kind soul! and insisted on my returnin' to his ship and acceptin' of a job in the galley. My cruise as assistant cook aboard the old Dreadnaught came mighty near ending in a watery grave."

"How was that?"  
"You see we were bound for New York, and just off the banks got into a calm, and I thought I'd try my luck fishin'. So I took a big cod hook and line and sat on the fore'ard rail, baiting the hook with a whole clam, and, after tying the line to this wooden appendage for a fishing pole, cast out to starboard for a bite. I sat there for a whole hour and was almost asleep, when all of a sudden there came such a tug that I went overboard. It was a whale. Just when I expected to be swallowed whole like 'Jonah something gave way and I was picked up on the port side of the ship. The worst of it was there wasn't but one man aboard who believed a whale had pulled me overboard."

"You see most of the crew were asleep, and to make matters worse, me and the mate, a man who refused to eat my apple dumplin', wasn't extra friendly, and he swore that I was drunk at the time, which assertion most 'em believed until we arrived off Sandy Hook and discovered a dead whale."

"Another!" murmured the astonished reporter, preparing to hear a fresh whale story.

"No," interrupted the Captain, with an artful wink, "the same whale that I hooked off the Banks."

"But how did you know it?"  
"Why, by the line that was hanging out of its mouth with this here leg attached to it, of course."

"What, you lost your leg, then?"  
"Yes, for the time being, and I was mighty lucky I had one to lose, for I might have lost my life if I hadn't parted with my leg."

"True! But what killed the whale?"  
"The clam," insisted the Cap'n, "which was the biggest and toughest clam I ever saw before or since I baited that hook in the spring of '58 on board the Dreadnaught. But the thought of that whale always makes me dry," concluded the Cap'n, bracing his back against a mooring spile, and twisting his wooden leg until that eccentric member was disjoined at the knee.

Then, after peering into its internal mysteries with one eye shut, as if looking through a telescope, he extricated a bag of canvas, which, when tenderly unfolded, contained a large black bottle, which he gazed at with unmistakable reverence, and turning to his amused companion with a sly twinkle in his starboard eye, said:

"Great scheme, ain't it? A wine cellar bank, and safe deposit vault all in one, and nobody, not even my old woman, able to get at its valuable contents. Take a nip."  
Go to the Eel, Ye Lazy Hens.  
The Popular Science Monthly asserts that an eel lays 9,000,000 eggs. This is a good deal to swallow. Those noisy barnyard cacklers, the hens, should go and learn wisdom from their slippery rivals.

### OOZY-HEADED PEOPLE.

Beware of Persons Between Whose Ears and Mouth There is No Partition.

You would not pour precious wine into a sieve, yet that were as wise as to make a confidant of one of those "leaky vessels" of society that, like corporation water-carts, seem to have been made for the express purpose of letting out what they take in. There is this difference, however, says the New York Ledger, between the perforated puncheon and the leaky brain—the former lays the dust and the latter is pretty sure to raise a dust.

Beware of oozy-headed people, between whose ears and mouth there is no partition. Before you make a bosom friend of any man be sure that he is secret-tight. The mischief that the non-retentives do is infinite. In war they often mar the best-laid schemes and render futile the most profound strategy. In social life they sometimes set whole communities by the ears, frequently break up families and are the cause of innumerable "misfortunes," "miseries" and crimes. In business they spoil many a promising speculation and involve hundreds in bankruptcy and ruin. Therefore, be very careful to whom you intrust information of vital importance to your own interests or to the interests of those you hold dear.

Every man has a natural inclination to communicate what he knows, and if he does not do so it is because his reason and judgment are strong enough to control this inherent propensity. (When you find a friend who can exercise absolute power over the communicative instinct—if we may so term it—wear him in your heart: "yea, in your heart of heart." If you have no such friend, keep your own counsel.)

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