

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 1899.

FORETOLD BY PARROTS.

FEATHERED EARTHQUAKE SHARP IN GUATEMALA.

Excitement Among the Birds Just Before the Shock Came—Respect Inspired in Natives by Their Dealings with Satan—A Duel Between Parrots.

'You had best not ride the black mule to-day, Don Carlos,' said the old Indian on the Guatemalan coffee finca to the young American. The latter was preparing to take a nine-mile ride to the Post Office and returned before noon breakfast. 'There is going to be a bad earthquake, the Indian continued, 'and the mule will be frightened to death. Take the little bay beast instead.'

'Don't you think I can manage the mule? I'm not afraid of her,' replied Don Carlos. 'It's not that, Senor. If the quake comes when the mule is tied, she will break away for certain. Nothing will hold her, and I know there is going to be a big earthquake.'

'How do you know that Manuel?' Did the spirit in the Takana volcano inform you or are you a good guesser on the subject?' asked Don Carlos incredulously. 'Are you an earthquake expert?'

'The parrots have been making much noise this morning, Don Carlos. I know there will be an earthquake and a bigger one than usual. The parrots always raise such a rumpus when a heavy one is coming. You will see I am right, Senor.'

The parrots had been keeping up a terrible racket ever since daybreak that morning, so much so that Don Alejandro, whose English blood had resented deeply their intrusion on his plantation without permission, had risen wrathfully in his pajamas and fired a load of shot at the birds nearest the house. This only had the effect of driving them to a safer distance in the tops of the tall, sentinel-like trees scattered sparsely among the coffee. From these points of vantage they jeered and hooted at Don Alejandro for an hour or more in the native parrot language. The parrots were wild and knew not the speech of man—only such profanity as was directed at their heads on account of their noise and clamour. They made such a discord flying from one tree to another and telling their stories in harsh, strident tones, that sleep was out of the question. Don Alejandro was forced to forgo his morning nap. He therefore got under the refreshing shower bath and ordered the morning cup of coffee, with the slice of bread accompaniment, which in the tropics does for breakfast.

Don Alejandro and Don Carlos drank their coffee and then, the younger man ordered the mule saddled. He took the advice of Manuel and rode the steady mule. The parrots must have had some sort of a tip after all. Don Carlos had ridden scarcely two thirds of the nine miles when the earthquake came and proved to be a big one. It was, indeed, much worse than the imaginary earthquake seemed to be on the night when the big house dog sneaked under the lone bed, and rising, made the sleeper think the world was coming to an end. This time the quake was so pronounced that the pools of muddy water in the road—it was in the rainy season—were greatly agitated. The mule spread her legs apart like the supports of a particularly bow-legged dachshund and waited until the thing was over. The animal swayed and rocked under Don Carlos as if she had been a ship in a heavy sea. When the quaking had ceased, the mule gave a sigh of relief, a snort, and proceeded. All the time the parrots had been flying overhead, shouting out in their jarring, discordant tones. 'I told you so! I told you so!'

Don Carlos scratched his head and marvelled. 'I wonder how those birds knew what was coming,' he said to himself. 'They must be in league with Old Nick.'

In Guatemala the parrots have much the same reputation among the natives as the blue jays possess among the negroes of the States. Like the jays they are popularly supposed to have private dealings with Satan. On this account they are respected to a certain extent. Though the Indians and country people are fond of making pets of them they seldom kill the birds. The most sought after are not the pure green, but those with yellow or red marks on the neck and crest. From being feathered boiler factories in sound when in their wild state, they become honey-voiced creatures when tamed and educated. They live in the soft mellifluous Spanish tongue, with the accent of the pure Castilian. They

even shrug what shoulders they have in keeping with this. When one of them is told, 'Adios, chico' (good-bye, little one), it will respond quickly and cheerfully with 'Adios, Senor bueno,' followed by a string of felicities a yard long with, as a fitting ending, a kiss, which expresses the essence of bliss.

The parrots of Guatemala are something of birds of passage and pleasure. In the early morning they can be seen flying from the lowlands, where they make their roosting places, to the high ground. They frequent the coffee fincas situated at an elevation of from 2,000 to 4,000 feet above sea level, in the day. They feed on bananas, plantains, and other fruits. Always cheerful, ever restless, they skip from one to another of the tall trees, enjoying themselves by spinning up in true parrot style the smooth, white shafts of the tropical forests. They finish up their business in the highlands regularly about an hour before the sun sets. Then they depart, never singly, but in couples or flocks of 6 or 7, for their roosting places further down, where it is warmer at night. They fly high, resembling somewhat pigeons on the wing, but not moving so swiftly. While in flight they utter their accustomed cries. So regular are the parrots in their comings and goings that the natives keep the time of day by them. If an Indian is asked the hour in the early morning, he morning, he will respond:

'It is not much after sunrise, Senor. The parrots have not long come.' If at noon, or thereabouts, he will say: 'It must be midday, Senor. The parrots are quiet.' Like the rest of the inhabitants of the country who can do so, the parrots take a siesta at noon. At any rate they are silent.

It was the writer's fortune to witness a novel conflict in the heart of a Guatemalan forest between two parrots. It was in the afternoon, and the long wait for a deer, which never came, by the side of a mountain stream that had been fatiguing. It was warm in the forest. On one side of the stream a little river rippled over the stones. Save for the drone always heard in such a place the occasional chirp of an insect, the rustle of an animal, probably a peccary, in the foliage all was still. The gigantic ferns and vines waited together effectually concealed the watcher, as he leaned his back against the smooth, white trunk of a tree which ran straight up in the air, without a limb, for seventy-five or eighty feet. The hunter had almost fallen asleep. Suddenly, screaming shrilly and fiercely, two parrots darted out from the surrounding foliage, apparently so intent on their quarrel as to be totally unaware of the presence of a man. Up and down, around the tree, first one in pursuit then the other, they flew with feathers ruffled and every evidence of parrot rage. Several times they vanished in the dark depths of the forest, their cries growing fainter and fainter. Then as quickly they appeared, and the chase about the white body of the tree began again.

Apparently with one accord the two birds alighted. They were fine specimens, both males, from their brilliant plumage and their size. The deer forgotten, the hunter watched the two contestants. They rested within a foot or so of one another, bills open and neck feathers ruffled, like two gamecocks. Then, as if sparring for an op-ning, they advanced on one another. Feathers flew, and both retreated. They were too tired from their efforts to utter more than an occasional cry. As quick as a flash one darted at the other, seizing its neck in the powerful beak. There was a snip! like that of a pair of shears through a thick piece of cloth. With its neck hanging limp and striving to retain a foothold by one claw, the injured bird fluttered to the ground, catching here and there an outstretched branch or vine tendril. With a cry of triumph the victor flew swiftly into the forest and was gone. When examined the dead bird was found to have had its neck almost severed. Those who have experienced the force of a bite from the strong bill of one of the birds can recognize how readily the feathered conqueror disposed of its rival. As a general thing the Guatemalan parrot is considered to have an excellent disposition, compared with those of some of the other Central American States. It is asserted, however, that such conflicts are not infrequent among them.

The best parrots on the Pacific coast, at least from Panama to San Francisco, are said to come from Corinto, Nicaragua. Every north bound steamer which stops at that port takes on board dozens of the birds. The occupants of the fore-castle do considerable speculation in that line, disposing of the birds in San Francisco at two or three hundred per cent. above their cost price in silver or tin money. It was this which led a traveler on a ship to San Francisco to remark sardonically that after leaving Corinto there were far more parrots aboard than passengers.

The birds build their nests in hollow trees, and they must be taken young in

order to be properly educated for pets. No parrot having attained its majority without having become acquainted with a human can be tamed.

THE TARTARIAN LAMB.

A Strange Plant that Closely Resembles an Animal.

Among the strange stories to be found in the narratives of early travelers, few are stranger than that of the vegetable lamb of Tartary. This story, as believed by the reading public, and even by the naturalists of two centuries ago, is so marvelous, and so obviously absurd that we wonder how the most credulous could have believed it to be true.

The story is that in an elevated and cultivated salt plain of great extent, west of the river Volga, there may be found a creature half-animal, half-plant, to which the natives give the name of barometz meaning 'little lamb.' To obtain it, the Tartars sow in the ground a seed like that of a melon, from which, in due time, rises the strange plant, having the figure of a lamb, with the feet, the hoofs, the ears, and the whole head, except the horns, of that animal distinctly formed.

It grows on a stalk about three feet in height, being according to one version, rooted to the ground by its four feet, while another account raises the whole lamb, feet and all, from the ground on a single stem, on which it is able to turn, and also to bow itself downwards to the herbs on which it feeds. It lives as long as there is grass or herbage around it, but when it has consumed all within its reach, it dies, and withers away. Its skin is covered with a very white down, as fine as silk, and is greatly prized by the Tartars, who pull it off, and wear it as a cover for the head.

Inside, it is composed of flesh and bones and when wounded it gives out a liquid resembling blood. Wolves are said to be the only animals that will eat it, and they are very fond of it.

Specimens of this remarkable production were looked upon as the rarest treasures in the collections of the curious in days gone by. Two different specimens have been described in the 'Philosophical Transactions,' and a third has its portrait given in an engraving in Darwin's 'Flower Garden' and its history told in the florid verse of that work.

The 'lamb' is a natural production, greatly helped, in the development of the particulars in which it most resembles that creature, by the ingenuity of the natives. The body is a portion of the creeping stem of a species of fern which generally grows as erect as a tree. This stem is densely covered with beautiful, jointed silky hairs, of a rich golden color.

On the surface next to the ground a few roots are given off, while the leaves—or fronds as they are called in ferns spring from the upper surface. The fronds reach a height of twelve or fourteen feet, and have a long bare stock before the leaf is spread out. The Tartar takes a suitable part of this creeping stem for a body, deprives it of the roots, and of all the stalks except four, which are intended to be the legs two short ones for the ears, and a stump for the tail, and then turning it upside down, trims the stem, and so produces this marvel of the early explorers. The fern, known to botanists as the cibotium barometz, is a native of Eastern Asia; it has been introduced into our conservatories, where it flourishes, producing after a few years' growth, good specimens of the 'lamb.'

The silky hairs of this form a favorite remedy among the Chinese for checking the flow of blood by applying them to a wound in the same way that felt or cowhairs are used by some people in this country. The most fibrous and elastic hairs of several species of the same group, natives of the Sandwich Islands, are largely exported from these islands to California and Australia for stuffing cushions and for similar purposes.—Philadelphia Times.

Found the Needle After Many Years.

In the summer of 1881 Miss Emma J. Keener of Marion, Ohio, swallowed a needle one inch and a fourth long, which she had used in sewing. At the time it gave her much alarm, but, suffering no inconvenience, she was advised to await the results, as nothing could be done but to let it have its course. The following year she married Jacob W. Berry. She is now the mother of six children, but has not suffered from any serious illness, occasionally complaining of a distress in the stomach, which was attributed to indigestion. For three days past she has complained of something pricking her in the pit of the stomach, which sensation increased in violence, until last evening she discovered a

sharp point protruding from the stomach just below the costiform cartilage, and, upon grasping it, brought out the broken needle, three-fourths of an inch in length. The question now that troubles the patient is, What has become of the other piece of the needle, and how did it become broken? She is suffering no inconvenience, but is somewhat nervous over the result.—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

TRICKS OF SHARP SMUGGLERS.

Shrewd Schemes by Which Diamonds are Brought in Duty Free.

On the line of the Grand Trunk Railway near the little town of Merriton, Ont., and about ten miles from the Niagara River, is a short tunnel through which the railroad passes under the Welland Canal. This little tunnel, though insignificant of itself, has been the means of baffling the detectives of the American customs more times than they would care to acknowledge and yet it seems they have never got on to it. To illustrate how it is done I will describe the methods employed by the smuggling agents of two large jewelry firms. The same men—there are three of them—are employed by both firms, and probably by others.

It is a well-known fact, and to none better than the smugglers, that no considerable purchase of precious stones can be made in Europe without the purchaser and his bargain becoming immediately an object of interest to the agents of the American Government, and thenceforward kept in sight. So that the agent who goes to Montreal to receive them does so fully expecting to be watched and tracked from the moment they come into his possession. As a general rule this expectation is fully realized, but still the advantage is on the side of the smuggler, for his plans are fully matured, and he has the confidence of experience, while the detective, no matter how shrewd, can only watch and await developments.

Having secured the precious package Agent No. 1 as I shall call him, instead of starting for the nearest point on the line, buys a ticket for Toronto, managing to arrive in that city in the evening, and spending the night there. Next morning he buys a ticket for Buffalo, and takes the train for that place, a movement which no doubt meets the full approval of the patient watcher.

At the little city of St. Catharines, about four miles from the above mentioned tunnel, the train is boarded by a man who from his dress would be taken for a mechanic, who enters the smoker, taking care if possible to secure a seat near which there is at least one other vacant. As the train leaves St. Catharines, Agent No. 1 develops a desire for smoking, and entering the smoker secures a seat as near as possible to the roughly dressed man, who is Agent No. 2. After a short stop at Merriton the train moves on and a few moments later plunges into the darkness of the tunnel, which is so intense as to render seeing impossible. Before the light once more appears there is a quick and silent movement, and the precious package has passed from the hand of No. 1 into those of No. 2 and when the train emerges from the tunnel, both are calmly smoking and apparently unaware of each other's existence.

When the train pulls into Niagara Falls, on the Canadian side, No. 2 drops off and disappears, while No. 1 remains on till the American side is reached, where, if he

has been watched as expected, he is compelled to submit to a most rigorous search, which, of course results in nothing, save the wear and tear on the feelings of the disgusted sleuth who has been following him. Meanwhile Agent No. 2 has telegraphed a few vague words to No. 3, who is quietly waiting in Buffalo, upon receipt of which No. 3 buys a ticket for Chicago via G. T. R., and taking an ordinary looking valise, catches the train which suits his purpose. Arrived at the Bridge, which is the entrance to Canada, the Canadian official, finding that he is going through to Chicago, places a little strip of paper on the valise, which virtually declares that having come from the United States and being bound for the same country without stopping, it is not worth examining. When the train leaves Niagara Falls, Ont., it carries agent No. 2 and 3, and when the tunnel is reached the package changes hands once more, passing from No. 2 to No. 3, and into the bonded valise. At St. Catharines, Agent No. 2 leaves the train, and No. 3 continues his journey. At Detroit the American official sees the bonding strip on the valise, perhaps adds, 'Come right through, but more likely says nothing and passes on, and thus the package is safely on American soil, the after part being too easy to be worth mentioning.

TO TELL HARMLESS SNAKES.

How the Poisonous Reptiles Inject Their Venom into the Flesh.

Harmless snakes generally have two rows of teeth in the upper jaw and one in the lower, these teeth being slender, sharp, comparatively short, and not set in sockets as these animals do not tear or mutilate their food. The teeth are simply used as hooks by which the food is drawn into the snake's throat. The bones of the jaw being movably joined together.

The teeth are advanced on one side securing a hold on the prey, and then on the other side, in which way the swallowing is accomplished. Poisonous snakes have two long, sharp fangs which appear to be flattened out like a knife blade and then bent up, forming a groove, in some cases forming a closed tube, open, however, at both ends, the upper end of which is fastened to a bone in the cheek, which moves with ease, so that the fangs when not in use can be folded or packed away. The saliva of all animals, even man, contains poison; though in man it is greatly diluted and of use in assisting digestion. In the poisonous snakes it is collected into sacs or glands placed on each side of the upper jaw, says the New York Sun. A delicate canal extends from the poison gland forward under the eye to the edge of the jaw and there opens into the fangs, and to use the poison the snake has but to strike the prey; as the fangs enter the flesh the muscles of the jaw press upon the poison glands, squeeze the poison through the little canal down through the hollow of the poison fang in the wound. There is a most ingenious arrangement in the fang. The opening is not at the very tip, where it would be liable to get plugged up with skin and flesh, but it is a little way up in front of the groove, so that the sharp point goes in first and makes a little hole into which the poison flows.

Maud: 'Ted, dear, I suppose papa was rather cross when you asked him for me?'

Ted: 'Oa, no. On the contrary, he was quite pleased, and asked if I knew any other quiet, respectable young men who could be coaxed into proposing to your three sisters.'

The hair

is like a plant. What makes the plant fade and wither? Usually lack of necessary nourishment. The reason why Dr. Ayer's Hair Vigor restores gray or faded hair to its normal color, stops hair from falling, and makes it grow, is because it supplies the nourishment the hair needs.

"When a girl at school, in Reading, Ohio, I had a severe attack of brain fever. On my recovery, I found myself perfectly bald and, for a long time, I feared I should be permanently so. Friends urged me to use Dr. Ayer's Hair Vigor, and, on doing so, my hair immediately began to grow, and I now have as heavy and fine a head of hair as one could wish for, being changed, however, from blonde to dark brown."—Mrs. J. H. HOBBSYDER, 152 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, Cal.

Ayer's Hair Vigor.