

ADVENTURES, NATIONAL CUSTOMS, AND CURIOUS FACTS.

SPIDERS AND SNAKES.

BY AN AMERICAN FARMER.

In concluding the subject of venomous snakes from a former Number (149), I may observe that nearly all snake-bites are in the leg or arm, for very obvious reasons; horses or cattle are generally bitten in the jaw, as they disturb the reptiles by their feeding. A horse, mule, or ox generally dies in one, two, or three days. The Indians dread the serpents very much, on account of their so often losing their horses by them.

When we speak of dreading venomous reptiles, we should explain that, horrible and loathsome as the rattlesnake is, and though, on the whole, he is, of course, more feared than any other creature in America, yet, on the western frontier, he is not dreaded so much as the tarantula spider. This is an enemy against whom none can guard, and for whose bite no remedy has been found. Such alarm do they inspire, that I have known a large party of men, who had "camped out" all through a snake country, and through the midst of hostile Indians, driven from a desirable position by discovering that tarantulas infested the spot. The tarantula spider commonly grows to the size of half a large walnut, being thick and rounded something like the half-shell, and has eight long legs, two at each corner. It is covered with long hair, and is, indeed, as ugly and disgusting a reptile or insect, or whatever it is, as can be seen. The people who dwell where these spiders most abound declare that they attain a size equal to the clenched fist of a man; but I think this is a great exaggeration. At any rate, I have never seen any approach this size. I do not know if there are several varieties of the tarantula; but some are said to haunt the marshy borders of streams, while others are found in dry, rocky places. Last summer, a woman was bitten near this district by one, just about her ankle. The poison acted quite as quickly as serpent-poison, and she was carried to the nearest town for surgical advice. I have not heard whether she lived or died; but her leg was all one uniform size from the instep to the knee—I should think eighteen or twenty inches round—and shockingly discoloured and inflamed. I knew one of two men who were sleeping in a tent when a tarantula found its way in. They were both bitten by the same spider: one died, the other was scarred for life. The tarantula is more dangerous than any other venomous creature, because a light attracts it; and it will always crawl into a tent, if possible, where a light is burning. They inflict the wounds with their mouths, and not with nippers or claws.

I have no space left to speak of centipedes and scorpions, both of which are found very plentifully in Texas, and can only just mention the other snakes which are common in America. The black snake abounds in many parts, and grows to the length of six or seven feet. Although not venomous, it is very much disliked and dreaded on account of its spiteful nature. It will frequently attack children, whom it has been known to suffocate in its folds, after the manner of a boa constrictor—in this place, by the bye, always termed the "anaconda." The racer—"blue racer," as it is called—derives its name from its swift and straight progression. It does not wriggle its crooked way through the dust; but, aided by its hard scales, which gripe the ground at each of its curves, goes direct as a line on its route, and with remarkable speed. The bull-snake is very handsomely marked with diamonds of black and yellow; hence I suspect it is the "diamond-snake" of some districts. These snakes are the largest in North America, growing sometimes to the length of eight or ten feet, and are very powerful.

I cannot remember to have read anywhere that the natives of Mexico were serpent-worshippers. The Pueblo Indians, however, were, and probably still are so, despite their baptisms and their civilization. The Pueblos are the only civilized and working Indians known, and although often confounded with them, yet differ materially from the ordinary red men of America. They make very industrious, successful farmers, and possess, almost exclusively, several large towns. Taos, in New Mexico, is one of these; and it may be remarked that the Pueblo farmers in that district raise wheat incomparably finer than any cultivated by their white rivals. But as regards the town of Taos, it is averred by too many credible persons to leave much doubt upon the subject, that serpent worship is there practised, and that the sacred snake is there maintained. In the autumn of each year, great festivities are held at Taos, which correspond in their meaning, so far as

outsiders are concerned, with our harvest-home, and in the various games and races every one can join. But it is asserted that at this season other and more mysterious rites are celebrated, and the hidden serpent shown to the faithful. The reptile is said to be in every case—and other towns have a sacred snake—of the anaconda tribe.

THE RHINOCEROS.

AFTER devoting the earlier part of the evening to its rambles in quest of food (says a traveller in Africa), the rhinoceros—in common with other monsters of the forest—is in the habit of repairing to some favourite haunt to slake its thirst and refresh its body in the limpid waters of the stream.

One night I watched the water with my Hottentot attendant, Kleinboy: very soon a black cow rhinoceros came and drank, and got off for the present with two balls in her. A little afterwards two black rhinoceroses and two white ones came to the water-side. We both fired together at the finest of the two black rhinoceroses; she ran three hundred yards, and fell dead. Soon after this the other black rhinoceros came up again and stood at the water-side; I gave her one ball near the shoulder; she ran a hundred yards, and fell dead. In half an hour a third old borele appeared, and having inspected the two dead ones, came up to the water-side. We fired together; he ran two hundred yards, and fell dead. I felt satisfied with our success, and gave it up for the night.

By the following evening the natives had cleared away the greater part of two of the rhinoceroses, which lay right in the way of the game approaching the water; I, however, enforced their leaving the third rhinoceros, which had fallen on the bare rising ground, almost opposite to my hiding-place, in the hope of attracting a lion, as I intended to watch the water at night. Soon after the twilight had died away, I went down to my hole with Kleinboy and two natives, who lay concealed in another hole, with Wolf and Boxer ready to slip in the event of wounding a lion.

On reaching the water I looked towards the carcass of the rhinoceros, and, to my astonishment, beheld the ground alive with large creatures, as though a troop of zebras were approaching the fountain to drink. Kleinboy remarked to me that a troop of zebras were standing on the height. I answered "Yes;" but I knew very well that zebras would not be capering around the carcass of a rhinoceros. I quickly arranged my blankets, pillow, and guns in the hole, and then lay down to feast my eyes on the interesting sight before me. It was bright moonlight, as clear as I need wish, and within one night of being full moon. There were six large lions, about twelve or fifteen hyenas, and from twenty to thirty jackalls, feasting on and around the carcasses of the three rhinoceroses. The lions feasted peacefully, but the hyenas and jackalls fought over every mouthful, and chased one another round and round the carcasses, growling, laughing, chattering, and howling without any intermission. The hyenas did not seem afraid of the lions, although they always gave way before them; for I observed that they followed them in the most disrespectful manner, and stood laughing, one or two on either side, when any lions came after their comrades to examine pieces of skin or bones which they were dragging away.

THE SIGNS OF TAVERNS.

The absurdities which tavern signs present are often curious enough, but vary in general be traced to that inveterate propensity which the vulgar of all countries have, to make havoc with everything in the shape of a proper name.

What a magpie could have to do with a crown, or a whale with a crow, or a hen with a razor, is as difficult to conjecture as to trace the corruption of language, in which the connection more probably originated. The sign of the Leg and Seven Stars was merely an orthographical deviation from the League and Seven Stars, or seven united provinces; and the Axe and Bottle was doubtless, a transposition of the Battle-axe, a very appropriate and significant sign in warlike times. The Tun and Lute seem quite emblematical of the pleasures arising from the association of Wine and Music. The Eagle and Child had some meaning, but no application; but when we arrive at the Shovel and Boot we labour in vain to come to any rational definition of the affinity.

The Swan with Two Necks was long a subject of mystery to the curious; but it has been explained by the alteration of a simple letter. The sign was originally written *The Swan with Two Nicks*, the meaning of which we find explained by the fact that it was customary to make marks or nicks on the beaks of the swans and cygnets in the

rivers and lakes in Lincolnshire. Certain persons had privileges granted to them for keeping swans in these waters. This information has been collected from a curious roll of parchment, presented in 1810 by Sir Joseph Banks to the Antiquarian Society, which also states that means were taken to prevent any two persons from adopting the same figures and marks on the bills of their swans.

The sign of the Goat and Compasses has been supposed to have arisen from the resemblance between the bounding of a goat, and the expansion of a pair of compasses; but this is more fanciful than appropriate. This sign is of the days of the Commonwealth, when it was the fashion of the enthusiasts of that period to append scriptural quotations to the names given them by their parents, or to adopt them entirely instead. This rage for sacred titles induced them to coin new names also for places and things. The corruption from "God encompasseth us," to Goat and Compasses, is obvious, and seems quite natural; and it is not unlikely that "Praise God Barebones," the canting leather-seller, preferred drinking his tankard of ale at the "God encompasseth us," rather than frequent a house retaining its old and *heathenish* title.

The Bag of Nails, at Pimlico, was originally the Bacchanals, where, in the time of "Rare Ben Jonson," people were accustomed to make a holiday excursion.

The sign of the Bull and Mouth exhibits another instance of the corruption and perversion of language. Everybody knows that a bull has a mouth, but it was not so evident that Boulogne Harbour must have an entrance, commonly called a *mouth*.

POMPEII.

POMPEII was not completely buried by a single eruption. Eight successive layers have been traced above its ruins. In the intervals the inhabitants must have returned to secure their more valuable property. Sir William Gell mentions that the skeleton of a Pompeian was found, "who, apparently for the sake of sixty coins, a small plate, and a saucenap of silver, had remained in his house till the street was already half filled with volcanic matter." The position of the skeleton indicated that he had perished apparently in the act of escaping from his window. Other incidents of like character are no less striking. The skeletons of the Roman sentries were found, in more than one instance, at their posts, furnishing a remarkable proof of the stern military discipline of imperial Rome. The skeleton of a priest was found in one of the rooms of the Temple of Isis. Near his remains lay an axe, with which he had been trying to break through the door.

THE GEYSERS.

THE Geysers, or boiling springs, are situated in the south-west division of Iceland. About one hundred of them play within a circle of two miles. These rise in a thick bed of lava derived probably from Hecla, a volcano whose summit can be seen from them at the distance of some thirty miles. It rises out of a spacious basin which surrounds a vent or a well. The basin consists of a mound which has been formed around this well by siliceous or flinty matter which has fallen from the spray of the water, and which has settled as a circular incrustation. The diameter of the whole basin is fifty-six feet in one way and forty-six in another. In the centre of the basin is the well, shaft, or pipe, which goes down seventy-eight feet deep, and which is from eight to ten feet in diameter. At intervals this basin is quite empty, but usually it is filled with water that boils as if in a kettle on the fire.

THE BUFFALO.

THE buffalo herds, which graze in almost countless numbers on the beautiful prairies of North America, afford the Indians an abundance of meat; and so much is the flesh of these animals preferred to all others, that the deer, the elk, and the antelope sport in herds on the prairies in the greatest security—as the Indians seldom kill them, unless they want their skins for a dress.

The buffalo—or, more correctly speaking, the bison—is a noble animal that roams over the vast prairies from the borders of Mexico on the south to Hudson's Bay on the north. The size is somewhat above that of our common bullock, and their flesh of a delicious flavour, resembling and equalling that of fat beef.

The buffalo bull is one of the most formidable and frightful-looking animals in the world, when excited to resistance; his long shaggy mane hangs in great profusion over his neck and shoulders, and often extends quite down to the ground. The cow is less in stature, and less ferocious, though not much less wild in her appearance.