

ADVENTURES, NATION'L CUSTOMS, AND CURIOUS FACTS.

RHINOCEROS HUNTING IN JAVA. FROM A TRAVELLER'S NOTE-BOOK.

We followed so long, that Peter at last got tired, and assured me it was useless to proceed any further, we could not come up with the animal; but I told him if he thought so, to stop where he was, and I would go by myself—if he heard me shoot, he could easily come up. But he was rather ashamed to do this, I think, and after consulting a few seconds with the Sunda man, while I went on, not to lose time, I heard them coming after me—Peter groaning as loud as he could, evidently greatly dissatisfied with the chase. The vegetation here was really magnificent, but I had no time now to look at it, or spend a second in anything but the chase—the vegetation did not run away, but the rhinoceros did; and so passing beauties many a botanist would give his little finger only to see, I pushed on, heedless over what ground the animals went, and only once in a while taking notice in which direction we proceeded, so that if I should lose my companions, I might not lose myself.

I had followed the two monsters for about an hour or more, with not a dry thread upon me; when reaching a little knob, right in the midst of one of the most powerful thickets, I involuntarily grasped my gun—not twelve yards distant before me, I heard a sharp and loud sounding noise, resembling the sound a frightened stag gives in the woods, only far, far louder, more like the escape-pipe of a steamboat. While watching the track, I had not looked upon the bushes, and there, so close before me that I could have thrown my cap upon the huge mass of flesh, I recognised—only half-hid in the thick and drooping foliage of the bushes—the immense dark body of one of the old fellows I had been after since yesterday. I could just distinguish the outlines of the huge bulk of this rhinoceros, when, seeing its head turned towards me, as if to make out what little creature had been daring enough to follow him to his mountain fastness, I raised my gun and pulled trigger. So much for percussion caps in wet weather, which have not a little copper plate over the white substance inside—snap said the right, snap said the left barrel, as the cocks struck, without igniting the caps; and nearly at the same moment, Peter's gun—a double-barrelled fowling-piece—at some distance behind me in the bushes, went off by itself. I expect, for I heard the ball strike a tree close by rather high. The rhinoceros, hearing the strange clicking sounds, and the crack of the gun, blew as if with a trumpet, and commenced stamping the underwood down under its feet.

I looked round quickly for a tree—for I did not expect anything else, after the dreadful tales they had told me about the animal, but to see it come rushing upon me—to stamp me under foot; observing one about ten yards distant, I thought I would reach it, and await the result. But the monster came not: he seemed intent only on amusing himself with smashing the bushes, as if clearing out an improvement for himself. My first thought was to clean the tubes and have another aim at the animal; but remembering that one barrel of Peter's gun was still loaded, I looked round to make him come up to me. But where was Peter or his companions? Taking the alarm, I think, as soon as the rhinoceros began to roar and tear, they had fled to some place of security. I had no choice but to take out my tumserser, in sight of the enemy, and use it—always ready though, at a second's warning, to fly to the nearest tree, should the animal make a motion to have a stamp at me. But the rhinoceros, apparently far too peaceable a customer to have any such ideas, gave me a last look, and dashing again into the bushes, soon disappeared, leaving me pricking away at my tubes, raving mad, to get them open again, so as to be able to pour in some fresh dry powder. I did it as fast as I could, of course; but it took me at least five minutes; and now nothing was left me but to push on after the flying game.

There were two of them, and they seemed to choose nearly impassable thickets, breaking down old logs and trunks like reeds. Away we went, through branches and sloughs—I following in a monstrous rage at not being able to come up with them; the giant beasts just rolling along, as it seemed, at their common pace, to get out of harm's way. Several times I was near enough to hear them blow, when they got the wind of me, but I never halted a minute to ascertain their exact direction, as I had only to keep the trail, rush down the slope, and storm them up. All my efforts were in vain—the ground was so rough I could not get nearer, at least not in sight of them; and only by following down hill, as it seemed, upon reaching a little more open wood, I gained on them just enough to come in sight of the black

hide of the hindmost. I had heard that they rushed invariably upon the hunter if they were wounded; but not in a humour just then to consider what they might do after I had shot, I raised my gun at the first chance, knowing that the next moment would bury them behind the thick curtain of the bushes; and pulling trigger, this time at least I could hear the ball strike the black hide, penetrating it of course, as I shot pointed slug balls, which go through nearly anything. Holding back the second barrel—for I really did think the wounded and enraged animal would come and call for it—I stopped a moment; but no—it never thought of turning round, and simultaneously with the shot, I heard the two animals breaking through the bushes like a small hurricane. This did not last long—I heard a heavy splash in the water; and, a hundred yards farther, I stood on the margin of the lake I had started from.

A BRAZILIAN SNAKE.

PROCEEDING in a journey northward, at the end of the plain (says a recent traveller in Brazil), we crossed a stream from the westward, which bears strong marks of occasional violence, and, a little beyond the bridge, saw some orioles in their pendant nests upon lofty trees. Just as I had stepped into the low brushwood with which the ground was covered, and put the gun to my shoulder, to bring down a bird, my attention was suddenly drawn downwards; there I saw a large snake passing within a few inches of my toe. To start backward was involuntary; I lowered the piece, and wounded him; but he dragged his length across the road, and escaped among the bushes; for I thought him an enemy too formidable to be incautiously roused. He appeared to be six or seven feet long, five or six inches round, had a dark brown back and yellowish belly, dashed with black oval spots, which were particularly large on his sides. His eye was exceedingly brilliant, as is the case, I believe, with most of these reptiles, seeming to reflect, as well as to bear the full splendour of the sun. I have seldom found myself able to look steadily upon them. He moved, as do all Brazilian snakes with which I am acquainted, in horizontal curves. When we met at the next station, our people complained of having been molested to-day with an unusual number of these reptiles, and supposed that they had been driven from the mountains by the dry weather, and were in search of water.

THE INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO.

The peculiar charm of the Archipelago is the fresh green perpetually displayed. Its atmosphere is of equinoctial warmth, yet continually charged with moisture, purified by season winds, and so fecundating that the very rocks shortly become fertile. Round the larger islands lie rings of smaller ones, described as resembling floating gardens, umbrageous and flowery, on waters so blue and gleaming that they would dazzle but for the shadows of the clouds reflected in them. In other quarters there is the sublimity of lofty ranges, but instead of glaciers or snow, one invariable forest overlays them all, the peaks inflamed with that rose-red glow seen on the Swiss Alps, and emitting curls of smoke, which shine like scattered gold-dust in the sun. These woods overspread a large proportion of the surface in most of the islands, though in some, as in Java, the eye is delighted by a series of cultivated hills and park-like slopes, curving gracefully upwards from the sea, with all the processes of agriculture exhibited in succession, from ploughing to reaping, according to the temperature, which is regulated by the elevation of the land.

In Borneo and Sumatra, however, dense forests extend over large tracts: trees of gigantic stature, of abundant foliage, and hung with a thousand creeping plants, entangled, fantastic, brilliant with flowers, and equal in their gaudy splendour to the growth of the Brazilian woods. Birds countless fill the solitude with their songs—some deep, long-drawn and shrill, others tremulous, plaintive, and wild, but few with sweet notes, or very melodious tones; their plumage is more beautiful than their music, and it gleams amid the branches, gold, or red, or blue, or flashes with a metallic lustre, peculiarly dazzling to the eye. From the boughs also hang snakes, green and velvety, or like a roll of coral—some harmless, some deadly—falling through the leaves, or gliding amid the tangled flowers and grass. Insects of splendid hues, and in immense variety, animate the solitudes of Celebes and Borneo—the bronze green beetle, emitting a perfume like that of roses; the silver-winged butterfly, and myriads of grasshoppers. The Indian gazelle, herds of elephants, the rhinoceros, the tiger, the tapir, the barbirusa, the mias pappan, the sloth, and the buffalo, also inhabit the woods of the great islands; while in the smaller groups, as the Moluccas, if these creatures are rare, others more

curious are found, especially of the winged species.

More beautiful than any are the birds of paradise—fabled to be the messengers of God, who fly towards the sun, but overpowered by the fragrance of the isles over which they pass, sink to the earth, and fall into the hands of man. The lori and the argus pheasant, the cream-coloured pigeon, and those "atoms of the rainbow," the cinnurus, or sun-birds, gleam and glitter amid the foliage; while to perfect the beauty of the islands, fields of the Indian lotus and the tiger lily, sprinkled with patches of scarlet or violet flowers, surround the woods, or border the large sheets of water. Alligators in great numbers haunt the mangrove creeks and rivers, with riches of innumerable species. Fragile and richly tinted shells, the olive and the harp, coloured like the most beautiful tulips, strew the sand of the beach. The sea is inhabited by multitudes of fish—some of them exceedingly curious and rare, as the Malayan mermaid, food of kings, which suggested that romance so pleasing to the Oriental imagination.

SNAKES.

The following property in the snake is not generally known. A respectable land-surveyor informed Mr. Jesse that, while he was making a survey of some property, he was attended by a man who had the character among his neighbours of being a shrewd fellow, but what more particularly entitled him to distinction, was his extraordinary partiality for the common snake. On being questioned on the subject, he proposed to take the first opportunity which offered of showing a peculiar property in the reptile. It was on a sunny spring morning, whilst running a line through a copse, that the man in question was observed suddenly to drop the chain handle and jump upon a bank. The next moment he came forward, with two full-sized snakes writhing about his hands and wrists. After viewing them some time, while the man admired them with the most lively feelings of satisfaction, he observed, "I know them, sir," (meaning their habits and disposition), "quite as well as they do themselves."

He then proposed to show a trait in their character, which would bear out that description of them in Scripture,—that they possessed superior cunning. On adjoining to a neighbouring road, the man placed one of the snakes on the hard ground. He then took a very thin twig, and tapped the reptile very gently on the head. It immediately darted towards him, when he presented his hand to its open mouth, and continued to play with it, now and then gently tapping it on the head with the twig. He then said that it would presently dissemble and counterfeit death. This curious effect soon afterwards took place, and the snake to all appearance lay dead. Those who were standing by thought that this was actually the case; but the snake-fancier insisted that it only feigned sleep, and stated, that while those present continued to look at it, so long it would remain motionless. On removing to a distance of between twenty and thirty yards, the snake was observed to glide speedily into the nearest hedge.

On one occasion, and upon one only, the same person saw a snake in the act of casting its skin. He said, to use his own words, that "it reminded him of a labouring man drawing his round or smock-frock over his head." He further added, that the head of the reptile was about midway in the old skin, and it extricated itself from the worn-out garment by passing the body through what he called the vent-hole of the old skin. The snake appeared in a very languid and exhausted state, and the new skin was in colour and appearance perfect.

OYSTERS.

SOME years ago the oysters of Colchester were frequently distinguished by a green tinge, which the fishermen had the art of communicating to them. On this subject, the historian says—"All oysters are naturally white in the body and brown in the fins. In order to green them, they put them into pits, about two feet deep, in the salt marshes, which are overflowed only at spring-tides, to which they have sluices, and let out the salt water until it is about a foot and a half deep. These pits, from some quality in the soil, will become green, and communicate their colour to the oysters that are put in them in four or five days, though they commonly let them continue there six weeks or two months, in which time they will be of a dark green. It is very remarkable, that a pit within a foot of a greening pit will not green; and those that did green very well, will in time lose that quality. So that it is not done by coppers, or other greening stuffs, as some have imagined; nor is it more true that they grow green by feeding upon a sort of cross-silk, as some authors have asserted."