

dence afforded. The result was that the rate of wages declined, both from the over population and the fact that employers naturally took into account the privileges the labourers enjoyed in making their terms with them; the people became pauperised, and in a population of some 250 souls there are now only four surnames, so closely are all connected; and although the promiscuous heaving together of the members of several families is no longer permitted, the effects of past habits are still to be seen in the low standard of intelligence and the impaired physique of the inhabitants of the parish in question, compared with the dwellers in the surrounding districts.

It has been remarked by foreigners that if you so much as look at an English working man he immediately expects you to give him, at the very least, the price of a pint of beer. In an article which appeared a short time since in one of our periodicals upon this very subject, from the pen of an American, the writer mentioned that during his stay in England nothing had shocked him so much as the want of self-respect in our labouring men, which allowed them to accept, and even to seek, by the exercise of various servile and mean devices, gratuities in money for every little favour they could contrive to show to anyone who appeared to be in a better social position than they were. In America, the writer went on to say, a working man would be highly offended if you offered him money in return for some piece of civility; while in England the civility seems to be entirely prompted by the expectation of a pecuniary reward. Yet it is only among what are commonly termed the working classes that this feeling prevails. Men in nominally better positions, but often

THE NATURALIST.

STORIES ABOUT SNAKES, &c.

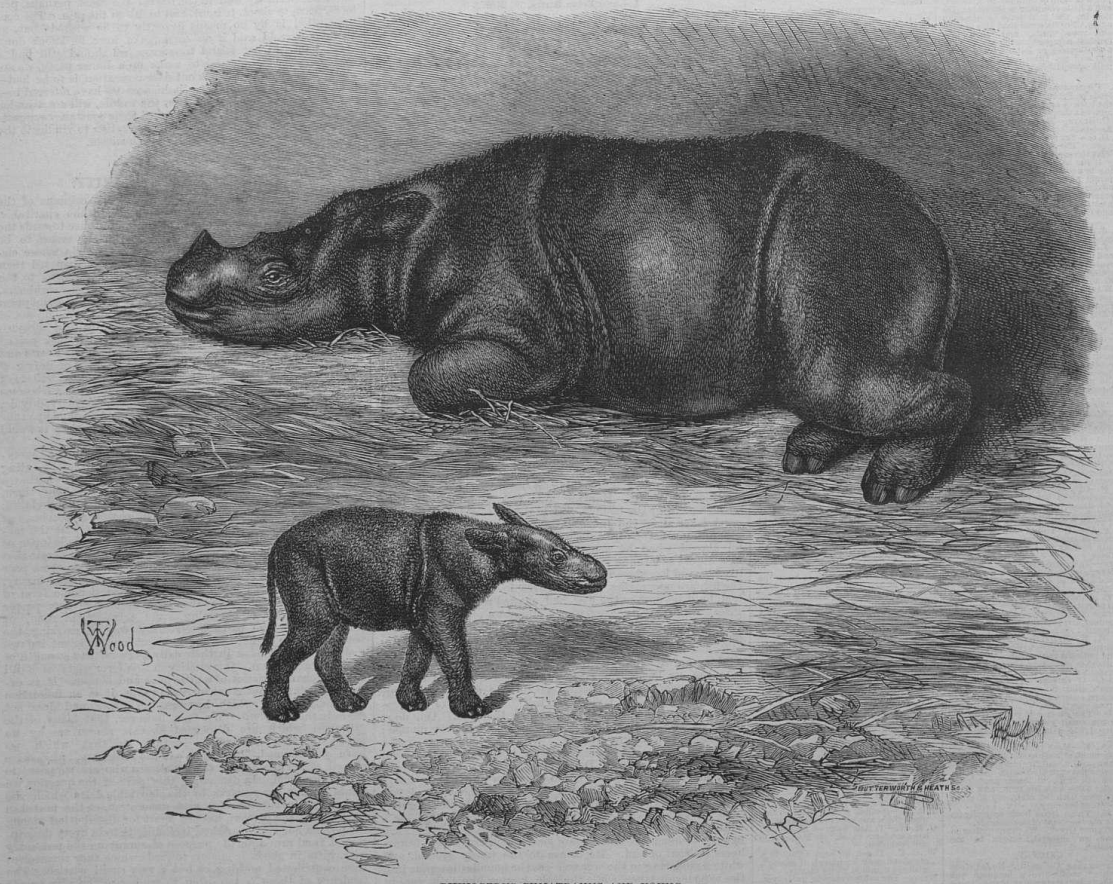
Can any reader of *The Field* supply one duly authenticated instance of a European having been killed by a snake in any tropical country? A case or two may well be brought forward; but I certainly never heard of one, and it does not quite harmonise with popular belief about snakes in tropical regions that I venture to put the question.

There are not a few stock English names for snakes, which are variously applied in different parts of the world, and sometimes to venomous, sometimes to innocuous species; such are, cobra snake, carpet snake, garter snake, riband snake, whip snake, pipe snake, rat snake, diamond snake, grass snake, black snake, yellow snake, two-headed snake, and probably more. It is necessary, therefore, to know something of the particular habits before such names can be referred to their proper species, or even families; and habits exceedingly dissimilar may accordingly be quite truly assigned to different species bearing the same popular appellation. This is a confusion which indicates the necessity of recognising the established system of technical nomenclature. Without it, all is vague and illusory.

A notion prevails in Southern India of some terrible little creature said to be known as the "carpet snake"; but what that is nobody can ever point out in a collection of ophidian reptiles, though I believe that the little harmless *Lycodon sulcius* (if anything at all be meant) is the species intended. In like manner everybody in the Bengal Presidency is sure to have heard of the formidable *big h-cobra*, an alleged small lizard supposed to be terribly poisonous; but no offered reward can induce the production of one, albeit snip harmless lizards may be brought from time to time as representing the little ogo, and such a creature as

published originally in the *Magazine of Natural History*. The same French-American naturalist's very highly imaginative description of a white-headed sea-eagle attacking a wild swan on the wing by striking at it from below, was embodied in a fantastical display seen by hundreds of thousands in the first International Exhibition, and sadly misled a world-renowned artist who transferred the scene to canvas. But if a professedly ultra-accurate observer and "field naturalist" emphatically, as was Audubon, thus indulges in freaks of fancy, can we at all wonder that novelists have run riot in their occasional snake stories, or have done their best to "pile up the agony," as is the Transatlantic phrase in such matters?

It is from fictitious narratives of the sort that the great mass of readers derive their impressions. Who does not know, for instance, "Tom Cringle's Log"? Under which title a series of highly spiced adventures were published many years ago in *Blackwood's Magazine* by an author (Mr Michael Scott) who undoubtedly possessed a fair share of West Indian experience, and therefore has credit awarded for veracity in the natural-history incidents which he introduces, by his very numerous readers who have not the requisite knowledge to judge of their credibility. Unfortunately, it is, I repeat, from such narratives that most people in this part of the world derive their exaggerated notions of the sundry and manifold horrors (as they suppose) of tropical existence, and "Tom Cringle's Log" has contributed its full quota to the general sum of Cringle's delusions. The imagination is captivated by fervent and glowing descriptions, in comparison with which plain and sober truth becomes dull and insipid, and the general impression remains of a condition of things which, if true, or even approximately so, would be simply unendurable by human beings. "Tom Cringle" decidedly flags somewhat in his later chapters, to enliven which he draws upon his imagination, or much more probably reproduces what he may have been told, to startle his readers with alleged perils from wild animals; but to the experienced he only succeeds in showing that personally he knew very little about them. Neverthe-



RHINOCERUS SUMATRANUS AND YOUNG.

actually far worse off than a day labourer, such as clerks in Government offices, and others in receipt of small fixed incomes, who are frequently put to the greatest possible straits to subsist and maintain the decent appearance society and their employers demand of them, would think themselves degraded indeed if they stopped to accept a gift in money from a stranger, however much richer he might be than they. But the British workman, however good his wages might be, however prosperous his condition, can rarely resist the offer of a shilling, thus preferring the present material gain of a trifle to the respect and esteem of his fellow men, which would be sure some time or other to follow a consistent determination to refuse a gratuity tendered in return either for no service at all, or an incommensurate one. This want of self-respect, we believe, can be partly traced to the multiplication and consequent abuse of the benefactions we have mentioned, which have impressed the poor man with the feeling that there can be no shame in receiving gifts from his wealthier neighbours in a country where large funds are annually distributed in the unbecoming manner which characterises the administration of the majority of these doles; and partly to the reckless way in which young men and others, to whom money is no object, or who have yet to learn the value of it, fling away their shillings and half-crowns upon undeserving objects, either to save themselves trouble, or to be credited with the reputation of being generous, open-hearted fellows.

The above remarks will not have been made in vain if, by thus drawing attention to some of the consequences which follow upon it, a check may in future be put upon the bad practice of indiscriminate almsgiving.

a venomous lizard is totally unknown to naturalists. In the southern parts of India, however, a chameleon is popularly believed to be poisonous; as is a *tok-tou* (Gecko verus) in Burma. It is hopeless to try to convince a native to the contrary, and most Europeans believe exactly what they are told in such matters, without troubling themselves to make any further inquiry.

The idea of a "milk snake," which is believed to draw the udders of cows and goats, and is accused of depredations still more unpardonable, is a widely prevalent one. "Why, I killed one close to a cow which it had just been sucking," exclaims an occupant; but it does not occur to him that a fill of milk would have rendered the snake unyieldy, or that upon smashing one there should be the convincing evidence of spilled milk. That necessary result I do not remember to have ever seen related. Still the notion prevails, and it is of little use trying to persuade some people to the contrary.

There is the famous "hoop snake," which puts its tail into its mouth, emblematical of eternity, and by forcibly opening itself out springs at your face, or in hoop fashion trundles after you down hill. This, perhaps, is too much for almost everybody; but it is hardly more preposterous than other stories which are gravely related—about snakes, for instance, which strip the flesh from the bones, to leave only the skeleton. That of a child was found some time ago in a crevice in some part of America, and a number of "black snakes" (Coluber constrictor) were likewise there; *ergo*, the snakes had killed the child and devoured its flesh. That their doing so was utterly impossible was a matter of exceedingly small import; the story had the full run of the newspapers, and so had an equally silly tale of vipers doing the same in a vault near Paris.

The famous ornithologist Audubon was a great deal too fond of the sensational, and his outrageous account of the fang of a rattlesnake sticking in the leg of a boot, and occasioning the death of several persons in succession who tried it on, was only exposed and commented upon by the late Squire Waterston in one of his essays

less, because of the influence which so popular a story-teller still exerts; it may be worth while to criticise him.

In chapter xvii. an alligator is made to do what no alligator ever did yet. The narrator tells us: "I again felt a similar thump and rattle along the side of the canoe. There was a small aperture in the palm thatch, right opposite to where I was sitting, on the outside of which I now heard a rattling noise; and presently a long snout was thrust through and into the canoe, which kept opening and shutting with a sharp rattling noise." Nonsense! An alligator would avoid rubbing against a boat, and have made one sudden "grab" and have done with it, supposing that it had seen anything what he may have been told, to startle his readers with alleged perils from wild animals; but to the experienced he only succeeds in showing that personally he knew very little about them. Neverthe-

But only two pages on we are told of a somewhat different story. We read of a "Leth-like stream," its margins "all water and underwood, except where a soft, slimy, steaming black bank of mud bore its shinning back from out of the dead waters near the shore, with one or more monstrous alligator sleeping on it, like dirty rotten logs of wood, scarcely deigning to lift their abominable long snouts to look at us as we passed, or to raise their scaly tails, with the black mud sticking to the scales in great lumps. Oh! horrible, most horrible!" But the creatures, although no beauties certainly, are harmless after all. For instance, I never heard a well-authenticated case of their attacking a human being hereabouts. Pigs and fowls they do thine, however, like any parson. I don't mean to say that they would not make free with a little fat dumpling of a *peewee* if he were thrown to them; but they seem to have no ferocious propensities. Well, they must eat, I suppose, and will seize whatever falls in their way; but one poking its nose through the thatch of a canoe is rather overdoing the matter.

Next, in chapter xviii., we have first a most absurd tussle with a jaguar (indifferently styled *gatto del monte*, "tiger," and

