

AN ADVENTURE WITH A SNAKE.

While travelling in South America, I experienced many adventures, one of which was particularly hazardous.

The sun had just passed the meridian in a cloudless sky; there was scarcely a bird to be seen, for the winged inhabitants of the forest, overcome by heat, had retired to the thickest shades; all would have been like midnight silence were it not that the shrill voice of the pi-pi-yo every now and then resounded from a distant tree.

On ascertaining the size of the serpent, I retired slowly the way I came, and proffered four dollars to the negro who had shown it to me, and one to the other who had joined us. Aware that the day was on the decline, and that the approach of night would be detrimental to the dissection, I thought that I would take it alive. I imagined, that if I could strike it with the lance behind the head, and pin him to the ground, I might succeed in capturing him.

When we got up to the place, the serpent had not stirred. I could see nothing of its head, and I judged by the folds of its body that it must be at the furthest side of his den. A species of woodbine had formed a complete mantle over the branches of the fallen tree, all most impervious to the rain or the rays of the sun. Probably the snake had resorted to this sequestered place for a length of time, as it bore the marks of an ancient settlement.

After working in dead silence for a quarter of an hour, with one knee all the time on the ground, I had cleared away enough to see his head. It appeared coming out between the first and second coil of his body, and was flat on the ground. This was the very position I wished it to be in. I rose in silence, and retreated very slowly, making a sign to the negroes to do the same. We were at this time about twenty yards from the snake's den.

F. J. Woodward, a firm reconductor of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, who had his neck broken in a Texas wreck the 10th of June, 1889, arrived here to do his way to St. Louis. As far as he was the second person who ever lived after having his neck broken. He was bedfast six months after the accident, and never put foot on a train from the time he was hurt un-

til he started on his present trip from Denison. He wears a brace or cage to keep his head in position, as without it his head would fall upon either his breast or shoulders.

We went slowly, on in silence, without moving our arms or heads, in order to prevent alarm as much as possible, lest the snake should glide off or attack us in self-defense. I carried the lance perpendicularly before me, with the point about a foot from the ground. The snake had not moved; and, on getting up to him, I struck him with the lance on the near side, just behind the neck, and pinned him to the ground. That moment the negro next to me seized the lance and held it firm in its place, while I dashed head foremost into the den to grapple with the snake, and to get hold of its tail before it could do any mischief.

On being pinned to the ground with the lance, it gave a tremendous loud hiss, and the little dog ran away, howling. We had a sharp fray in the den, the rotten sticks flying on all sides, and each party struggling for superiority. The second negro threw himself upon me, as I found I was not heavy enough, and the additional weight was of great service. I had now got a firm hold of the tail, and, after a violent struggle or two, the snake gave in. While the first negro continued to hold the lance firm to the ground, and the other was helping me, I contrived to unloose my braces, and with them tied up the snake's mouth.

We contrived to make his snake-ship twist round the shaft of the lance, and then prepared to convey it out of the forest. I stood at its head, and held it firmly under my arm, one negro supporting the body and the other the tail. In this order we began to move slowly toward home, and reached it after resting every ten minutes, for the snake was too heavy for us to support it without stopping to recruit our strength. As we proceeded onward with it, it fought hard for freedom, but it was all in vain. The day was now too far spent to think of dissecting it. Had I killed it, a partial putrefaction would have taken place before morning. I had brought with me into the forest a strong bag, large enough to contain any animal I should want to dissect. I considered this the best mode of keeping alive wild animals when I was pressed for daylight. If the bag yielded in every direction to their efforts, they would have nothing solid or fixed to work on, and thus would be prevented from making a hole through it. I say fixed, for after the mouth of the bag was closed, the bag itself was not fastened or tied to anything, but moved about wherever the animal inside caused it to roll. After securing afresh the mouth of the monster, it was forced into this bag, and left to its fate till morning.

I can not say it allowed me to have a quiet night. My hammock was in the loft just above him, and the floor between us half gone to decay, so that in parts of it no boards intervened between his lodging and mine. He was very restless and fretful; and had Medusa been my wife, there could not have been more continual and disagreeable hissing in the bed-chamber that night. At daybreak I went to borrow ten of the negroes who were cutting wood at a distance, as I judged it most prudent to have a good force, in case he should try to escape from the house when we opened the bag. However, nothing serious occurred. We untied the bag, kept him down by main force, and then I cut his throat. He bled like an ox. By six o'clock the same evening he was completely dissected.

On measuring him afterward, he was found to be something more than fourteen feet long. This species of snake is very rare, and much thicker, in proportion to his length, than any other snake in the forest; one fourteen feet in length is as thick as a common box of twenty-four. After skinning this snake, I could easily get my head into its mouth, as the singular formation of the jaws admits a wonderful extension.

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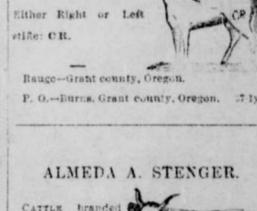
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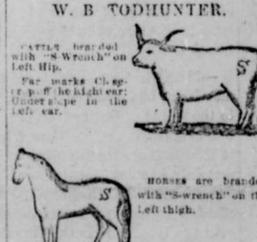
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