

AN OLD-FASHIONED ANIMAL.

BY MISS E. F. MOSBY.

In the forests of South America, ages and ages ago, there lived enormous animals which are now extinct, and are known only by their bones which have been discovered embedded in the soil. But although they lived so long ago, and were so different in size from the creatures that now possess their ancient haunts, there is a likeness and a kinship existing between them. When the little French visitors to the Jardin du Roi (the garden of the king), in Paris, crowd to see the foreign animals that are on exhibition there, they are filled with amusement and wonder at a strange quadruped which seems incapable of using its four long legs either to run or jump, or even to walk. It looks lazier than a grab or a beetle, and its name—the Sloth—seems a very appropriate title, for it only crawls along upon the earth in a weak and helpless fashion, its hands and feet, which are armed with sharp claws, stretched out aimlessly on the ground.

The trees in South America grow in the valleys of the great rivers in the greenest luxuriance, every branch rustling thick with leaves, and the trunk buried knee-deep in long grasses. In the air the vines, heavily laden with foliage and blossoms, form aerial and swaying bridges that throw their strong arms from bough to bough. Here the diminutive Sloth of to-day has its home, and it no longer looks inert or awkward when it has reached its true habitat. This is not on the earth's surface, nor on the water's, but in the forest that rises in "the aerial ocean." The creature can neither run nor swim nor fly; but it can climb, and it is indeed a climber *par excellence*. Each limb being terminated by two or three long and strong hooks, with these it could securely cling to the branches, along these it moved, often rapidly; there was nothing slothful in its arboreal mode of progression. Suspended always with its head and trunk downwards, it so traversed every branch and part of the tree yielding food by leaf or fruit. In that clinging attitude it rested, suspending itself to sleep. Amid the boughs it so lived and bred, the mother carrying her suckling young securely clinging to her neck.

In this same wild, sylvan country of South America there were dug up the fossil remains of some enormous animal, to which the

naturalist Cuvier gave the name of the *Megatherium*, the giant Sloth of the early ages of the world. Its skeleton is not as large as that of an elephant, it is true, but it surpasses in bulk those of the hippopotamus and rhinoceros, and therefore it is not probable that it lived such a simply arboreal life as its smaller successors, climbing from branch to branch, and rocked in their leafy cradle by the wind.

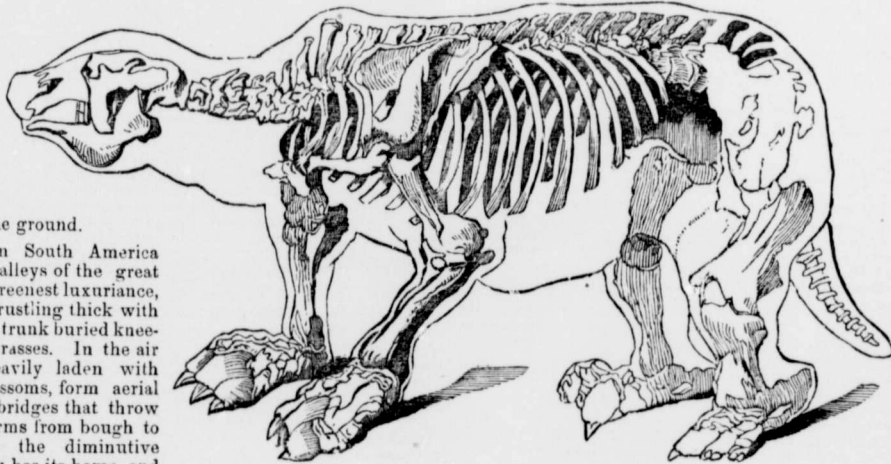
It was, however, so formed as to possess every means of self-support in its great forest world, and also of self-defence, though a monstrous tiger called the "sabre-tooth," on account of its long, sharp teeth, was often its assailant. But the tiger found its match even for these in the three long, large, curved, sharp-pointed claws which the great *Megatherium* used in its combats. The present ant-eater of South America has no other weapons than similar sharp claws, and yet these

and consequently we find him possessed of two mighty hind legs, which were not so long as those of the elephant, but were twice as thick and massive, and a tail which was sufficiently firm-jointed, long, and heavy to form with the heavy hind legs a substantial tripod which could well assist the *Megatherium* in his work. The front limbs, which were used for seizing the tree, pulling it roughly to and fro until it gave way, and then hauling it down, were powerful and complex in development, being almost as perfect as the arms and hands of man for the purpose for which they were designed.

We can, in imagination, see this gigantic animal raised on its powerful hind legs, and tugging, riving, and swaying the root-loosened tree until it fell with a loud crash, its wide-spreading branches tearing into the soil beneath or rearing themselves still high in the air. Then the feast began, and

if that were true, the *Megatherium* could escape being crushed to death or killed by a blow from some of the falling trees? It now appears that, although these animals became doubtless trained by experience to dexterity in dodging such collisions, they did not always escape unhurt. In a skeleton of the *Megatherium* discovered on the banks of the Rio Platta the skull had two distinct fractures, one completely healed, and the other, a more serious injury to the back of the skull, evidently the cause of the animal's death. Each of the scars indicated a stunning blow, which must for a time have completely prostrated the huge creature; and as the first was cured and the last had by no means caused instant death—since sufficient time had elapsed for the bone to begin a new growth—neither could have been inflicted by a tiger's paw or a hunter's club. Such enemies would have finished their work

while their prey lay defenceless. The blow was without doubt from some passive or inanimate body, like the falling trunk or bough of some large tree.—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*



SKELETON AND OUTLINE OF A MEGATHERIUM.

suffice to enable it to hold its own against the jaguar and the puma. When it has once seized a foe, no matter how desperate its own hurts or injuries may be, it will cling until death relaxes its fierce and tenacious hold.

The *Megatherium* used his claws on his hind feet for a different purpose than war. These were limited in number, being confined to one sub-compressed, but large and sharp-pointed claw on each hind foot, the other toes having no claws, but terminating in a sort of hoof, which gave the animal a heavy but firm tread. The two sharp claws served as pickaxes to dig away the soil from the roots of the trees, and so loosen their foundations; for, instead of climbing to obtain his food, this giant leaf-devourer uprooted and tore down the great trees on which he was accustomed to feed.

Of course, he needed a firm base for such a tug and strain,

this was enjoyed by means of the long muscular and flexible tongue, more like a rope than anything else, having the same shape as a giraffe's, but twice as big, which could be used to browse upon the leaves at will and bring them easily within reach. The lower jaw is formed like a spout, hollowed into a long, smooth canal, in which the tongue lay, and was thrust forward or drawn back, gliding to and fro in quest of its leafy repast. The *Megatherium's* teeth were equally as well adapted for the mastication of its vegetable food, grinding it up to a pulp on their cross-ridged surface.

Dr. Buckland, when he first heard the description which has been given already of the *Megatherium's* form and habits, urged an objection which afterwards was the means of furnishing additional proof of its accuracy. Doubting the possibility of such a mode of feeding, he asked how,

You can catch them easily, if you know how. You must go up to them very slowly. If you make a quick motion, they are off. When you get near enough, grasp swiftly a little before the lizard's nose. If you grasp on the spot where he is you will only catch the end of his tail. Now a lizard drops his tail off as easily as a boy loses his jack-knife; so if you catch only the lizard's tail, you lose the rest of the lizard. . . . If you are kind to the lizard, and tickle him gently with the end of your finger, he will soon be tame. He will catch flies on the table, and will also come and take insects from your hand." The lizards in the tropics are green, and golden, and red, and purple, and indeed all colors. They are beautiful creatures, and may be tamed like their gray cousins in Virginia. But sometimes they are very large and fierce."

"GENIUS is eternal patience."