

THE REIGN OF REPTILES.

One summer about a dozen years ago, I was visiting Hartford, Connecticut. A number of people met together every summer in some part of the country to discuss questions of science, and to have a good time generally. In the morning there is the science and in the evening there is usually the fun.

One day during the Hartford meeting, the geologists and others paid a visit to a very wonderful place on the Connecticut River, near Middletown, called the Portland Quarries. Quantities of brown stone for house-building had been taken out and shipped to various places. This quarrying had been going on for about one hundred years.

In one place a broad, uneven floor had been left littered over with slabs of stone of various sizes. On the broken bits and on the floor were great numbers of the most wonderful footprints, as clear and distinct as if they had been made an hour before in wet earth. Some of the tracks were eight or ten inches in length, others were not more than four or five. The tracks looked like those of gigantic birds, and were called for many years "the bird tracks of the Connecticut Valley."

The sandstone quarry had once been the beach of a shallow sea. Over the sand which had been left wet by the receding

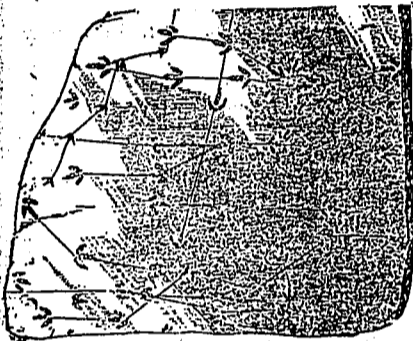


Fig. 1.—SLAB OF SANDSTONE, WITH TRACKS OF BIPEDS.
(From Winchell's Sketches of Creation.)

water, myriads of strange creatures roamed in search of food. More than fifty different kinds of creatures have left a record of their presence on this shore, and there were probably hundreds upon hundreds of each kind. On this single slab of stone, six feet by eight, and dug from one of the quarries of the valley, are the tracks of six different creatures, inhabitants of that ancient world (Fig. 1).

Before the foot-prints had lost their distinctness, the next tide, rising and sweeping inland, carried a new supply of sand and spread it over the beach, covering the foot-prints and making a fresh, smooth surface for new ones. So layer after layer was formed, each holding the record left of their presence by the visitors of the day. Slowly the whole mass hardened into stone, keeping through thousands of years the marks impressed upon it when it was yielding sand.

The sandstone readily splits between any two layers. When an upper slab is turned over, the same footprint is found upon it as was upon the one below it, only the print is raised instead of being hollowed out, just as the sealing-wax on a letter shows the same figure raised upon it which was hollowed out on the seal that pressed it.



Fig. 3.—RAMPHORHYNCHUS.
(From Winchell's Sketches of Creation.)

The markings so long considered to be bird tracks, are now thought to have been made by a strange winged reptile with bird-like claws, whose bones have been found in the rocks of that time. It is not so singular as it may seem at first glance that such doubt exists. Reptiles and birds are nearer cousins than one would be apt to guess. They are really only two branches of one great division of the animal world.



Fig. 4.—IDEAL LANDSCAPE OF THE AGE OF REPTILES.
(From Winchell's Sketches of Creation.)

Now, it is true, we find them very widely separated, but if we could see some of these old-time monsters it would puzzle us to tell whether they were birds or reptiles.

These tracks in the sandstone may have been made by a reptile-like bird, but more probably they were those of a bird-like reptile.

When a reptile is spoken of, the idea it suggests is a snake, as snakes are the commonest of the reptile class in our time and our country. There are, however, many creatures living on the earth now which are just as truly reptiles as snakes are; we may not see many of these creatures, but we often hear or read of them—crocodiles, and their American cousins alligators, turtles or tortoises, and lizards. These do not form a very important class in the animal kingdom now, but there was a time in the world's history when they were the rulers everywhere, in the air and the sea and the land. There were probably more in number and more in kind than the world has seen before and since, and besides this, they were enormously larger, more powerful, and more dangerous. Some of these creatures were sixty or seventy feet long, and many were as much as forty feet.

The reptiles that ruled in the air were utterly unlike anything we now see. Some of them were twenty feet from tip to tip of their outspread wings. One of them, you see (Fig. 2), has just thrown himself from a rock in pursuit of a dragon-fly, while his companion sits perched above him on the top of the bank.

Another of these singular creatures may be seen in Fig. 3, leaving behind it, as it walks, the prints of its bird-like claws and sharp tail and queer wings. The wings, you see, are nothing like a bird's wings; they are more like those of a bat, the skin being stretched to a bone of the forefoot from the side of the body.

The shores of the ancient seas were infested with other huge beings something like our alligators. In the landscape (Fig. 4) one of these may be seen, in the middle of the picture, crawling up on a rock, while the huge frog-like reptile is making his lumbering way down to the water, where he spent most of his time.

It was the ocean, however, in which most of the monsters of that time lived. The waters of its seas were lashed into fury by their sports and spoutings and battles to the death. Such a battle is shown in the picture (Fig. 5). The larger, to the left, must have been a terror to the watery world around him. Not content with devouring all the fish and lizards that came in his way, he also lived upon the young of his own kind, as the bones found in the stomach of a skeleton show.

The huge sea-lizard to the right in the same picture was a much less dangerous creature. It is possible that some of his cousins still exist in the ocean, and that they occasionally show themselves. There have been a great many stories of sea-serpents seen by many people and at various times. Most of these are undoubtedly sailors' yarns, and deserve no attention; but leaving these out of the question, there still remain some that we cannot refuse to credit—one of these, for instance, where five hundred people saw the creature again and again, and near enough to distinguish its eyes; and some of these witnesses were men whose evidence would have been taken in any court of justice in the land. Not very long ago a strange carcass was caught in the anchor of a sailing vessel and beached on the Florida coast. A storm washed it away before such drawings and measurements could be made as would have settled the question as to what it was.

The character of the forests, too, was changing all the while from what it had

been in the coal-making period. The great club mosses with their carven stems, and the huge feathery-leaved reeds, were passing away. The ferns still grew in great profusion; both the low and creeping kinds and the tree-ferns filled the woods, but other trees and plants, like our evergreens and palms, took the place of vanishing kinds. These too made coal-beds, though not such vast ones as were stored away during the reign of plants.

It must be understood that the whole world, Europe and America and Australia, had each its history, when the reign of water and fire and ice, of plants and animals, followed each other very much in the same way, but not at the same time. Europe is an older country than America, and America is older than Australia, in other things besides those about which our written histories tell us. The animals and plants of America when it was first discovered were like those of Europe in a time much earlier. Australia had animals and plants that corresponded with an age still earlier than those of America. Some of the curious birds and animals of Australia help us to understand the meaning of the singular skeletons dug out of the rocks in European countries.

In the history of each country, after man came upon the earth, we see something like



Fig. 2.—THE PTERODACTYL.
(From Winchell's Sketches of Creation.)

this. When Rome was in its later days, England was full of barbarians; and England was an old country, in her turn, when America was still barbarous. Just as man's work in the world—his diggings and minings and quarryings—changes the order of nature in the layers of the earth, so his moving in and taking possession of the new countries changes the order of things there too, and interferes with the regular succession of creatures which would have followed, one kind succeeding another till all was complete.—Sophie B. Herrick, in Harper's Young People.

THE WAY GOD LOOKS AT SIN.

During last summer a Christian lady, who was visiting a seaside place, asked some little children to come to her every Lord's day afternoon to hear about the Lord Jesus.

One afternoon she wanted to tell them what God thought about sin, so she took a microscope, and gave them some very small print to look at through it.

They all exclaimed, "How large the letters seem, and when we look at them without the microscope they are so very small."

So then the lady told them, "That is the way God looks at sin."

You see, God thinks sin is very big, while you and I think it looks very small. We need to look at it through a microscope, as the little children did at the small print, to see how big it really is, though it looks so small to us.

Now, dear children, perhaps you think it is a very little thing to tell a story, or get out of temper, or be disobedient to your parents; but God does not think it a little thing. God thinks it so big that nothing but the blood of Jesus, His own dear Son, could wash it away; and God loved the world so much, and the dear little children too, that "He gave His only begotten Son" to die on the cross, so that his precious blood might wash away all their sins.—Word and Work.

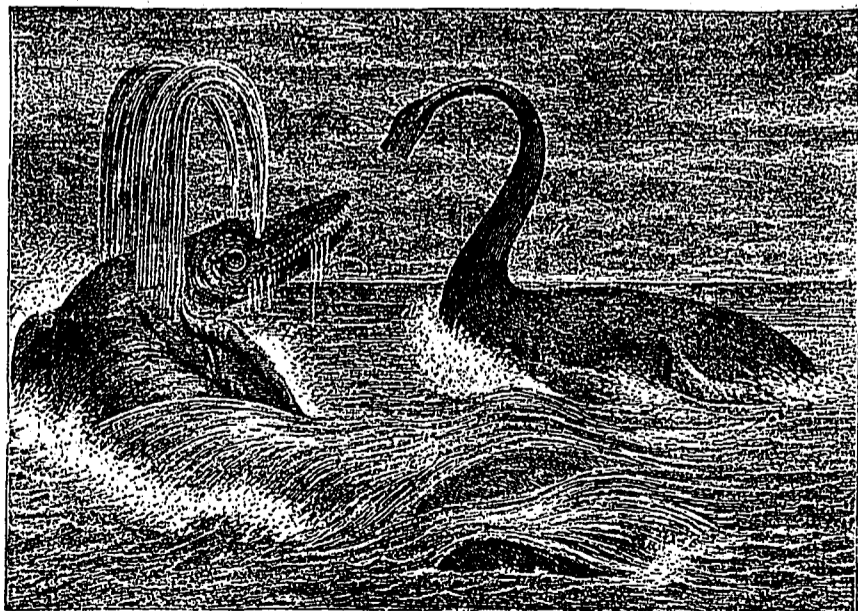


Fig. 5.—ICHTHYOSAURUS AND PLESIOSAURUS.
(From Winchell's Sketches of Creation.)