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NATURAL HISTORY.

CONTRIVANCES OF ANTS.

A gentleman of unimpeachable veracity remarked to us the other day, that while in the island of St. Croix, he instituted several experiments with reference to ascertaining the truth of what he had been often told, of the ingenuity, and apparent reasonings of the ant, of that beautiful island. Having slain a centipede, which had been sent him by a friend, he laid it on the window stool within his apartment, where, though not a single individual of that mischievous race of vermin had been seen, to his great gratification within the course of a very few hours, one solitary ant suddenly made its appearance through a crevice in the casing, attracted probably by the odour from the body. Shortly after, having surveyed the premises, it disappeared, but speedily returned with a host of companions, to whom the discovery of a prize had unquestionably been communicated; a more careful survey of the magnitude of the object was evidently instituted. The whole company then disappeared simultaneously through the crack; but an army was put in requisition, for the third appearance was a multitude. Having mounted the carcass, examined minutely its exact position, and satisfied themselves that it was actually bereft of life and that no danger would be incurred from their premeditated operations, a new and unlooked for series of labors were commenced, bearing such a striking analogy to human reason, as manifested in what is commonly called *contrivance*, that if there is no intelligence in it—why, the metaphysicians have in reservation an unexplored field of observation.—Well, not being able to move the mass entire, they divided themselves into platoons, and cut the body into portions of about half an inch in length, which was effectually and skilfully done, between a late hour in the afternoon and the following night, and each piece transported to their citadel, through some contiguous aperture, of sufficient diameter to allow the loads to pass. When the observer arose at daylight, every part had been carried away but the head, which was really moving off towards the hole, surrounded by an immense concourse of admiring spectators, probably on the *qui vive*, happy in the delightful anticipation of future feasts and revellings. On farther scrutiny, he found that the decapitated head was mounted on the backs of about a dozen bearers, who, like a Roman phalanx with a testudo upon their shoulders, were marching off in an orderly manner, towards the same orifice through which all the rest had disappeared.

Dr. Smith's Scientific Tracts.

PECULIARITIES IN PLANTS.

(Concluded.)

The cause of these movements in plants has been ascribed to the presence or absence of the sun's rays. Some motions are evidently excited by heat; but plants kept in an equal temperature in a hot-house, fail not to contract their leaves, or to sleep, in the same manner as when they are exposed to the open air.

The American plant, the Venus's Fly-trap, affords another instance of rapid vegetable motion. Its leaves are jointed and furnished with two rows of strong prickles. The surfaces of the leaves secrete a sweet liquor, which allures the approach of flies. When these parts are touched by the legs of a fly, the two lobes of the leaf instantly rise up, the rows of prickles lock themselves fast together, and squeeze the poor captive to death. A straw or pin will excite the same motion.

The transition from plants to animals is allowed to be almost imperceptible: for the animated Sea-nettle, fixed to the rocks, that stretches out its numerous feelers to receive its food, is but a little way removed from the plant fixed in the earth, that pushes its roots in the direction of water, or whatever else in its vicinity may contribute to its growth; and the motions of some plants in appearance come very near to the principle in animals, which is expressed by the term *conscious feeling*. Yet, though we do not understand them, we cannot believe that it is any thing but appearance. Some of these motions in vegetable life are indeed remarkable, for a plant, reared in a dark cellar, if some light be admitted, will bend towards the light, or if made to grow in a flower-pot with its head downward, it will turn its head upward, according to the natural position of a plant. If a root be uncovered and not exposed to much heat, and a wet sponge be placed near it, but in a direction opposite to that in which the root is proceeding, in a short time the root will turn towards the sponge. In this way the direction of roots may be varied at pleasure. All plants make the strongest efforts, by melting, twining, and even twisting their stems and branches, to escape from darkness and shade, and to procure the influence of the sun. If a vessel of water be placed within six inches of a growing cucumber, in twenty-four hours the cucumber alters the direction of its branches, and never stops till it comes into contact with the water. When a pole is placed at a considerable distance from an unsupported vine, the branches of which are proceeding in a contrary direction from that of the pole, in a short time it alters its course and stops not till it clings round the pole. But the same vine carefully avoids attaching itself to low vegetables near it; as the cabbage. Hence Pliny and Cicero * remark, that the vine hates the colewort and cabbage, as if it possessed the faculty of perception and the power of choosing.

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* "The vine hates the cabbage and all kinds of pot-herbs."—PLINY.

"The vine is said to avoid the colewort and cabbage if planted near it, as if they were noxious and pestilential."—CICERO.

"Man is more distinguished by devotion than by reason, as several brute creatures discover something like reason, though they betray not any thing that bears the least affinity to devotion."—ADDISON.

STORY OF AN EAST INDIAN BOY.

Some thirty years since, the captain of an East Indiaman obtained an introduction to a Persian lady of great personal attractions, of whom he shortly after became enamored. She returned his affections, and they married. The lady being in possession of great wealth, the husband relinquished his profession, and took up his permanent abode at Lucknow.—Here he resided with his wife for upwards of three years in great domestic comfort, during which period she bore him three children. From this time the father was absent until the eldest boy was about seven years of age, when he brought him to England in order to obtain for him the advantages of a European education. It happened that the father, for some reason now only to be surmised, led his child to suppose that he was not related to him, but merely a friend to whose care he had been committed during the voyage. Almost immediately upon arrival in this country, the father suddenly died without revealing to his charge the relationship subsisting between them. As the boy bore the complexion of his native clime, and the features of the race from which he sprung on the maternal side, he was looked upon as a half-caste by the relatives of the deceased, who had never been informed of the father's marriage; they therefore considered that they made a suitable provision for him by binding him an apprentice to a grocer, with whom he served his time, and proved a faithful servant. When the period of his apprenticeship was completed, the relations of his late father gave him a hundred pounds, and cast him upon the wide world to seek his fortune, at the same time discouraging any expectation of future assistance, glad to be thus easily freed from the claims of one whom they deemed an incumbrance.

Without patron or friend, the deserted youth had little chance of establishing himself in his business by securing a respectable connection—a half-caste being looked upon with a kind of conventional prejudice, which it is to be hoped the late act of Parliament in favor of this slighted race will tend.