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A TALK ABOUT SNAILS.

BY EDWIN A. BARBER.

It is probable that every reader of the *Illustrated Christian Weekly* has observed the common garden snail (*Helix albolabris*) creeping laboriously and slowly along in moist places, with his shell or house on his back. A creature so lowly and sluggish would scarcely be supposed to have anything of interest attached to its history, and yet, on the contrary, we can discover many curious facts in regard to it. If we watch him when moving we will see that he has two pairs of horns on his head, a long pair above and a short pair beneath. The eyes are situated, like little knobs, on the extremities of the longer horns. Should we alarm him, he will quickly draw in his horns, the eyes disappearing first, and then retreat himself into his house. When he is drawn within his shell, the breathing orifice may be seen in the aperture on the right side, and we will have no difficulty in observing it open and close as he breathes.

A few weeks ago I placed a snail in a small box, and forgot it until nearly three weeks had elapsed, and when I examined it I supposed it to be dead. Placing it upon my bureau, I went in quest of some boiling water, in which to immerse it for the purpose of extracting the animal from the shell; but what was my surprise on returning to find Mr. Snail complacently exploring the surroundings. I have now had him for nearly two months, and he still comes out nearly every night and employs his time in trailing himself over my brushes and toilet-bottles, and I have become quite attached to my little pet.

The term *Helix*, applied to snails, is taken from a Greek word which means spiral, twisted. The land snails of the genus *Helix* do not possess what is called an *operculum*, like the sea and fresh water snails. This is a peculiar, horny scale on the hinder part of the body, which, when the animal retires into his shell, fits tightly in and closes up the mouth of the aperture. In the absence of this the *Helix* closes its shell with a peculiar secretion of its body which becomes dry and tough like a thin skin. This is called the *epiphragm*. When snails wish to retire for the winter they bury themselves in the ground and contract themselves as much as possible in their shells. Then they close up the openings with this mucus and lie dormant until spring.

Snails, as a rule, are extremely tenacious of life, and accounts are recorded of individuals surviving without water or food for several years. A very celebrated specimen lived in a dormant condition for the length of four years, glued down to a card in the conchological collections of the British Museum. This was a specimen of the desert snail of Egypt, (*Helix desertorum*), and after it was accidentally discovered to be alive it lived for more than two years. Another land snail is said to have lived for a period of six years without food.

In the Western territories and through the Rocky Mountains, snails exist in great numbers. "Cooper's *Helix*" (*H. Cooperi*) is so abundant in some places that bushels of shells can be scraped together in a few moments. In many localities, where the forests have been burned away, these shells lie in great abundance, sometimes extending for miles, bleaching on the surface of the blackened soil. The shells of snails generally turn from right to left like the spring of a watch; then they are

called *dextral*, or right-handed. Occasionally, however, an exception to the rule occurs, in which case the spiral turns the other way and the shell is called *sinistral*, or reversed. Such a specimen is nothing more nor less than a monstrosity, and is as much a freak of nature as a two-headed calf or a four-legged chicken. In some few species of *Helices*, however, left-handed shells are the rule, and in such cases when an exceptional one turns in the opposite direction, like a watch-spring, it is called a reversed shell. In Northwestern Colorado I had the rare fortune to pick up one specimen of a sinistral *Helix Cooperi*, and, so far as I know, it is the only one of this species on record.

Snails are either *oviparous* or *viviparous*; that is, they either lay eggs which, in time, are hatched into miniature shells, or they bring forth their young alive with the shells perfectly formed. The *Helix Cooperi* belongs to the second class.

It may seem strange to us that snails are used for food in some portions of the world, yet this is a fact. The edible snail (*Helix pomatia*) is a large species, reddish-brown in

THE OLD MAN'S TALE.

It was in this very room we sat, said he, Maggie and I. It was a sorrowful meal. We had just started life, and every dollar we had in the world was in the factory over there, and the flames had devoured all. I was discouraged, but Maggie was full of hope in God. Of all the good gifts of God to me in this world that blessed woman crowned them all. Even while we sat conversing the goodness of God appeared. The door opened, and in came a neighbor, rough but kind, who at once said: 'I hear you are out of a job.'

'Yes, the fire has left me nothing to do.' 'Well, I want you to do something for me. I have a mortgage on a farm near Rochester, and it is to be sold in three days' time. I want some one to go out and secure my interests, and you are just the man. Will you go?' 'What do you think, Maggie?' 'Why, if you think you can do the business satisfactorily, then go; you have nothing else on hand.'

'I will be ready, sir, to-morrow morning.'

'Get into my buggy. I will drive you down.' I got in with him, and when we reached the basin, he reined up before a new boat, a perfect beauty. I read her name. 'Mount Morris,' and looked her over. He said:

'What do you think of her?' 'As pretty a boat as ever rode the water.' 'I want you to command her this summer.' 'What, what, me? I never ran a boat in my life. I don't know the first thing about it.' 'Never mind, you are a reliable man. You can learn. We want you.'

And there it was again, said he. One thing right upon another. I have been a special object of God's goodness. Well, I said to him:

'I will go home and speak to Maggie about it. I am greatly influenced in everything by her opinion. If she thinks best I will do it.'

'In case she does,' said he, 'you meet me at the Albany office.'

'Very well, sir.'

I came home, and Maggie said, 'Why, if you can get along with it, I can stay here with grandmother and the children. You have nothing else to do.' So I wrote him that I would take the Mount Morris on one condition, viz.: she should be known as the 'Cold Water Boat.' I would have no drunkenness, nor nonsense of the kind about her. To this they assented. I shipped a crew on these express terms. First along they hissed us and hooted at us as we went through the locks, but presently God honored my resolve with new marks of goodness, for He caused so much talk about us, and awakened so much interest in us, that we were always loaded down to the water's edge with passengers. People would wait for days with their furniture and baggage piled up on the shore, and allow the boats to go by, that they might take the Mount Morris. It was all out of my line, but it was all in God's line. It was not my way, but it was His way, and it was a good way. It was a profitable summer for the boat, and for me, and it tided me over a very troublesome bar. O! that men would trust the Lord.—*F. A. Herton, in Interior.*



SOME CURIOUS SNAILS.

color, which lives on vines or small trees. It was considered by the ancient Romans a great delicacy for the table, and was raised by them in parks, being fed on cooked meat and flour. These articles of luxury are now extensively reared and consumed in France and Switzerland, and in England they are fattened for the market in hothouses. Except for the prevailing prejudice against them, I cannot see any reason why they would not be as palatable as oysters.

Representatives of the snail family occur in almost every region of the earth, excepting the colder districts, varying in size from a small pin's head to more than four inches across the shell.—*Illus. Chris. Weekly.*

The superintendent of a Kentucky Sunday-school asked one of his scholars if his father was a Christian. "Yes, sir," replied the boy, "but he is not working at it much." That kind of Christians is not confined to Kentucky.

So I left Maggie and the children, and started next day for the boat. And here the Lord surprised me again. On the way to the boat I met—, who said:

'Where are you going?' 'Rochester.'

'I heard that you was. Will you do some business for me by the way?'

'Certainly; what is it?' 'I own a store at Palmyra. The rent is past due. If you will stop and collect it, I will pay you well.'

'So thus it was again,' said he, and the tears streamed down his face as he lived the dark days over. "I was ready to come home, and passing down Main street, Rochester, I met the owner of a line of packets, an old friend:

'Why, what are you doing here?'

'Transacting business.'

'When are you going home?'

'I am on my way now to find a boat for the east.'

The name is Brown dog