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NATURAL HISTORY.

THE SALAMANDER.

Though the ancients have described a lizard bred by fire, and existing in flames, the moderns have discovered that it was a fabulous assertion, and that they have merely the offspring of a heated brain.

The salamander, which was once supposed to live upon that element which must inevitably prove the destruction of life, resembles a frog in the form of its body, though, like every species of the lizard, it has a long tail: like that animal its snout is rounded, and its eyes placed in the back of the head; the claws of its toes are short and feeble; and it is covered with a rough skin.

Not only the salamander, but every one of the lizard species are supposed to be of a venomous kind; but it appears to be the effect of prejudice or misconception, for they are destitute of fangs like the viper, and have very small teeth; as to the saliva, which has been supposed poisonous, no effects of that nature have ever been produced.

The salamander, which is best known in Europe, is generally from eight to eleven inches in length; when taken in the hands it imparts a chilling sensation, and appears to be incapable of supporting heat, as it always makes choice of a cool retreat. Like the frog, it seems to be a torpid animal, and in that instance differs from the rest of the lizard kind, as the generality of them are continually in motion, if we except the winter months, which are chiefly devoted to sleep: during that period the water lizard changes its skin every fortnight; but in the summer twice or thrice in that space.

FLOWERS.

Flowers are undoubtedly among the most exquisite pieces of nature's workmanship.—What beautiful tints do they display?—What lively colours do they unfold?—What variegated beauties do they discover?—and, what delightful perfumes do they emit! In view of these well might the poet exclaim:

—Who can paint

Like Nature! Can imagination boast
Amid its gay creation, hues like hers?
Or can it mix them with that matchless skill
And loose them in each other, as appears
In every bud that blows?

But the skill of the architect is no less conspicuous in the general contrivance and delicate structure of their several parts, and beautiful harmony of the whole, than in the laying on of the colours by which they are embellished.

The diversity of shape, and form, and complexion, in those of different kinds is not more remarkable than that no two are to be

found exact, y^e alike, even of the same species and growing on the same stalk or knot.

Nor should the aromatic fragrance which those beautiful sons and daughters of nature send forth, more excite our gratitude, than that well ordered succession, by which, the pleasures we receive from these transitory visitants are lengthened out and protracted almost all the year round.

Before winter with his cloudy front has taken his departure, the early *Snow drop* boldly steps forth in his pure white robe,—the *Crocus* next, with an air of timidity peeps out, and as if afraid to venture, keeps close to the earth—then comes the *Violet* with her varied beauties, accompanied by the sparkling *Polyanthus*, and splendid *Auricula*—afterwards groves of *Tulips* display their rich and gaudy attire, followed by the *Anemone* in her spreading robe. Now the *Ranunculus* expands the richness of his foliage—the *Sun flower* shoots forth his golden rays and the beautiful *Carnation* with a numerous train bring up the rear, and close the procession,—Who can reflect upon this passing, yet protracted scene, without being forcibly struck with the wisdom and goodness of God manifested in it?

DAWN OF GENIUS.

KING ALFRED.

Alfred, more justly surnamed the Great than any of his predecessors was born in an age of the most profound ignorance, when learning was considered rather as a reproach than an honour to a prince. He was not taught to know one letter from another till he was about twelve years of age, when a book was put into his hands, more by accident than by previous design. The queen, his mother, one day being present with her four sons, of whom Alfred was the youngest, and having a book of Saxon poems in her hand, beautifully written and embellished, observed that the royal youths were charmed with its external appearance; upon this she said, "I will make a present of this book to him who shall first learn to read it." Alfred immediately took fire, and applied his mind with such ardour, that in a very little time he both read and repeated the poem to the queen and received it for his reward. From that moment he felt an insatiable thirst for knowledge; and reading and study became his chief delight. Such was his proficiency that he composed various poems, and apt stories; and translated from the Greek the fables of *Aesop*. He also gave Saxon translations of Gregory on the Pastoral Office, of the histories of *Orosius* and *Bede*, and of the *Consolation of Philosophy* by *Boethius*. The last literary work in which he engaged, was a translation of

the *Psalms of David* into Anglo-Saxon which however he did not live to finish.

Alfred came to the crown young, but found affairs in that state that he was obliged to seek refuge, in disguise, in the cottage of one of his herdsmen, whose wife ignorant of the quality of her guest, and observing him one day by the fireside, employed in trimming his bows and arrows, she desired him to take care of some cakes which were toasting, while she was employed in other domestic affairs. But Alfred, whose thoughts were otherwise engaged, neglected this injunction; and the good woman, on her return, finding her cakes burnt, rated the unknown king very severely, and upbraided him, that he was always ready enough to eat her warm cakes, though he was so negligent in toasting them.

EMINENT EARLY RISERS.

Dr Adam, the celebrated rector, of the high school of Edinburgh, whose long life, to its very close, was spent in an unremitting course of labour for the public good, was an early riser. It was his constant practice, for the whole summer, to rise at the hour of five and not unfrequently, when excited by any particular object, or any formidable difficulty, even at four in the morning. A proof how favourable the morning hours are for study, it may be mentioned that Dr. Adam frequently felt his patience worn out by the harassing exertions he made in the completion of his work on Roman Antiquities, and would rise from his desk, in the after part of the day, half determined to relinquish his task; yet notwithstanding these sallies, he would rise with the sun the next morning, to prosecute his task with renewed vigour.

A volume might, indeed, be filled with notices of early risers. Bishop Jewel rose regularly at four; Dr. Franklin was an early riser; Priestly was an early riser; the great and learned lawyer and pious Christian, Sir Matthew Hale, studied sixteen hours a day, and was an early riser; Dr. Parkhurst, the philologist, rose regularly at five in the summer and six in the winter, and in the latter season always made his own fire.—It is to the hours gained by early rising that the world is indebted for the numerous volumes which, within a few years, have issued from the pen of Sir Walter Scott. Among the ancients, the names of *Hommer*, *Horace*, *Virgil*, and of numerous other poets may be inscribed upon the list of early risers.

WANTED,

At the Tin Plate Working Business, a smart active Boy, of about the age of 14 years. Noon need apply but such as can be well recommended. Enquire of

January 8. Wm. F. STAYNER.