



BOA CONSTRICTORS.

Our illustration taken from the *Scientific American* shows Mr. G. R. O'Reilly, a well known authority on snakes, handling a boa constrictor at the Central Park Museum. Of course, it is not to be inferred that the snake thus easily mastered is of a size and power equal to that represented in the famous Laocoon marble, if such monstrous serpents ever existed, but it is none the less a true boa of very respectable size, such as are widely distributed in tropical America.

The name boa has been generally applied to several varieties of large serpents which kill their prey by constriction, and do not have poison fangs, the European variety being known as pythons. The true boas are abundant in Guiana and Brazil, where they are found in dry, sandy localities, amid forests, and on the banks of rivers and lakes, some species frequenting the water. They feed chiefly on the smaller quadrupeds, in search of which they often ascend trees. The size of their prey often seems enormously beyond their capacity for swallowing, but the creature's jaws are merely connected by ligaments which can be distended at pleasure. Its mouth can be made to open transversely as well as vertically, the two jaws not being connected directly but by the intervention of a distinct bone, which adds greatly to the extent of its gape. It has also the power of moving one-half of the jaw independently of the other, and can thus keep a firm hold of its victim while gradually swallowing it. The upper jaw has a double row of solid, sharp teeth, and there is a single row in the lower jaw, all pointing inward, so that, the prey once caught, the boa itself could not easily release it. Their immense muscular power enables them to crush within their folds quite large animals, which they first lubricate with saliva and then swallow whole by their immense dilatable jaws and gullet. After feeding they become inactive, as is the case with most other reptiles, and remain so while the process of digestion is going on, which, for a full meal, may extend over several weeks, during which period they may be readily killed or captured.

The eggs of a boa are about the size of hens' eggs. About fifteen years ago a boa at the Central Park menagerie laid twenty-one eggs, and it was especially noted that each third egg laid was sterile. The fertile eggs had each a young boa within; one came out of its shell immediately after being laid, but soon died, and all the others died in their shells.

The boas of tropical America, where the specimen shown was captured, never reach the size attained by the great pythons, of the same family, of Hindostan, Ceylon, and Borneo, some of which are said to grow to thirty feet in length, and to be able to manage a full-grown buffalo. A specimen which was brought from Borneo to England was sixteen feet long and eighteen inches in circumference. A goat was placed in the cage of this boa every three weeks, and during the process of swallowing, which occupied over two hours, the skin of the snake became extended almost to bursting, the points of the horns apparently threatening to pierce the coat of the destroyer. The whole animal was so completely digested that nothing was passed but a small quantity of calcareous matter, not equal to a tenth part of the bones, and a few hairs. The skin of the boa was the object of serpent worship among the Mexicans, and a specimen of a skin which was so used is preserved in the British Museum.

THE STORY OF AN APRON.

BY HARRIET B. HASTINGS.

"God hath chosen the weak things,"

When I was about thirteen years old, I went to live in a family of a distant relative, to assist in doing the work about the house. The man was well-to-do in this world, but wicked and profane, and his interest was in anything rather than the religious training of children. The work was hard, and the prevailing irreverence and the profanity were harder still to bear; but I was needed there, and so endeavored to fulfill my appointed duties faithfully.

One Lord's day morning, I heard that there was to be a religious meeting some three or four miles away, and my heart was set upon attending it. But how could I go? Would they give their consent? I feared not, as they might think it too far for me to walk, and their horses would be too tired to be driven such a distance. What could I do?

I had from childhood been taught to pray, and following the convictions of my heart, I left the house without saying anything to anyone, and ran up a little path which led me into a secluded spot upon the mountain side, where there was a rock which seemed to be made on purpose for me, and where I often used to go and pray. The man with whom I lived, mistrusting my object, followed stealthily up the mountain, and hid on the other side of the rock to listen to what I had to say. I opened

my dear little Bible and read, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die, but if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8, 13, 14). I was ignorant of the Scriptures, but I firmly believed that this passage was put there for me, and that I had some cross to take up; and though I knew not what it could be, yet I thought I must do something that would "mortify" me, and I inquired, "What can I do to 'mortify the deeds of the body'?" I was young, and had no mother near to advise me, nor any Christian friend to whom I could go for instruction. I was entirely alone, as far as religious matters were concerned, and so I asked God to show me what I could do to "mortify the deeds of the body." I wanted to attend the meeting that day, and desired that the Lord would influence my relatives to let me go; and though the distance was so great that I was fearful I could not gain their consent yet I thought I would tell the Lord about it, and he might possibly open a way for me to go.

Then the question arose again, How could I "mortify the deeds of the body"? The passage was a mystery to me; I did not understand it. But after a little I thought I had found the key. My mother had made for me a long calico apron, which came down to my feet, to wear when washing dishes, and to do housework in. I always hated that apron; it was so much longer than my dress, and of a very homely color, and it always mortified me to wear it. It almost made me cry every time I put it on. There was nothing in the world that I disliked as I did that apron, and I concluded that this was my cross, and that there was nothing I could do to "mortify the deeds of the body" like putting on that apron, and wearing it to meeting! Like many another devotee who has thought to gain the favor of God by doing some disagreeable work, or suffering severe penance I felt that this was my way of obtaining his blessing; and as I felt great need of help, I fell upon my knees and asked the Lord to put it into the hearts of my relatives to permit me to go to the meeting, and if they consented I would wear my long apron. After I had done praying about it, on rising, whom should I see but the man with whom I lived, who had been concealed over on the other side of the rock, and who, having heard all that I had been saying, came out from his hiding-place, and started for the house, shouting and laughing at my foolishness. Of course I knew what to expect, and went down the hill with a trembling heart, wondering if they would let me go, and thinking if they did I must be true to my promise, and wear the apron!

When I reached the house, my relative began to laugh at me, and make fun of my prayers. I said nothing, but finally asked him if I could go to the meeting. He laughed, and said:

"Yes, if you will 'mortify the deeds of the body.'"

So I prepared myself, and, secreting the long apron under my shawl, started for meeting. There was a small river which I had to cross, either by wading or going over in a boat. I was somewhat afraid, as the water was quite high, but I finally got into a boat—the same old boat which had once carried me down stream when a little child—and rowed across. When over the river I knelt again in prayer to thank the Lord that I was so far safely on my journey, and I then put on the long apron. I thought at first of going directly by the road to the meeting, but afterwards concluded that I would not, for I wore a short dress, and over this the apron, which came down to my feet; and to go along the public road in this costume was a little too much for my courage; so I went around through the fields, dodging among the trees and woods and stumps and fences, some of the time coming out into the highway, and then going back into the pastures and over the hills to avoid passing any houses, or meeting anyone on the road.

At length I came within sight of the schoolhouse where the meeting was held, and I saw that the house was crowded with people, outside and in, old and young, most of whom were my acquaintances. As they looked out from the corner of the schoolhouse and saw me coming in my long apron, I could see them laughing and

pointing at me, and I was too sensitive to face their mirth; and, with a trembling heart, I turned back to a convenient place, and quickly removed the troublesome apron, hiding it under the fence, wishing my mother had never made it, and feeling sorry that I had ever promised the Lord to wear it. I started on again, and came to a little stream of water which came between me and the schoolhouse, over which a beam was thrown for foot-passengers to cross. As I was crossing the stream I looked down into the water, and thought of Christ and his words commanding us to "repent and be baptized," and of the baptism with which he had been baptized for us, and I thought within myself, Since Christ has done so much for me, could I not be willing to do so little a thing as I thought I was called to do for him? These words came also to my mind, "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall also the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his father with the holy angels" (Mark 8, 38). My heart was filled with sadness. How wretched I was! I had never openly professed my faith in Christ, nor had I learned the way of peace, but I felt a love for the Lord and a desire to do his will, and the Lord pitied me in my ignorance and my honesty of purpose and desire.

I turned back again to the place where the apron was hidden, and knelt upon it to seek help from the Lord, and while I was praying the Lord seemed very near to strengthen and encourage me. It seemed as if the angels of the Lord were round about me, and I received such joy and courage from God that felt I could do anything for Christ, no matter what it might be. So I put on my apron which I had taken off, and started again for the meeting. As I approached the schoolhouse the people began to laugh. With a firm step and a determined will I pressed my way through the crowd of boys and girls who were holding their mouths to keep from laughing and disturbing the meeting. I thought I would take a back seat, but the schoolhouse was filled, and the only seat I could find was in front, where the little folks usually sat, and where I was exposed to the gaze of all the people.

My presence and strange dress of course created quite a sensation among both old and young in the house, and at short intervals some of the younger folks outside would put their heads inside the door, and then draw back laughing; and I well knew what it was for. The mirth produced was of course annoying to the preacher, who was an old, gray-haired gentleman, who seemed to be much broken down and discouraged. He said he had been there three weeks laboring with the people, and not a soul had been converted, and he had concluded that it was of little use to do any more in that place, and it was probably the last time they would ever hear his voice, as that was the closing meeting. He soon concluded his remarks, and sat down, giving others opportunity to follow him in testimony or exhortation as the spirit should give them utterance.

The sadness and discouragement of the old preacher touched my heart, and after he concluded I arose, and in my childish way told my simple story about my prayer by the rock and about the long apron, and the reason why I put it on, that I might "mortify the deeds of the body;" how my courage failed, and I had taken it off; and how I prayed to God for strength to bear the scolds and taunts of my acquaintances, and had determined to do right and serve the Lord, and not to be ashamed of his words, believing that the Lord would take care of me, and how he had blessed, strengthened and comforted me in my determination to do his will.

The effect of this simple story was remarkable. The power of the Spirit of God seemed to rest upon the congregation. Both old and young were bathed in tears. The gray-headed minister buried his face in his hands and wept aloud, and rising, said, "This little child has condemned us all. She has been willing to take up her cross, and has done it with such courage, it ought to be a lesson for us all." The congregation were greatly affected; those out side crowded to the doors and the windows to look in, and before the old minister had concluded every eye seemed filled