

# Sea Serpent Taken Alive

Ever and again, this cock-sure world of ours, toddling along on its self-confident way, is brought to a sudden stop by some little happening that makes us realize with a sudden start how blindly we walk on the edge of mystery.

Such a happening was it that has been brought about by three drunken negro fishermen of Bermuda—as mean instruments as nature could pick out to teach the world something new of her wonderful ways and to give us a glimpse of the unrevealed marvels of creation.

Out of an abyss of the tropic ocean the three pulled the first true deep-sea creature ever to be taken and kept alive. And with that capture the men of science have been almost forced to accept the belief that somewhere in the deepest depths of the deep seas there lives a true sea serpent—the "great eel-like form, swimming with exceptional swiftness and of unknown dimensions," as Doctors Bean and Goode of the United States fish commission put it in their official report in discussing the theory that somewhere in unknown chasms of the ocean there may exist such a monster as that of which men have talked since the days of Pliny.

This creature that has been dragged from its black home of eternal night to lie gasping in a glass tank to be seen by tens of thousands—the first time a human eye ever has seen its kind—is not great in size, for its extreme length when it exerts its entire and startling power of expansion is not more than 6 or possibly 7 feet. But its aspect is so thoroughly that of the Pit, so Satanic, so grotesquely impossible, that the ichthyologists who have studied it up to this time have become converts to the belief in the sea serpent. For men are convinced now that if there can be such things in the marine gulfs of our coasts, and if they can exist without letting science with all its grapples and dredges and sounding wires and trawls ever get a glimpse of them, there is ample reason for believing that vast creatures of aspect still more fantastic and frightful swim far below the surface, rising to the sunlight only in epochal periods to terrify the human nites that see them, and to flee again as terrified themselves by the blinding light of day and the noises of the upper world.

The creature has been identified only tentatively as yet as to species and genus. Prof. Spencer of the New York aquarium, to whom it was sent, believes that it is the same kind of form that was seen dead on the surface of the Caribbean sea off the Cuban coast by Richardson in 1844 during the famous exploring voyage of the Erebus and Terror. If this conjecture is correct, as it probably is, for Prof. Spencer is an observer of rare experience, the fish is entitled to the name *Channomureana Xittata*. That classification puts it into the strange Moray family, the huge and ferocious eel-like fish that have been infamous since the days of ancient Rome, when certain of the species were kept in ponds and fed with living men by their owners, who thought that their flesh became the more delicious from this human diet.

No man who saw this fish wondered at the terror that nearly drove the negroes who caught it out of their boats when they saw what it was that they had hooked. Finless, wrinkled, gulping ceaselessly with a baggy, ophidian throat, it lies, a bloated, venomously evil thing, turning its weird head in reptilian motions. Tiny black beads of eyes, scarcely so large as pin heads, glimmer out of its dark head, set so near the tip of its jaws that, were it not for their baleful light, one would not dream that they could be anything except nostrils.

The head has a shape quite indescribable. It is as formless as a mass that has been stepped on and then partially straightened out, roughly and carelessly. Not that there is much head to it. Most of it is taken up with gape. The observer gets no opportunity to overlook that. For the fish has a habit of opening its jaws constantly, apparently swallowing air. Those gaping jaws extended far back into the very body of the thing, apparently. Never a creature known to man has jaws so overhange.

Where its gills should be, the observers failed to find any. But after a few minutes of close watching they saw a little swelling work up and down, like a slippery knot of muscle under the slimy skin. And then suddenly a tube peered out, protruded and slipped back. Continued observation showed that the tube was a true siphon, and that it takes the place of gills in this deep-sea thing.

It does not swim. It writhes. At times it stretches itself like a worm till its high, rigid body is quite thin

and enormously elongated. Again it shrinks and compresses its great form until, with a hundred wrinkled folds over it, it lies shrunken and even more evil in its vague mass than it was when it lies extended, with its head raised at strange angles with the body, peering wickedly at everything within its ken.

Shrunken and wrinkled, it looks like a puff adder—equally thick-set, with the reptile head. Expanded to full length, its head seems far greater than its body, and then the resemblance to the venomous serpents is complete.

There is no doubt that it is a true deep-sea form, of a kind that rarely ventures from the vast depths, where it makes its home among unknown forms that probably are still more strange, more terrible and more incredibly misshapen than even it. Where it was caught there is a high ledge of coral and limestone, rising sheer out of a chasm 1200 feet deep. No doubt the *Channomureana* writhed its way upward to the top of the ledge more by accident than design, for rarely do the fish that swim 200 fathoms deep rise near to the surface voluntarily. Indeed, few of the deep sea dwellers can do so and live. For their air bladders are adapted by nature to withstand the enormous pressures of water where they dwell, and when they ascend near the surface the effect of the decreased pressure on them is just as the effect of ascending to high altitudes in a balloon is on man. Blood bursts forth from ears and nose, and finally the eyes. Were it possible to ascend still higher, the aeronaut would burst.

Just so is it with the fish. Those that are seized by deep sea trawls and dredges always come to the surface split and torn open, with their eyes actually bulged out of their heads and their entrails protruding. The more delicate forms are generally ruined for all purposes except those of mere scientific identification.

However, for some unknown reason, perhaps driven from its black caverns by scarcity of food, this uncanny monster did find its way upward until it lay in what was shallow water indeed—shallow enough to make its tiny pinpoints of eyes blink, dazzled by the light that filtered down through the wonderfully clear, light blue water, for the depth over the shelf of rock where the *Channomureana* found itself was only 66 feet. And there, winding in and out among strange things, itself the strangest of all, driving the butterfly fish and the bride fish and the angel fish and parrot fish, in all their gorgeous reef-liveries, before it in terror, it found a baited hook and snapped at it with that mighty gaping mouth.

Floating above it lay a fishing boat, with a deep well in its hull, so that the captured fish might be kept alive. Three negro fishermen lolled in the craft. They had sailed out to this spot, seven miles northeast of Bermuda, armed with great bellying bottles of pineapple rum, to fish for market, but they were devoting far more time to the flask than to the fish lines. They were anchored right on the edge of the reef where it descended into the depths. Now and then they would pull up a gay fish—green, yellow, violet, blue, scarlet—fish of a dozen colors far more showy than any rainbow that ever was—fish of one color, some like flames, some like the sky overhead, some like the sky at sunset.

Gradually the pineapple rum took effect and the three negroes began to doze. One happened to awaken for a moment, took hold of his line and tugged. He could not move it. After working lazily for a moment or two he decided that the hook was fast to coral on the bottom, and he settled to another doze, in the hope that it would work loose while he slept. But he awoke to find the hook still fast.

Then he took the lead-jack. The lead-jack is a hinged ring of lead, very heavy, that the reef fishermen put over their lines and send down to the bottom to free their hooks when they foul on submarine obstructions. The lead-jack plunged down swiftly, but it did not clear the hook. Then the three fishermen grasped the stout line and began to sway on it to break it.

To their amazement, it suddenly began to give, not easily, but with tremendous swirlings and surging deep below. Pull as they would with all their might, something in the water was pulling harder than their six arms could. Again and again the unseen quarry overcame their efforts and shot toward the bottom again.

Suddenly the thing ceased pulling and came upward and toward the boat with tremendous speed. And then its head shot above the surface, and with wide open jaws it seemed

to be heading straight for the three men. One shrieked, "The debil! The debil!" and crawled to the extreme bow of the boat, where he lay cowering. The man in the waist let go the line and ran for a knife, intending to sever the twine and let the monster go. But the third man scented some great reward—for was not the professor from New York always asking for queer things?

This was a queer thing with a vengeance—almost too queer for man to tackle. But with a mighty bracing of nerve the negro overcame his superstitious terror and held on to the line. Finally he induced the others to help him, and at last the "devil snake" was dropped in the live well, where forthwith it lashed and writhed until the darkies were frightened all over again.

When they got ashore the news of their unique capture spread quickly. It was not long before the Bermuda darkies had discovered positively that this was something from the bottomless pit, and as "devil snake" the creature was known thereafter. The news reached a young naturalist, Mowbray, of St. George, Bermuda, who hurried down to the shore and obtained the fish. He had it transported to a tidal pool. There it was viewed by hundreds, and all sorts of legends soon were told of it. One was that it could make itself smaller or larger at will. Mowbray investigated and found that it was true. The beast could elongate its uncouth body enormously or contract it at will.

Prof. C. L. Bristol of the University of New York is in Bermuda collecting specimens for New York's public aquarium. He heard of the find and bought it at once. He and the other scientists in Bermuda could not identify it in their first examination.

They put the creature into a great tin tank, and it was shipped to New York, in company with other tanks, containing two hideous specimens of octopus and several dozens of beautiful, gaudy, graceful angel fish and other tropic beauties.

Thus in one day the aquarium was enriched by a collection that comprised within itself the most ugly and the most beautiful ocean dwellers that there are, for a truly as the "devil snake" deserves its name, so does the angel fish earn its appellation. Those are not fins, but wings in truth that bear it soaring through the transparent water of its tropic home. Its face is wise as that of a human being, and it is as gentle and tame as it is beautiful. Over its dainty body there play a dozen colors, all equally rich and all equally delicate in shading and tint. Bright blues chase bright greens, vivid gold flushes along its sides and fades and gives way to pink so pale that it may hardly be seen before it is gone.

### Baby Was Starved

Chicago, Aug. 2.—The police have arrested Mrs. Neel Campbell, of 655 Grand avenue, on a charge of allowing an infant to die from insufficient nourishment.

It is alleged that in the last three years eight other infants have been buried from the woman's house. Yesterday Dr. Wellfield was called to the Campbell house to attend the infant, which has since died. He found it in such a condition that he refused to issue a death certificate, declaring that the child died of starvation.

The assertion that eight children have died in the house is made by Viola Campbell, 14 years of age.

Mrs. Campbell says that she is the mother of the girl, who claims that Mrs. Campbell has said on other occasions that she was not a relative of hers. A letter was received at the Campbell house three weeks ago, the girl says, which was written by John Read, a printer, of Cincinnati. In this letter Read told the girl that he was her father, and that she had been kidnapped from her home in Cincinnati ten years ago.

Concerning the children who, according to the girl, have died in the house, Viola Campbell says that they were received from a woman living on Wells street in this city. She says that they were obtained by Mrs. Campbell because her husband had threatened to leave her because they were without children. None of the children lived long.

Mrs. Campbell alleges that the child that died Friday was the daughter of her dead sister, and while denying that there have been eight deaths in the house, admitted to the police that three children had died in her house within the last few months.

There is no evidence against Mrs. Campbell save that of the girl, Viola Campbell, but Police Inspector Wheeler, who has the case in charge, declares that he believes her story, and says that the bodies of the children that have died will be exhumed in order to determine their number. The girl declares that they were all buried in one lot in Calvary cemetery.

### Overtakes the Gun

Washington, Aug. 1.—The navy people hope to offset the recent development in high explosives and armor piercing projectiles through a considerable improvement in the resisting power of the armor plating of a battleship. Lieut. Cleveland Davis, attached to the naval ordnance bureau, has produced an armor plate which recently was tested at the proving grounds at Bethlehem, and the results encourage the naval officers here to believe that the armor plate has again overtaken the gun in the never-ending struggle for supremacy.

This plate is obtained by a novel process, carbon being driven directly into the surface of the hot plate by an intensely powerful current of electricity, the result being a face as hard as glass and of any thickness desirable, supported by a tough back which, it is declared, cannot be cracked. The depth of the hardening is ruled by the length the current plays upon the plate. Davis said that an average plate can be completely treated electrically in five hours. Moreover, the plate is declared to be a third lighter for the same resisting power, which means a great saving to constructors.

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### \$50 Reward.

Stolen Sunday, June 8th, one malamute dog, very dark grey, white breast, light chops, light grey stripe running from point of nose up between eyes, front legs white, hind feet white, extreme tip of tail white, belly light color, always carries tail curled over back or left side, nose very small like a fox or coon. I will pay the above reward for any information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the thief and recovery of dog.

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