



THE GREAT ANT-EATER AND ITS YOUNG.

Natural History.

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The ant-eaters (*Myrmecophagidae*) form one of the most interesting families known to science, and comprise a number of forms that, as their name indicates, gain a living by assaults upon the nest of ants found in the countries to which they are indigenous. The largest and best known of the family is the great ant-eater, or ant-bear, which is covered with long, coarse, shaggy hair, except the head, where it is short and close; it has a very long and slender head, and a bushy black tail of enormous size and length, the whole animal measuring often eight feet from the tip of the snout to the extremity of the tail. Being plantigrade, it stands lower on the hind legs than before, which is the case with bears and other quadrupeds similarly formed. It has four toes on the fore feet, the second and third being provided with long, sharp-pointed, and trenchant claws; so that nothing upon which it has an opportuni-

ty of fastening can escape. The hind feet have five toes, furnished with short weak claws, resembling those of ordinary quadrupeds. In the fore limbs we notice that the ultimate phalanges of the toes, which support the claws, are so constructed as to allow the movements of the latter being restricted to flexion inwards; and in order to maintain this position there are powerful ligaments which keep the phalanges directed toward the palm, and never allow the digits to be stretched out in the manner of the plantigrade carnivora. The relative size and strength of the toes are also very significant in this family; in those which have five toes the central digit attains an enormous bulk, while the outer pair are comparatively very small. And, in order to afford adequate power for the digging and burrowing propensities of these animals, the phalanges are all closely connected together up to the base of the ultimate phalanx, converting the hand into a kind of trowel, similar to that found in moles.

From what has been advanced, it will readily be remarked that ant-eaters do not walk on the soles of their feet; neither do they tread on their strongly-curved toes, which would damage the claws, but, in the fore feet at least—as may be seen