

THE WEEKLY MIRROR.

No. 50. VOL. 1]

HALIFAX, DECEMBER 25, 1835.

[ONE DOLLAR PER ANNUM.]

NATURAL HISTORY.

REPTILES.

In the order of reptiles we have a new display of the wonders of creating art, and of the ease by which the Sovereign Lord of all can perform his will by instruments and means the most dissimilar.

These creatures are also endowed with the power of motion; but how differently do they move from any of the orders we have already considered. Deprived of the usual apparatus of legs or wings, the ponderous serpent issues from his concealment, and moves majestically along by means of his scales and strong muscular powers; and the slender worm draws and pushes himself forward by his rings and contortions. The wisdom in these contrivances must be immediately apparent, when we consider that

some of the former have their habitations assigned them in the most impenetrable thickets, where an elevated stature would expose them to many inconveniences; some take up their abode in the swampy banks of great rivers, or among the reeds in morasses, where the weight of their body, supported by legs, must have sunk them deeper in the mire; others wind their way among heaps of rubbish or crumbling ruins, where projecting appendages of any description would have been apt to retard their progress; and the naked and defenceless bodies of the latter are admirably adapted for those subterraneous passages which they form to themselves unseen in the bowels of the earth.

Snails are also a species of reptiles, but being encumbered in their movements with their shelly appendage, they are furnished with an instrument peculiar to themselves, in what long broad surface by which they pull themselves along, and by which, assisted by the glutinous substance they emit from their bodies, they are enabled to adhere, in any position, to the smoothest of surfaces.

The motion of caterpillars in their vermicular state is curiously performed by means of a number of little legs, the foremost of which are differently constructed from the hindmost, but all are formed in the most suitable manner for assisting in their progress on the leaves of plants.

Being deprived of those instruments of motion possessed by other animals, to carry them speedily forward in pursuit of their prey, serpents are necessitated to have recourse to the resources of artifice, and to lie in wait for it; and, to enable them to do this to the best possible advantage, nature has not only endowed them with the power of intertwining themselves in ambush around the trunks and among the branches of trees, by the slender make and flexibility

of their bodies, but, by a very particular and singular construction of the back-bone in serpents, they are enabled to coil themselves up in a very small compass; and if they are not furnished with the claws of the tiger to lay hold of their prey, the strong hooked bill and talons of the eagle to pull it to pieces, and the tusks of the boar to devour it, several of this species are furnished with a poisonous sting for instantaneously inflicting the mortal wound; others are soon enabled to extinguish the vital spark, by means of the conclusive energy of their enormous twistings; while the general conformation of the jaws, the width of the mouth, and yielding texture of the bodies of serpents are such, as to enable them to swallow prodigious morsels, and animals more bulky than themselves.

But the assistance which some of these creatures receive from their poison in the seizing of their prey, is not the only benefit they derive from it—it is also their most sure and effectual defence; and from the dread and horror which such an instrument as the sting of a serpent inspires (although only found in the possession of a few), it serves as it were for a safeguard to the whole species.

Mankind, indeed, cannot tread with too cautious steps the paths frequented by these creatures; for although none of the most venomous kinds will attack man except on the defensive, yet, without the power of discriminating, when accidentally trod upon, they will make the intruder feel the power of their vengeance. What a merciful provision, therefore, has Providence made for the safety of the American in the tail of the rattle snake: than which, there is not one of the serpent tribe perhaps more to be dreaded; yet the rattle in his tail, on the smallest motion, must give notice of his approach, or warn the traveller of the impending danger that lies concealed in his haunts.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Concluded.

Think, think of me, think of the babes." "I do, I do," he hastily replied, "but I must not, I cannot refuse to go, I should be unworthy of you all if I did." The children joined their mother, and clung round his knees. "Speak, speak to them, father," said Thomas beseechingly. The old man was himself scarcely less distressed, and every limb shook with agitation. "Fanny," said he, with a faltering voice, which however gathered strength as he spoke, "let go your hold, it is his duty to go. He who has commanded him to assist his fellow-creatures, can protect him through danger, and restore him to you in safety;

yea, and he will. Go then, my son, and He who is mightier than the waves be with you." Thomas waited not another instant, and Fanny, awed by her father's words, sunk into a chair in silence. "We must ask," said the old man, "if we would receive, our prayers are the just due of those we love; and never can we express affection better, than when it rises in petitions to the throne of grace for the welfare, spiritual or bodily, of those we value. Let us kneel down and implore God's protection on your husband, and on those who are gone with him." Reverently they assembled round him and never did more fervent prayers ascend than those which were offered by the inhabitants of the cottage.

Three hours passed in a state of the utmost anxiety. The children overpowered with fatigue, soon sunk to sleep. Old Grant endeavoured to read, but in vain; and Fanny wandered backwards and forwards to the cliff in the vain hope of seeing her husband return. Almost in despair she at length seated herself by the baby's cradle, and covering her face with her apron wept bitterly.

The sound of approaching footsteps, however, roused her, but unable to stir, she sat listening with almost breathless anxiety. "He is safe!" exclaimed the old man, and raising his clasped hands to Heaven while tears of joy ran down his aged cheeks, he silently returned thanks to that God who had heard his supplications. "Get the bed ready," said Thomas to Fanny, "that we may put this stranger in it, and try if we can restore him." His companions now brought in the apparently lifeless body of a youth. Proper remedies were instantly applied, and happily with success. In the morning he awoke perfectly sensible, and though very much exhausted, all symptoms of danger had disappeared. But who shall describe the joy of his father, who, seated by his bed side, had watched the moment of his son's awaking. The vessel which was a home bound West India ship had been totally wrecked, and but for the activity and courage of Thomas and his companions all on board would have perished: at the imminent hazard of his life he had rescued the young man from a watery grave. "You have saved my life," cried the delighted father "in saving that of my son, and no recompense can be sufficient to express my gratitude. I know not what to offer you, but here is my purse; take it and if it is not enough I will double it." So saying, he held it to Thomas, who drawing back, said, while a deep colour spread itself over his cheek, "I am obliged to you, sir, for your kindness, but I must refuse accepting it. I cannot expose my life for money. I