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NATURAL HISTORY.

IMITATIVE POWERS OF THE HYENA.

Mr. R. Lee, in a work just published, entitled "Stories of Strange Lands," relates the following:—"The laugh of the hyena greatly resembles that of a maniac, and has a startling effect as it steals through the still night, even under our windows, which it approaches in search of food. The power of imitation given to these animals is very extraordinary, for they not only cry like the quadruped whom they wish to lure within their reach, but they even seem to utter human sounds. The commandant of a fortress on the western coast of Africa assured me, that for several evenings he had been disturbed at his dinner hour by the laughing and screaming of the native women, who passed under the walls in search of water. He sent his serjeant to them, who desired that they would take some other path, and they promised to obey. The next evening, however, the noise was heard again, which highly irritated the commandant, and he desired the serjeant to lie in ambush on the third evening, and rushing suddenly out on them, with a few soldiers, secure the women, and bring them to him in the fortress. The men took their stations as ordered, the laughing recommenced, and out they sallied, when, to their great astonishment, they only saw three hyenas standing in the path which had been frequented by the women, and so well counterfeiting their voices, that they could not have been detected but by sight. These hyenas are not very formidable, and will, at any time, rather fly from, than attack a human being."

THE PRAIRIE DOGS.

A STORY BY WASHINGTON IRVING.

These animals of the prairies in the "far west" are of the cony kind, and about the size of a rabbit. They burrow under ground; and are said by travellers to live in communities or large villages of the extent of several acres. Over the whole of this extent, you see little heaps of dirt marking the places at which they enter their underground houses, and between these entrances there are hard beaten paths running from one to another in every direction, showing that they are social friends and good neighbors.

Travellers relate that there is a species of owls, which sometimes take their abode with the prairie dogs; especially in those cells, which, for some reason or other the dogs have left. Rattle-snakes, too, often get in among them. You know how difficult it is to keep all bad company out of any society—city, village, school, or family.

Washington Irving, who lately travelled in the West, calls these villages of prairie dogs little republics; and amuses himself by comparing them with republics of men. A visit to one of them, which he says covered a space of thirty acres, he describes in the following humorous manner:

"It was towards evening that I set out with a companion, to visit the village in question. Unluckily, it had been invaded in the course of the day by some of the rangers, who had shot two or three of its inhabitants, and thrown the whole community in confusion. As we approached we could perceive numbers of the inhabitants seated at the entrances of their cells, while sentinels seemed to have been posted on the outskirts, to keep a look out. At sight of us, the picket guards scampered in and gave the alarm; whereupon every inhabitant gave a short yelp, or bark, and dived into his hole, his heels twinkling in the air as if he had thrown a somerset.

We traversed the whole village, but not a whisker of an inhabitant was to be seen. We probed their cells as far as the ramrods of our rifles would reach, but could unearth neither dog nor owl, nor rattlesnake.

Moving quietly to a little distance, we lay down upon the ground, and watched for a long time, silent and motionless. By and by, a cautious old burgher would slowly put forth the end of his nose, but instantly draw it in again. Another at a greater distance, would emerge entirely; but catching a glance of us, would throw a somerset, and plunge back again into his hole. At length, some who resided on the opposite side of the village, taking courage from the continued stillness, would steal forth, and hurry off to a distant hole, the residence possibly of some family connection, or gossiping friend, about whose safety they were solicitous, or with whom they wished to compare notes about the late occurrences.

Others, still more bold, assembled in little knots, in the streets and public places, as if to discuss the recent outrages offered to the commonwealth, and the atrocious murders of their fellow burghers.

We rose from the ground and moved forward, to take a nearer view of these public proceedings, when, yelp! yelp! yelp!—there was a shrill alarm passed from mouth to mouth; the meetings suddenly dispersed; feet twinkled in the air in every direction, and in an instant all had vanished into the earth.

The dusk of the evening put an end to our observations, but the train of whimsical comparisons produced in my brain still continued after my return to camp; and in the night, as I lay awake after all the camp was asleep, and heard in the stillness of the hour,

a faint clamor of shrill voices from the distant village, I could not help picturing to myself the inhabitants gathered together in noisy assemblage, and windy debate, to devise plans for the public safety, and to vindicate the invaded rights and insulted dignity of the republic."

[From the N. Y. Journal of Commerce.]

THE MOUNTAIN COTTAGE.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

I never so fully realized the beauty of these lines, as during the events which I now record. The circumstances by which I was surrounded, brought vividly to my mind the fact that persons born far from the theatre of active life, live, die, and are forgotten, like the flowers which perfume the air they breathe. As the river flows unruffled in its course through the wilderness to the ocean, so there are many who pass quietly down the tide of existence, until lost in the ocean of eternity.

All day I had wandered among the wild scenery of the Green Mountains, without (for nearly all that time) seeing a human habitation, until, at the close of the day, I came in view of a small cottage, the sight of which was indeed welcome. Fatigue and hunger naturally directed my steps to the cottage, which I found was formed by fastening the ends of logs together at right angles, thus making a hollow square, about ten feet high, surmounted with a high roof of rough boards. As I entered the rude enclosure, I turned to survey the surrounding scenery. The cottage was situated in the bosom of a deep valley, at the base of two gigantic mountains whose summits were lost among the clouds, and the sides of which were covered with unbroken green, save here and there an oak or a pine lifted its withering limbs, like Patriarchs who had withstood the storms of many winters.

In the front of the cottage was a stream of the purest water, leaping over its rocky bed, sparkling as it pursued its first descending course.

As I made signal of my approach, I was bid welcome by a lady less than middle aged, and of an unusually interesting appearance. Her mild intelligent, and I may add beautiful expression of countenance, her neat and appropriate dress, her simple and unostentatious manners, and the order of the household arrangements, at once interested and surprised me.—In her lap lay an infant, and clinging to her chair was her little daughter, I should judge six or eight years old, the image of her mother.

From the preparations making, I judged that their evening repast was approaching, to