

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

THE PASSENGER PIGEON.

THE American passenger pigeon is now recognized as a British bird. Several examples had occurred, and whilst some of these were probably "escapes," others doubtless were wild birds. These had perfect plumage, were taken in an exhausted condition, and their crops showed only the slightest traces of food. As is well known, the passenger pigeon is a bird of immense powers of flight, and in its overland journeys often flies at the rate of a mile a minute. Wild birds, however, can only come from America; and this opens up the interesting question as to the possibility of birds crossing the Atlantic without resting. Naturalists of the present day say that this feat is not only probable, but that it is actually accomplished by several wild birds. Mr. Darwin somewhere asserts that one or two of them are annually blown across the ocean, and it is certain that half-a-dozen species have occurred upon the west coasts of England and Ireland which are found nowhere but in North America. Mr. Howard Saunders states that passenger pigeons are often captured in the State of New York with their crops still filled with undigested grains of rice that must have been taken in the distant fields of Georgia and South Carolina; apparently proving that they had passed over the intervening space within a few hours. It certainly seems remarkable that a bird should have the power of flying over 4,000 miles of sea; but recently two different writers have recorded the fact that they noticed pigeons settle upon water to drink, and then rise from it with apparent ease. And Mr. Darwin says that where the banks of the Nile are perpendicular, whole flocks of pigeons have been seen to settle on the river and drink while they floated down stream. He adds that, seen from a distance, they resembled flocks of gulls on the surface of the sea.

AN INGENIOUS TRAP.

WHERE do the monkeys come from? Doubtless thousands of people have asked themselves this question. Yet it is one easily answered. Nearly all one sees in the United States come from Georgia, a little village a short distance from the Panama Railroad. On a Mexican transfer camp, it is now chiefly inhabited by negroes, who do not mind the fever-laden atmosphere. This region is the paradise of monkeys. They travel in groups around the woods, led by an older monkey. When the people receive information that the troop is near the village, they repair to the woods in crowds to capture them. Their plan is very simple. They cut a hole in a cocoon large enough for a monkey's paw. The nut is now hollowed out, and a piece of sugar is placed inside. A string is tied to the nut, and the trap is placed in the way of the approaching monkeys. The animals are the most inquisitive known next to man, and when they spy the nut in goes a hand and grasps the sugar, but the hole is too small for the hand to be withdrawn with the prize, and so the monkey holds on, and is dragged along by means of the string, and is followed by a crowd of his fellows, towards the ambush. At the supreme moment a large net is spread over the animals, and they are made prisoners before they know it. They are sold to the employes of the Panama Railroad, and reach the north through commercial dealers. In South Africa the baboon was, until late years, considered a vegetarian, and his worst offence was stealing mealies from the garden when he got a chance. Now he seems to have joined the carnivora—at least he is not above tearing open the young lambs. He also robs all the beehives and steals the honey, doing the work by night when the bees are drowsy and dull. The baboon is a blessing in that he attacks the wild aloe and pulls the pith out for food. It was hoped that he would rid the country of the prickly pear, but as the substance of both leaf and trunk is nothing but water, there is not much likelihood of it. The baboon has made himself such a nuisance in civilized Africa that shooting and poisoning clubs are fast destroying him. The poison has to be taken with palatable surroundings to fool him, but he is not proof against temptation, and so he dies.

DO THE LOWER ANIMALS KNOW HOW TO PLAY GAMES?

SUCH is the question to which a lady writer in a magazine has essayed to give an answer, and certainly one remarkable instance which she quotes would seem to show that birds in their wild state "go in for" organized romps just like children at a Christmas party. Mr. Andrew Crosse, the distinguished naturalist, was one day looking out of his study window, in a house on the Quantock Hills. From this window he could see into a courtyard a little distance away, which was sheltered by walls and was remote from any noises or disturbance of any kind. By and by the naturalist saw a robin engaged in dragging the apparently dead body of another robin round and round in a circle on the pavement. It looked just as if the live robin had fought with and killed the other, and was indulging in the cruel triumph of pulling the lifeless body of its rival over the stones, as Achilles dragged Hector round the walls of Troy. Just as Mr. Crosse had come to the conclusion that the strange proceeding of which he was privileged to be the witness was the termination of a battle to the death between two bird enemies, the live robin suddenly stopped and threw itself on its back, as though stark dead. Its wings were half-distended and rigid, and its legs upturned to the sky. Never, apparently, had there been a robin more dead than it was. Meanwhile,

the other robin went through an exactly converse transformation scene. It had only been shamming dead, and now woke up into full and vigorous life. Seizing on its feathered companion, it dragged the latter in its turn all round the same circle, and repeated the process several times over. The conclusion of the scene was that both birds flew off together to some neighbouring trees. Now, this story, related by the widow of the eminent authority on natural history to whom we have referred, might be set down as an exaggeration or distortion of what really happened, only that the observer was himself a trained scientific expert, not likely to let his eyesight be interfered with by his imagination. The peculiarity of the incident lies in the fact that the performers were wild animals. They had not been trained to play this game by any showman's devices, but they had, out of the pure merriment of their own hearts and the liveliness of their bird intellects, evolved a game of "Let's pretend," like "Alice in Wonderland," and carried it out with perfect success.—*Daily Telegraph*.

PADDLING A KAYAK.

WHEN a Point-Barrow Eskimo is simply travelling along and does not care to make any great speed, he uses an ordinary paddle with one blade, like those used in the *umiak*, but somewhat lighter. As he has to sit in the very middle of the boat, he can not use this as an Indian would, wholly on one side, driving the boat ahead with straight strokes and overcoming the tendency of the canoe to go off to one side by feathering his paddle in the water or by an outward sweep of the blade. First he makes three or four strokes, say, on the right side, and then, as the boat begins to sheer off to the left, he lifts the paddle out of the water and makes three or four strokes on the left side till she begins to sheer to the right, and so on. They do this pretty skilfully, so that the boat makes a tolerably straight "wake," and goes through the water at a pretty fair rate, but, of course, can make no great speed. When the time comes for hurry, out is drawn from under the deck the double-bladed paddle, such as we are all familiar with from the writings of Captain Ross and Captain Parry, Dr. Kane, and all the explorers who have visited the Eskimos of the eastern regions. This is about six feet long and has at each end a broad, oval blade, far more serviceable than the narrow oarblades of the eastern *kayak* paddles. The man grasps this by the middle and dips each blade alternately, regulating the force of his strokes so that the canoe goes straight through the water without veering to right or left. With the double paddle the *kayak* can be made to fairly fly through the water.—*From Eskimo Boats in the Northwest, by John Murdoch, in The Popular Science Monthly*.

A HINT TO SOLICITORS IN PREPARING EVIDENCE.

THE moral aspects of the recent *cause célèbre* in the Divorce Court do not come within our province, but all members of the profession are deeply interested in the question, which was brought prominently forward, of the limits imposed on counsel when cross-examining a witness. The mere suggestion of a certain class of offence is enough to wreck the happiness and shatter the nervous system of many men. It is, therefore, nothing less than wanton cruelty to put such a weapon in the hands of counsel unless something much stronger than bare suspicion justifies its use. If this can be said of the sterner sex, it is surely not too much to expect a more chivalrous sense of duty when a woman's chastity is in question. So long as the rules of cross-examining remain as at present, the public have a right to look to the leaders of the Bar for protection against any abuse of so powerful a weapon for good or evil, and if at any time they look in vain, public opinion (which is very strong on this subject) will certainly make itself heard and felt in other quarters. Meantime the remarks of the President, in his summing up of the case referred to, contained a warning which solicitors engaged in preparing evidence cannot afford to neglect.—*Law Journal*.

THE LARGEST SHIPS AFLOAT.

THE French five-master *France* is the largest sailing ship afloat. She was launched in September, 1890, from the yard of Messrs. D. W. Henderson, at Partick, for Messrs. Bordes et Fils, and her dimensions are as follows: Length 361 feet, breadth 49 feet, depth 26 feet. Her net register tonnage is 3,624, with a sail area of 49,000 sq. feet; and not long since she carried an enormous cargo of 5,900 tons of coal on her maiden passage from Barry to Rio de Janeiro. The largest British ship is the *Liverpool*, of 3,330 tons, built of iron by Messrs. Russell and Company on the Clyde. She is 333 feet long, 48 feet broad, and 28 feet deep. Her four masts are each square-rigged; but she is far from clumsy aloft, is easily handled, and has run fourteen knots an hour for a whole day. Next in size is the *Palgrave*, of 3,078 tons. The United States ship *Shenandoah*, of Bath, Maine, built by Messrs. Sewal and Company of that port, is the largest wooden vessel in existence. She is 3,258 tons register, and will carry about 5,000 tons of heavy cargo. She has just left San Francisco, California, with 112,000 centals of wheat, worth \$175,000. This is the largest grain cargo on record. Another wooden vessel, the *Rappahannock*, also built at Bath, Maine, is 3,053 tons register, cost \$125,000; and 706 tons of Virginia oak, together with 1,200,000 feet of pine timber, were used in her construction. The largest

British wooden ship is the *Three Brothers*, of 2,963 tons register, built at Boston, United States, in 1855. She is 323 feet long, 48 feet broad, and 31 feet deep.—*Chambers' Journal*.

CHINESE DIPLOMACY.

THOUGH the Chinese diplomatist moves slowly, there are some Chinese mandarins whose ways are expeditious and summary. Under the auspices of Chang Chih-tung foreign engineers are prospecting in the neighbourhood of Hankow. They were commended the other day by the Viceroy to the care and protection of a minor mandarin. This personage, rooted in the traditions of the past, viewed the advent of the "Fanqui" with disapproval. He penned a remonstrance, setting forth that it would be unsafe to allow the earth dragon, who has lain undisturbed since the time of Confucius, to be profanely tampered with. The country folk, he explained, were a rough set, who, on seeing strange men, with strange instruments in their hands, probing and peering into the earth, would be sure to be roused to mischief, and, as he professed himself powerless to restrain the riot that might ensue, he prayed His Excellency to reconsider the matter. The Viceroy took in the situation at a glance. He wrote in reply to say that inasmuch as the local official did not seem equal to cope with the situation, he was sending five deputies, with boats and followers, to afford the foreigners safe and suitable escort—all at the expense of the remonstrant. Their visit is said to have cost the worthy magistrate some seven hundred and fifty pounds, and since then Chang Chih-tung has not been troubled with any more remonstrance from the zealous defender of the earth dragon.—*From the Manchester Examiner*.

A PREP AT QUEBEC.

STANDING in any one of the river bastions, and gazing over the ramparts and the glacis, your glance takes in one of the noblest prospects of the globe. To the right the interminable river sweeps down from Ontario and Niagara. In front Point Levi frames the picture with a background of woodlands and buildings, and under your feet is the quaint old-fashioned French town and the crowded shipping. All is as tranquil as the stream itself; but to remind you of old scenes of carnage, and the changed conditions of modern warfare, the *Bellerophon* at this moment fires a torpedo for practice, blowing some 500 tons of the St. Lawrence high into the air, and making in the river a huge circle of mud and dying fish, which goes whirling and expanding down the current. The thunder of the explosion rolls back from Point Levi to Cape Diamond, and dies away high up among the fir-woods on the left, where Wolfe, after delivering his feint attack, landed his forces at night, by a flotilla of boats, and surprised the unsuspecting Montcalm by appearing suddenly on the plateau. The chivalrous Frenchman, instead of confiding in his stone walls, came rashly forth to fight in the open for the possession of Canada, and yonder obelisk marks the spot where Wolfe fell in the instant of victory, and where Montcalm also received his death-wound. It is good to find the names of both heroes linked together upon the memorial here, as well as lower down in the Des Carrières Street. The latter bears a nobly epigrammatic inscription:—

MORTEM VIRTUS COMMUNEM
FAMAM HISTORIA
MONUMENTUM POSTERITAS
DEDIT

—which, for the sake of all patriotic English-women, may be translated:—

Their valour gave a common fate,
Their worth a common fame;
English and French we here inscribe,
In common love, each name.

They say, as the surgeon drew the fatal musket ball from the wound of Wolfe, he exclaimed, "Why, this is not the bullet of an enemy!" and that the gallant General answered, with a faint smile on his dying face—gay even in extremity: "Well, doctor, I don't think it could be the bullet of a friend!" Wolfe has a proud and ornate monument in Westminster Abbey; but here is his true mausoleum, in the fair meadows and forests, the far pine-clad ranges, the broad, majestic river, the peaceful, prosperous Dominion, and, above it all, the flutter and the glitter of that Union Jack upon the flag-staff in the Bastion, which marks it all "British America," a territory one-fifteenth of the whole earth's surface, larger by one-tenth than all the United States, and only smaller than all the Continent of Europe by the area of Spain; a gift to the British Empire bought with most generous blood, and worth retaining while it is willing to be retained, with all the energies and resources of that Empire.—*Seas and Lands. Reprinted from the Daily Telegraph. By Sir Edwin Arnold, M.A., K.C.I.E., C.S.I.*

QUEEN VICTORIA possesses the oldest watches in the world. She has two beautiful little gold ones by Breguet that are supposed to be a hundred years old. They have silver dials, and are about the size of a two shilling piece. One is a blind man's watch and the other is a repeater. Both go perfectly and are in constant use. Her Majesty's favourite watch is a large plain gold one by Mudge, the English maker. It is about twice as big as an ordinary man's watch.