

NATURAL HISTORY.

From Graham's Magazine.

TO A LAND BIRD AT SEA.

BY LYDIA H. SIGOURNEY.

Bird of the land! what dost thou here?
 Lone wanderer o'er a trackless bound,—
 With nought but frowning skies above,
 And cold, unfathom'd seas around;

Among the shrouds, with heaving breast
 And drooping head, I see thee stand,
 And pleased the coarsest sailor climbs,
 To grasp thee in his roughen'd hand.

And didst thou follow, league on league,
 Our painted mast, thine only guide,
 When but a floating speck it seemed
 On the broad bosom of the tide?

On far Newfoundland's misty bank,
 Hadst thou a nest, and nurslings fair?
 Or 'mid New England's forests hear?
 Tell me! what tidings dost thou bear?

What news from native shore and home,
 Swift courier o'er the threatening tide?—
 Hast thou no folded scroll of love
 Prest closely to thy panting side?

A bird of genius art thou? say!
 With impulse high thy spirit stirred—
 Some region unexplored to gain,
 And soar above the common herd?

Eurns in thy breast some kindling spark
 Like that which fired the glowing mind
 Of the adventurous Genoese,
 An undiscovered world to find?

Whate'er thou wert, how sad thy fate
 With wasted strength the gull to spy,
 Cling feebly to the flapping sail,
 And at a stranger's feet to die.

Yet, from thy thin and bloodless beak,
 Methinks a warning sigh doth creep—
 To those who leave their sheltering home,
 And lightly dare the dangerous deep.

ARTIFICIAL LAKES IN CEYLON.—The Candelay Lake is situate within thirty miles of Trincomalee, in an extensive and broad valley, around which the ground gradually ascends towards the distant hills that envelop it. In the centre of the valley, a long causeway, principally made of masses of rock, has been constructed to retain the waters that from every side pour into the space enclosed within the circumjacent hills and the artificial dam thus formed. During the rainy season, when the lake attains its greatest elevation, the area of ground over which the inundation extends, may be computed at fifteen square miles. This work of art, and others of nearly equally gigantic proportions in the island, sufficiently indicate that at some remote period Ceylon was a densely-populated country, and under a government sufficiently enlightened to appreciate, and firm to execute the execution of an undertaking which, to men ignorant of mechanical powers, must have been an Herculean operation; for, such is the capricious nature of the mountain-streams in this Tropical island, where heavy rain frequently falls without intermission for many successive days, that no common barrier would suffice to resist the great and sudden pressure that must be sustained on such occasions. Aware of this peculiarity in the character of their rivers, the Cingalese built the retaining-wall that supports the waters of the lake of Candelay with such solidity and massiveness as to defy the utmost fury of the mountain-torrents. Nearly the whole of its extent is formed with vast heven masses of rock, to move which by sheer physical force must have required the united labour of thousands.

In more favoured lands, the object to be gained would by no means compensate for the toil and time requisite for the damming of a valley by a causeway two miles in extent; but in Ceylon, Nature, although bountiful in all other respects, is alternately lavish and chary of the element where, on the labours of agriculture mainly depend. In the Eastern provinces, incessant rains are succeeded by long-continued droughts, during which the fury rays of the sun suck up the innumerable rills that in the wet season spread over the face of the country. The largest rivers in this part of the island then subside into petty rivulets; and there being no natural lakes or large sheets of water, the necessity of supplying the want of these by the labours of art becomes apparent. Hence the Cingalese have, from the earliest periods, been attentive to the formation of artificial reservoirs, wherever they could be advantageously constructed; and the lakes of Candelay, Minere, Bawaly, and many others of less note, attest the energy and perseverance of the ancient islanders in such constructions.—*London paper.*

STATISTICS OF MUSCULAR POWER.—Man has the power of imitating every motion but that of flight. To effect these, he has, in maturity and health, 249 bones. He has, also, 434 muscles. His heart makes sixty-four pulsations in a minute; and therefore, 3,840 in an hour, 92,160 in a day. There are also three complete circulations of his blood in the short space of an hour. In respect to the comparative speed of animated beings and of impelled bodies, it may be remarked that size and construction seem to have little influence—nor has comparative strength—although one body giving any quantity of motion to another is said to lose so much of its own. The sloth is by no means a small animal, and yet it can travel only fifty paces in a day; a worm crawls only five inches in fifty seconds; but a lady bird can fly twenty millions times its own length in less than an hour. An elk can run a mile and a half in seven minutes; an antelope a mile in a minute; the wild male of an eagle can fly eighteen leagues in an hour; and a Canary falcon can even reach 250 leagues in the short space of sixteen hours. A violent wind travels sixty miles in an hour; sound, 1,140 English feet in a second.—*Bucks.*

CHRISTMAS-TIDE.—It is a curious as well as a remarkable fact, that, with the exception of Saturday last (the 25th Dec.), there has not occurred a wet Christmas-day for at least fourteen or fifteen years, or indeed one during the period upon which even a shower of rain has fallen.

The greatest heat of Christmas time during the last fifty years was on the 30th December, 1838, when Fahrenheit's thermometer showed a temperature of 56 degrees; and the coldest on the 1st of January, 1837, when the mercury stood at 12 degrees of Fahrenheit. On Thursday week, when the change came, we had 33 degrees at midnight; on Friday morning, at two o'clock, 32; on Saturday (Christmas day), at the same hour, 40; on Sunday morning, at five o'clock, 28 degrees; on Monday, at midnight, 30 degrees; and on Tuesday 47 degrees—a trying range for delicate constitutions.—*London paper.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.—LEVEL OF THE DEAD SEA.—At a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, held at Pall Mall, London, a letter of the late lamented Sir Daniel Wilkie was read, containing the result of his barometrical observations to determine the level and depression of the Dead Sea; being the last, if not the only, scientific labours of that celebrated man. No barometer had ever before been carried to the Dead Sea, and the observations of Sir Daniel Wilkie showed a depression of 1,198.76 feet below the Mediterranean, and the elevation of Jerusalem as 2,263 feet above the latter, points to which previous observations were nearly approximated.

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