

identical bird, "which is able to truss an elephant." Garcilasso states that some of those killed by the Spaniards measured fifteen or sixteen feet (the vagueness of the "or" in what professes to be actual measurement is suspicious) from tip to tip of the extended wings. He adds that two will attack a bull and devour it, and that single individuals will slay boys of twelve years old.

Desmarchais improves upon this; stretches the expansion of the wings to eighteen feet; a width so enormous that, as he says, the bird can never enter the forest; and he declares that a single one will attack a man, and carry off a stag.

A modern traveller, however, soars far beyond these puny flights of imagination, and gravely gives forty feet as the measurement, carefully noted, as he informs us, "with his own hand," from the actual specimen. It is only charitable to conclude that he really measured sixteen feet, and that he either wrote "spaces" by mistake, or, which is most likely, wrote simply "16," translating it afterwards when he compared his notes with what others had said before him. Here, however, is the veracious description, which the reader will see does not lack romance in its embellishment.

"It was so satiated with its repast on the carcass of a horse, as to suffer me to approach within pistol-shot before it extended its enormous wings to take flight, which was to me the signal to fire; and having loaded with an ample charge of pellets, my aim proved effectual and fatal. What a formidable monster did I behold, screaming and flapping in the last convulsive struggle of life! It may be difficult to believe that the most gigantic animal which inhabits the earth or the ocean, can be equalled in size by a tenant of the air; and those persons who have never seen a larger bird than our mountain eagle, will probably read with astonishment of a species of that same bird, in the southern hemisphere, being so large and strong as to seize an ox with its talons, and to lift it into the air, whence it lets it fall to the ground, in order to kill it and prey upon the carcass. But this astonishment must, in a great measure, subside when the dimensions of the bird are taken into consideration, and which, incredible as they may appear, I now insert from a note taken by my own hand. When the wings are spread they measure sixteen spaces, forty feet in extent from point to point. The feathers are eight spaces, twenty feet in length, and the quill part, two palms, eight feet in circumference. It is said to have strength enough to carry off a living rhinoceros."

Humboldt dissipated these extravagances; though he confesses that it appeared to himself of colossal size, and it was only the actual admeasurement of a dead specimen that corrected the optical illusion. He met with no example that exceeded nine feet, and he was assured by many of the inhabitants of Quito that they had never shot any that exceeded eleven. This estimate, however, appears to be below the reality; for Tschudi, a most careful and reliable authority, and an accomplished zoologist, assigns to this bird in one place an expanse of "from twelve to thirteen feet," while in another he says: "I measured a very large male condor, and the width from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other was fourteen English feet and two inches, an enormous expanse of wing, not equalled by any other bird except the white albatross." So far from his "trussing a rhinoceros," or even an ox, he cannot, according to Tschudi, raise even a sheep from the ground. "He cannot, when flying, carry a weight exceeding eight or ten pounds." The voracity of the obscene bird is very great. The owner of some captive specimens assured the naturalist that he had given to one, in the course of a single day, by way of experiment eighteen pounds of meat, consisting of the entrails of oxen; that the bird devoured the whole, and ate his allowance the next day with the usual appetite.

We have all been accustomed from childhood to regard with awe the enormous serpents of the hot damp intertropical forests; though the specimens carried about in travelling menageries have but little contributed to nurture the sentiment. A couple of coils of variegated mosaic, looking like a tessellated pavement, about as thick as a lacquey's calf, wrapped up in the folds of a blanket at the bottom of a deal box, we had difficulty in accepting as the impersonation of the demon which hung from the branches of an Indian tree, and, having pressed the life out of a buffalo in his mighty folds and broken his bones, swallowed the body entire, all but the horns. Here again there is uncertainty and disappointment; and the colossal dragon, which looms so large in the distance of time and space, grows "small by degrees and beautifully less" in the ratio of its approach to our own times and our own eyes. Yet enough of size and power remains, even when all legitimate deductions are made, to invest the great boa with a romantic interest, and to make the inquiry into its real dimensions worthy of prosecution.

I may observe, that several species of these great serpents exist in the intertropical regions of America, Africa, and Asia; but all these, though assigned by zoologists to distinct genera (the American species belonging to the genus *Boa*, and those of Africa and Asia to *Python*)

have so much in common, in habits, structure, and size, that I shall speak of them without distinguishing the species.

The old Roman historians report that the army of Attilia Regulus, while attacking Carthage, was assaulted by an enormous serpent, which was destroyed only by the aid of the military engines crushing it with huge stones. The skin of this monster, measuring 120 feet in length, was sent to Rome, and preserved as a trophy in a temple till the Numantine war. Several writers mention the fact, and Pliny speaks of its existence as well known.

Diodorus Siculus mentions a serpent which was captured, not without loss of human life, in Egypt, and which was taken to Alexandria; it measured thirty cubits, or about forty-five feet in length.

Suetonius records that one was exhibited in front of the Comitium at Rome, which was fifty cubits, or seventy-five feet in length.

It is probable that these measurements were all taken from the skin after having been detached from the body. I have had some experience in skinning serpents, and am therefore aware of the extent to which the skin, when dragged off by force, is capable of stretching: one-fourth of the entire length may not unfairly be deducted on this account. But even with this allowance, we must admit, unless we reject the testimony of sober historians, who could hardly have been mistaken so grossly as to warrant such rejection, that serpents did exist in ancient times which far exceeded the limits that have fallen under the observation of modern naturalists.

There is a well-known picture by Daniell, representing an enormous serpent attacking a boat's crew in one of the creeks of the Ganges. It is a graphic scene, said to have been commemorative of a fact. The crew had moored their boat by the edge of the jungle, and, leaving one of the party in charge, had gone into the forest. He lay down under the thwarts, and was soon asleep. During his unconsciousness an enormous python emerged from the jungle, coiled itself round the sleeper, and was in the act of crushing him to death, when his comrades returned. They succeeded in killing the monster, "which was found to measure sixty-two feet and some inches in length." This seems precise enough; but we should like to know whether the measurement was made by the Lascars themselves, or by any trustworthy European.

A correspondent of the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* has told, with every appearance of life-truth, a thrilling story of an encounter which he had with an enormous boa on the banks of a river in Guiana. Awakened, as he lay in his boat, by the cold touch of something at his feet, he found that the serpent's mouth was in contact with them, preparing, as he presumed, to swallow him feet foremost. In an instant he drew himself up, and, grasping his gun, discharged it full at the reptile's head, which reared into the air with a horrid hiss and terrible contortions, and then, with one stroke of his paddles, he shot up the stream beyond reach. On arriving at his friend's house, it was determined to seek the wounded serpent, and several armed negroes were added to the party.

They soon found the spot where the crushed and bloody reeds told of the recent adventure, and proceeded cautiously to reconnoitre. Advancing thus about thirty yards, alarm was given that the monster was visible. "We saw through the reeds part of its body coiled up, and part stretched out; but, from their density, the head was invisible. Disturbed, and apparently irritated, by our approach, it appeared, from its movements, about to attack us. Just as we caught a glimpse at its head we fired, both of us almost at the same moment. It fell, hissing and rolling in a variety of contortions." Here one of the negroes, taking a circuit, succeeded in hitting the creature a violent blow with a club, which stunned it, and a few more strokes decided the victory. "On measuring it, we found it to be nearly forty feet in length, and of proportional thickness."

I do not know how far this story is to be relied on; but if it is given in good faith, the serpent was the longest dependable example I know of in modern times. Still, "nearly forty feet" is somewhat indefinite.

In Mr. Ellis's amusing account of his visit to Manilla, he mentions specimens of enormous size; but there does not seem to have been any actual admeasurement.

"On one occasion," he says, "I was driven by an Indian, (coachman to the gentleman with whom I was stopping,) in company with a friend, to the house of a priest, who had some singularly large specimens of the boa-constrictor (*python*); one, of two that were in a wooden pen together, could hardly have been less than fifty feet long, and the stoutest part as thick round as a very fat man's body."

Bontius speaks of some which were upwards of thirty-six feet long; doubtless Oriental pythons. An American lion is mentioned by Binzley, of the same length. The skin of which was in the cabinet of the Prince of Orange; and Shaw mentions a skin in the British Museum which measured thirty-five feet. Probably in these last two cases we must allow something for stretching.

In the *Bombay Courier*, of August 31, 1799, a dreadful story is nar-