

NATURAL HISTORY.

THE GALL NUT.—See that curious gall nut. It is formed on the leaf of a tree. In that part of the leaf in which the female gall insect makes a hole for the purpose of depositing an egg, she discharges a peculiar fluid, which, by preventing the sap from passing in its natural course, causes a gradual enlargement, which becomes the habitation of the future insect, when hatched from the egg deposited there by the mother. In the autumn, this caterpillar changes into a fly, and gnaws a passage through the ball. These gall nuts form one of the ingredients of ink, and are also used in medicine.—*Dialogues on Natural Hist.*

AMPHIBIOUS ANIMALS.—Pray do you know the meaning of the word amphibious? I think I do. Does it not mean an animal that can live either in the water or on land?

Yes, that is quite right. Water rats are of the same kind, and otters, and many other animals. Water rats shew great ingenuity in the construction of their nests, which have two openings, one above the water, and the other beneath.—*The same.*

CURIOUS ANECDOTES OF DOGS.—A blind beggar's dog, besides leading his master in such a manner as to protect him from all danger, learned to know, not only the streets, but the very houses where the poor used to receive assistance. Whenever the animal came to one of these streets, he would not leave it till a call had been made at every house where his master had usually been encouraged. When the beggar began to ask alms, the dog lay down to rest himself, but the master was no sooner relieved, or refused assistance, than the dog rose immediately and went on regularly to the houses where the beggar had generally been relieved.—When a half-penny was thrown from a window, the dog would immediately set about to search for it, and would then lift it up from the ground, and put it into his master's hat. Even when bread was thrown down, the animal would not taste it, unless his master gave it him with his own hand.

Dogs have been taught to go regularly to the butcher's shop, and to carry home the meat in safety.

A mastiff, who had often observed his master ringing at the door for admission, had so learned to imitate him, that whenever he was accidentally shut out from any house where his master was visiting, he would himself always ring the bell.

There was a dog belonging to a grocer at Edinburgh, who greatly amused and astonished the people in the neighbourhood.

A man who went through the streets ringing a bell, and selling penny pies, happened one day to treat the dog with a pie. The next time he heard the pie-man's bell, he ran towards him, and seized him by the coat, and would not suffer him to pass. The pie-man, who understood what the animal wanted, showed him a penny, and pointed to his master, who stood at the street door, intending to shew the dog that he must ask his master for a penny before he could have a pie. The dog immediately went to his master, and made many signs to him, and directed looks to him as if he was earnestly begging for something. The master, who had seen what had happened, put a penny into the dog's mouth, which the dog instantly delivered to the pie-man, and received his pie. The traffic between the pie-man and the dog was practised for a long time afterwards.

THE MAHOGANY TREE.—The mahogany tree is found in great quantities on the low and woody lands, and even upon the rocks and in the countries on the western shores of the Caribbean sea, about Honduras and Campeachy. It is also abundant in the islands of Cuba and Hayti, and it used to be plentiful in Jamaica, where it was of excellent quality; but most of the larger trees have been cut down. It was formerly abundant on the Bahamas, where it grew on the rocks, to a great height, and four feet in diameter. The mahogany is a graceful tree, with many branches that form a very handsome head. The flowers are small and whitish and the seed vessel has some resemblance to that of the Barbadoes cedar. It so far corresponds with the pine tribe, that the timber is best upon the colder soils and in the most exposed situations. When it grows upon moist and warm lands, it is soft, coarse, spongy, and contains sap-wood, into which some worms will eat. That which is most accessible at Honduras is of this description; and therefore it is only used for coarser works, or for a ground on which to lay veneers of the choicer sorts. For the latter purpose it is well adapted, as it glues better than deal, and when properly holds seasoned, is not so apt to warp or to be eaten by insects. When it grows in favorable situations where it has room to spread, it is of much better quality and puts out larger branches, the junction of which with the stem furnish those beautifully curled pieces of which the choicest veneers are made. When among rocks and much exposed the size is inferior, and there is not so much variety of shading; but the timber is far superior and the color is more rich.

MOUNT ETNA.

The ancients considered this mountain as the highest in the world; and it is, indeed, of an enormous height, although there are some that are still higher, particularly among those called the Andes, in South America. Mount Etna is in the island of Sicily, and its elevation above the level of the sea is said to be 10,983 feet, which is more than two miles. It may be seen from Valetta, the capital of Malta, on a clear day, and this is a distance of 150 miles. Etna is what is called a volcano, or burning mountain, it throws out fire, and smoke, and hot ashes; and a sort of liquid fire runs down its sides, which is called lava; and, when this is cold, it becomes hard like a stone, and takes a polish, and has the appearance of a beautiful sort of marble. There is a burning mountain likewise in Italy, called Vesuvius, and there are, indeed, several in different parts of the world, but these are the most celebrated.—Etna is said to be nearly thirty miles from the beginning of the ascent to the top of the mountain. For about the first twelve miles there are pastures and fruit-trees in great perfection, and there are also towns and villages. The climate is particularly hot in this part. A little higher it is cooler, and it abounds in timber trees of different kinds, some of which are of an enormous size. The upper part of the mountain is constantly covered with snow.

Mount Etna was celebrated as a volcano by the most ancient writers; we have accounts of an eruption 1693 years before the birth of Christ. We must not suppose that burning mountains are constantly vomiting forth these torrents of flames, and masses of stone, and ashes, but these terrible eruptions are frequently taking place, and are often the cause of dreadful destruction.—Whole towns have been completely buried by the ashes from these two mountains, or covered with the lava. In the year 1639, the torrent of burning lava from Mount Etna inundated a space of fourteen miles in length, and four in breadth, and buried, beneath it, part of the town of Catania, which is at the foot of the mountain. For several months before the lava broke out, the mountain was observed to send forth much smoke and flame.

Mount Vesuvius, though a large mountain, is not to be compared to Etna.

We may perhaps say more about these mountains some other day.