

STORY WITH A MORAL

Remarkable Natural History Phenomena in Jamaica, W. I.

How a Sugar Planter's Experiment Upset Nature's Balance and Nearly Destroyed the Cattle and Poultry Industries.

[Special Kingston (Jamaica) Letter.] Jamaica has passed, or is passing, through the experience that deserved to have world-wide publicity, both on account of its intrinsic interest and because it points a significant moral as well as adorns a tale well worth the telling. It is a story of man's short-sighted tampering with nature under the spur of the immediate exigencies of his own narrow interests, and nature's inexorable reprisals in her inevitable efforts to recover a rudely disturbed balance.

As will be seen, in this struggle between man and nature some of the



JAMAICA PEASANT HOMESTEAD.

Island's most important and promising domestic industries have been nearly ruined, and incalculable financial damage inflicted on it—all because an ignorant but self-opinionated sugar planter laid the flattering unction to his soul that he had discovered a royal road to saving his cane pieces from the depredations of rats. Fortunately, nature is a benign mother whose chastisements are inflicted in loving kindness rather than anger and never exceed the bounds of necessity. Hence, the crisis over, the disturbed "balance of nature" is now calmly but certainly readjusting itself, like the needle of a shaken compass. But the facts of the case, briefly stated, will be found of general interest as well as serving to furnish a warning to other countries and future generations.

A quarter of a century ago Jamaica was still a flourishing sugar island, although the advancing shadow of the substance of European bounty-fed sugar that has since fallen on the West Indies with more or less fatal force even then trailed up over her industrial outlook. But in those days the planter had other and more imminent cares than the bounties, none of which was more formidable than the plague of rats that threatened destruction to his cane fields. Jamaica, especially, was overrun with the creatures. They swarmed over the land like locusts in Africa, until the very existence of the sugar industry was imperiled. In those days it had happened that in a single night a score of acres of magnificent cane fields had been laid utterly waste by an invasion of the rodents—so, at least, I have been told.

At any rate, the plague was formidable enough, and in 1872, a normal effort having failed to reduce the evil, one of the foremost planters, Mr. W. B. Espeut, conceived the brilliant idea of pitting the mongoose against the rats. And he carried it out; with what result it is the purpose of this story to briefly set forth. The rats were wiped out, indeed; but so, also, was to a most alarming extent the fauna of the island, what is called in naturalistic parlance "the balance of nature" receiving so rude a shock that the



A THREATENED INDUSTRY.

country is only now beginning to manifest signs of recovering from the disastrous industrial effects.

Jamaica welcomed the mongoose with open arms, for the losses incident to the rat plague, including the cost of the important trade of "rat-catching," itself half a million of dollars, amounted to a ruinous annual aggregate. Nor did the carnivore disappoint the most sanguine expectations. The animals increased and multiplied marvelously, and in ten years' time the island resounded with the praises of the mongoose.

By that time the dreaded rats had been practically exterminated. The mongoose had done his work swiftly and thoroughly. Dr. Morris, then director of the government botanical plantations, now of Kew in London, was authority for this, stating after an official investigation that the results were most satisfactory, and that

the saving to plantations, directly traceable to the diminution of rats, amounted to an enormous round sum almost equivalent to the actual losses annually incurred before the animal's introduction.

So far well. But nature had been outraged. The mongoose proved—as may have been foreseen, only that it was not—a deadly foe to other indigenous species besides the rats. So long as his obvious natural foe, or rather victim, survived, well and good. But as the mongoose increased and the rodents decreased to the vanishing point, the former had to adapt themselves to other diet—and they did, with a facility that soon rendered them a greater menace to the island than the rodents ever were.

And now for the aftermath. Poultry rearing was one of the most important of the minor industries, and it was to the domestic animals that the mongoose first turned his attention after the rats failed to supply his necessities. And dolorous was the destruction that he wrought. Entire poultry yards were wiped out, and the industry was seriously menaced. But once on a new scent, the mongoose—perhaps fortunately for the island—became more and more catholic in his taste and did not proceed to exterminate the various indigenous species one by one with the unswerving determination with which he had followed up the rats at first. It soon became apparent that other groups were diminishing, particularly the birds and reptiles—and this opened up another phase of menace to the island, in the form of a threat against the very "balance of nature" itself, which was only too swiftly and fatally realized.

The story from this point onwards of the depredations of the mongoose, from a scientific point of view, would be too lengthy and lacking in popular interest to be gone into in detail. Suffice it that in a surprisingly brief lapse of time the five species of snakes and 22 of lizards common to the island had been practically cleared out of existence. Here and there individual specimens were occasionally found; but as occupants of the island they had disappeared. The same applies to the crocodiles, which had been formerly abundant in the waters of Jamaica. Similarly with the land and fresh-water tortoises, and, above all, with the famous sea or green turtles that gave life to an important industry, to the eggs of which the mongoose took only too aptly.

The island was getting in a bad way, truly. But this is not all. The birds suffered as much, especially the numerous ground birds for which Jamaica



MONGOOSE AT WORK.

was famous. And the inevitable result soon made itself felt. Nature began to put in a protest against this disturbance of her balance. This wholesale destruction of the insectivorous birds and beasts, besides affecting various industries directly, as we have indicated, led to an excess of injurious insects which also commenced to affect industries. Various insect pests appeared, particularly the pimento borer and the cattle tick, which in a short time created a grievous menace to the pimento plantations and the stock farms throughout the land.

By the year 1890 the situation had become so grave that the government appointed a commission to inquire into the matter. They were unanimous against the mongoose, and, whilst giving him credit for his services, decided that his evil deeds counterbalanced them. It was proved that besides destroying animals, birds, reptiles and their young ones and eggs, the mongoose had by his adaptability become omnivorous, and, the meat menu declining, was making himself a pest to the fruit farmers.

But no action was taken on the report, and in a few more years the tick plague was destroying the cattle wholesale, whilst the mongoose himself was creating havoc among the fruit plantations and rendering the Jamaica peasant homesteads desolate. A commission was appointed some time ago to investigate the tick trouble, but nothing material came of that, either.

What might have been the fate of the island had things gone on thus it is not pleasant to contemplate. But nature is no blind force. Behind her stands her Almighty Lawgiver, whose fiat is that justice be tempered with mercy. And in this case nature is righting matters in a marvelous way.

Mr. J. E. Duerden, the curator of the Jamaica museum, tells me that another, a more hopeful and probably the last, phase of the question has been reached. Recently the mongoose itself has decreased very noticeably, and the results are shown in the reappearance of species supposed to have been exterminated. There is not nearly the same outcry against the loss of poultry, domestic animals and fruit as formerly, and he is convinced that the maximum influence both for good and for evil of the mongoose is passing away in Jamaica.

But the story points a moral. I repeat, of which the world may well take heed.

T. P. PORTER.

KILLING THE PIASA BIRD.

The Order of Red Men from Springfield Repeat the Curious Indian Ceremony.

An unique spectacular programme was lately carried out on the grounds of the Piassa Bluffs, Chautauqua, by the organization of Red Men from Springfield. The exhibition was a pantomimic portrayal of the old Indian legend of the original Piassa bird, which is supposed to have once lived in this region. The story told is of a huge bird so great that its wings gave the air vibrations like the tones of thunder, its talons and beak and powerful body foamed the river, dashing the waves against the rocky bluffs like the modern dynamite of the American navy—an enemy so furious and destructive and ready to devour that the Indian tribes suffered the loss of many of its braves. At last in council a sac-

EFFECT OF WEATHER ON FISH.

Why Trout Rise Merrily in the Midst of a Storm and Sulk When the Water is Quiet.

If trout rise merrily in the very midst of a storm, why do they invariably sulk when the thunder is only "in the air?" The explanation is simple, but it occurred to me only the other day, says the London Review. Trout sulk when the storm is gathering from the cause which makes men at the club decline to look at the billiard cues during the same weather. The atmosphere lacks oxygen, and therefore all sentient life is languid. When the lightning has come the sultriness is dispelled; fish and men have something more cheering than carbonic acid gas to breathe; both are in a humor for food or play.

The same reasoning, I think, explains why, as a rule, it is necessary

THE COUNT DE CASSINI



This gentleman has recently arrived at Washington as the ambassador of the czar of Russia. The count is a diplomat of great distinction, his work for Russia in the orient ranking with that of the best talent in the world. He was the czar's representative in the complications which followed the Chinese-Japanese war, and it was he who secured all the important concessions to Russia recently granted by the Chinese emperor and foreign council.

ribe was agreed upon to save the tribe. The son of the chief was to offer himself. In great sorrow the Indians assembled to witness the sacrifice, and if possible to do battle to save their youthful chief. In the final struggle the bird was pierced by arrows, and the boy delivered. For centuries, it is said, many tribes came from distant hunting grounds to feast and return thanks.

Everything on this recent occasion was as like as could be to the story. A huge bird of monstrous dimensions, of fearful form, its tail that of a great serpent, its face slightly human, with horns like an antelope, body like both bird and beast, its wings black and widespread, its limbs and talons the exaggeration of any and everything large and strong and cruel, was started across the valley from the highest rock on one of the adjacent bluffs, suspended on wire. The Red Men, with their war whoop, rushed to attack this

to have a ripple if you are to catch trout. The accepted explanation is that the ripple conceals the casting line, leaving visible to the fish the flies alone, but one has only to use one's eyes to discover that that is no explanation at all. Even in a gale, if there is no sunshine, the gut is as easily visible to the human eye as it would be in a dead calm, and to what the human eye can see in the water the trout is surely not quite blind. No; trout rise in a ripple more rapidly than in a calm simply because the wind is oxygenating the water. Whoso doubts this is invited to make an experiment. Let him put half a dozen live trout into a pail of water. Within an hour they will be sickening; some of them will be near death and turning on their backs. A few quarts of water plunged a yard or two through the air into the pail will make all the trout revive as if by magic. The fish want oxygen just as the fellows at the club on a sultry af-

GOOD-BYE, TORAL, OLD BOY, GOOD-BYE.



"Just tell them that you saw me— And that I was looking well."

enemy in the upper air. And sure enough, as though loud shouts added to the skill of the arrow, this monster fell, enveloped in a cloud of feathers. The braves completely encircled him with the circular war dance of noisy triumph.

Keep Tab on the Ministers. Every time a Russian minister leaves town his colleagues are notified of the journey, besides the council of the empire, the cabinet of the emperor, the empire's comptroller and secretary, the sacred synod, the emperor's military secretary, the empress, the governors of Moscow, Varsovie, Kieff, etc., ad infinitum to all appearance. When he returns the same minute notification performance is gone through.

Napoleon's Physician. The present war has brought to light the fact that Dr. Antommarchi, who attended Napoleon during his last illness at St. Helena, is buried at Santiago de Cuba, where he gave his services free to the poor for many years.

ernoon want a thunderstorm or other stimulant.

A Puerto Rico Custom. William E. Curtis, who has been a good deal of a globe trotter, writes from Washington to the Chicago Record: "I observed phenomena at San Juan, and the same at Ponce de Leon, for which I have never been able to obtain a satisfactory explanation. The old negroes who sit around the market place and the shady street corners selling dulces from large baskets are habitually smoking long black cigars, and they put the lighted ends in their mouths. Why they do so and how they can endure it are mysteries that could not be solved, but it is nevertheless a fact and a custom that is unique in Puerto Rico."

Vaccination Before Marriage. In Sweden and Norway a legal marriage is not allowed to be solemnized till both parties produce certificates attesting that they bear genuine vaccination marks.

PONCE IS TAKEN.

Miles' Troops Capture Another Porto Rican Town.

A SKIRMISH AT YAUCO.

Spaniards Ambushed Our Volunteers, but Were Routed.

GARRETSON LED THE FIGHT.

Enemy Left Four Men Wounded on the Field and Several Wounded—Not One of Our Men Was Killed and Only Three Were Wounded.

Ponce, Porto Rico, via St. Thomas, D. W. I., July 30.—Ponce surrendered to Commander C. H. Davis, of the auxiliary gunboat Dixie, on Wednesday. There was no resistance and the Americans were welcomed with enthusiasm. Maj. Gen. Miles arrived here in the morning with Gen. Ernst's brigade and Gen. Wilson's division, on board transports. Gen. Ernst's brigade immediately started for the town of Ponce, three miles inland, which capitulated in the afternoon.

The American troops are pushing towards the mountains and will join Gen. Henry with his brigade at Yauco, which has been captured by our troops.

A fight before the latter place on Tuesday was won by the American volunteers. The Spaniards ambushed eight companies of the Sixth Massachusetts and Sixth Illinois regiments, but the enemy was repulsed and driven back a mile to a ridge, where the Spanish cavalry charged and were routed by our infantry.

Gen. Garretson led the fight with the men from Illinois and Massachusetts and the enemy retreated to Yauco, leaving four dead on the field and several wounded. Not one of our men was killed and only four were slightly wounded.

The Porto Ricans are glad the American troops have landed and say they are all Americans and will join our army.

The roads are good for military purposes. Our troops are healthy and Gen. Miles says the campaign will be short.

Gen. Miles has issued a proclamation to the people of Porto Rico in which he says the American forces have come to occupy the island and that the people are released from allegiance to their former masters, and that the largest measure of liberty will be given to the inhabitants that is consistent with a military occupation. He says all property rights will be respected and existing laws continued.

A Bursting Bubble. Lubec, Me., July 30.—The Electrolytic Marine Salts Co., organized for the purpose of extracting gold from sea water, which has been brought into great prominence on account of the alleged course of its vice president and general manager, Rev. P. F. Jernagan, in buying thousands of dollars' worth of government securities just previous to his departure for Europe last week, has suspended operations at the plant. Its force of 600 men has been discharged. The company was organized last year and it is claimed that 2,400,000 shares of the stock were disposed of.

Can't Concede American Control There. Washington, July 30.—It was stated last night in a high diplomatic quarter in such manner as to give semi-official character to the expression, that if American control of the Philippines was an indispensable condition laid down as the basis for peace negotiations, it was certain that the Spanish government would not accede to this condition, but would continue the war. As to the other peace conditions understood to have been decided by the cabinet, it is believed they will be accepted.

A Timely Loan. Philadelphia, July 30.—Dr. French, general secretary of the national relief commission, has received a communication from Alexander Van Rensselaer stating that he has placed his yacht May at the disposal of the national relief commission as a supply vessel, at his own expense, with the assurance that any orders the commission might impose upon him will be faithfully executed.

Had Not Attacked Manila. Hong Kong, July 30.—The British gunboat Plover has arrived here from Manila. She reports that when she left there on July 27 the situation there was unchanged and the Americans had not yet attacked the city.

Fixed the Date. Ottawa, Canada, July 30.—Sir Wilfred Laurier, the premier, announces that the international conference to settle the differences existing between the United States and Canada will open here on August 10.

Additional Troops Sail for Manila. San Francisco, July 30.—The Third battalion, First South Dakota volunteers, and the Minnesota and Colorado recruits sailed yesterday to join their comrades in the Philippines.

Spanish Prisoners Die. Portsmouth, N. H., July 30.—Three of the Spanish prisoners died yesterday at Camp Long. There are ten prisoners dangerously ill at the present time and more deaths are expected from pneumonia. The fever has practically disappeared from the camp.

A Train Load of Sick Soldiers. Cincinnati, July 30.—A hospital train arrived at Newport, Ky., last night with 159 sick soldiers, from Tampa and transferred them to the hospital at Fort Thomas. All except one wounded soldier were suffering from typhoid fever.

\$500 Reward

The above Reward will be paid for information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the party or parties who placed iron and slabs on the track of the Emporium & Rich Valley R. R., near the east line of Franklin Housler's farm, on the evening of Nov. 21st, 1891.

HENRY AUGUST, President.

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