

NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES:

OR

UNCLE JOHN'S TRUE STORIES

ABOUT

Natural History.



NUMBER ONE.



BY THE AUTHOR OF

*"Green Mountain Annals,"—"*Christmas Token."



NEW-YORK :

PRINTED AND SOLD BY MAHLON DAY,

At the New Juvenile Book-store,

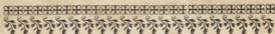
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NEW-YORK
EVENING TALES.



THE ELEPHANT.

COME, boys and girls, said Uncle John one evening; how shall we amuse ourselves to-night?

“O, tell us one of your true stories,” said they all with one accord.

Well, children, you are so attentive in listening to me, and remember what I say so well, I will begin again to-night about the

Elephant, and as you have seen a tame one, I will tell you how they catch the wild ones in a certain part of India. In the south part of India, large male Elephants are often found wandering alone. They go about to find fresh grass and shrubs on which they feed. They eat an enormous quantity, as they are so large. These are the finest elephants in the world, yet they are so fierce that no man dares to venture near them. But the way they are caught is very curious, and will no doubt please you so much that you will never forget it.

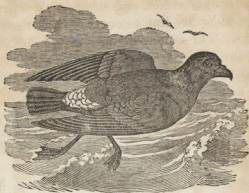
The people have female Elephants tamed, who are so cunning that they help their masters catch these large and valuable fellows, who have all their lives roved at liberty, independent of man. These tame Elephants are called *Koomkies*, and when their masters, who ride on their backs, come in sight of a wild Elephant, they get off and keep out of sight, until these cunning tame Elephants feed along very carelessly up as near the wild Elephant as they choose to come, and form an acquaintance with him if possible. They press close around him, and occupy his attention so entirely, that the men

creep under him and fasten large ropes to his legs. The tame ones so well understand the mischief they are about, that they help tie the ropes with their trunks. When he is securely tied, and the ropes made fast to a tree or to heavy weights, the deceivers walk off and leave the wild monster to rave, throw himself down, tear up the earth with his tusks, until he becomes exhausted. Hunger soon cools his courage, and by the help of these false friends who first ensnared him, he is soon tamed, and learned to labor and exert his wonderful strength for the service of his masters.

“Why what a good story you have been telling us, Uncle John! We wish you could make it longer.”

Would it not be as well to tell you something else, by and by, and not confine ourselves for a whole evening on one subject?

“Oh, just as you please,” said they all; “we know that you will make out the evening for us better than we can tell you.”

**THE STORMY PETREL.**

I will now tell you something, said Uncle John, about a singular bird, whose habits and the little I have learned of its history, have interested me very much.

Sometimes in the Northern Ocean, or in the high latitudes of the south, a bird is seen half flying and half swimming upon the curling waves. The sailor who sees the bird, instantly turns pale, and thinks of the deep sea-grave below him.

It is, in fact, a tradition of long standing among seamen, that a storm is sure to follow the appearance of this bird.

The truth may be, that the instinct of this bird teaches it to go abroad far at sea when

a storm is either preparing in the atmosphere, or has just begun to agitate the waters. The picture of this bird which I have shown you, is a very correct one, so that if any of you should ever be on board a ship, and should see such an object dancing along the heaving bosom of the waters, look out then for a storm! Expect soon to see the billows show their white foam, and to hear the wind whistle through the rigging.

I have a good song, made about the "Stormy Petrel," by Barry Cornwall, an English poet, which I will repeat to you—and which, if you will commit it to memory, will make you always remember, not only the Petrel, but the idea which the sailors have that it is the forerunner of the storm:

A THOUSAND miles from land are we,
Tossing about on the roaring sea;
From billow to bounding billow cast,
Like fleecy snow on the stormy blast:
The sails are scattered abroad, like weeds,
The strong masts shake like quivering reeds,
The mighty cables, and iron chains,
The hull, which all earthly strength disdains,
They strain and they crack, and hearts like stone
Their natural hard proud strength disown.

Up and down! up and down!
From the base of the wave to the billow's crown,
And amidst the flashing and feathery foam,

The Stormy Petrel finds a home,—
 A home, if such a place may be,
 For her who lives on the wide wide sea,
 On the craggy ice, in the frozen air,
 And only seeketh her rocky lair
 To warm her young, and to teach them to spring
 At once o'er the waves on their stormy wing!

O'er the deep! O'er the deep!
 Where the whale, and the shark, and the sword-fish sleep,
 Outflying the blast and the driving rain,
 The Petrel telleth her tale—in vain;
 For the mariner curseth the warning bird
 Who bringeth him news of the storms unheard!
 Ah! thus does the prophet, of good or ill,
 Meet hate from the creatures he serveth still,
 Yet he ne'er falters:—So, Petrel! spring
 Once more o'er the waves on thy stormy wing!

“Well! that is wonderful. We never heard of this strange bird before. What do they call it *stormy* Petrel for, Uncle John?”

Oh, because it delights to be abroad in stormy weather—and perhaps because it is thought to foretell a storm when it is seen on the water.

We will rest now a little while, and then I will tell you a story about a dog. It is a fact, that we sometimes, in trying to learn something about strange animals and birds which we have never seen, forget the wonderful animals which we see every day.



THE DOG.

The story which I will now tell you about the Dog, is a fact which happened in the city of New-York in the month of August. The dreadful disease, the cholera, had been raging in the city, and I shall remember as long as I live, how dull and deserted the streets looked. It came on night. It was cloudy, and dark, and sultry. I went early to bed, as it was not thought safe to be exposed to the evening air, and, after tossing and lying very restless for some time, at length went to sleep, and soon dreamed or fancied that a large flame was painted on the side of the chamber. I was soon aroused by a crackling noise, and found our room in a

blaze of light from the flames of a tall store just opposite, at the foot of Cortlandt-street. Rushing to the windows, we found the glass hot to the hand, and the flames towering awfully high from the upper windows, and roaring like a tempest. Dressing hastily, we rushed into the street, and found the watchmen and firemen just breaking open the lower door of the store, which opened into a large room partly filled with barrels.

A moment after the door was opened, and as soon as the torches shone into the room, a young man was seen coming down through an opening above on a windlass rope. He was almost smothered with smoke, and had on scarcely any clothes. As soon as he had fairly got down, and got to the air, and recovered himself a little, he burst into tears, and cried out—*save my dog! save my dog!*

It appeared that his dog had been left in the third story, where his master slept. But it was too late to save him; the whole building was now glowing like a furnace, and roof and beams were vanishing like cobwebs before the breath of the fierce element.

The young man appeared inconsolable; and when he told his story to those who stood around him, he did not weep alone.

He had been soundly asleep, and had been partly aroused by his dog rubbing his paw over his face. He told the dog to lie down, and then dropped to sleep again. The dog waked him a second time, and was again driven away from the bed-side in anger. But soon the dog, in an agony of affection, seized his drowsy master by the arm, tore his shirt, and bit his flesh with so much severity as effectually to arouse him—when to his horror he saw the ruddy flames breaking into his room. Suddenly leaping from his bed, and finding his door impassable, he hastily lowered himself through the windlass opening, without once thinking but what his friend, who had saved his life—his faithful dog—had the means to make his escape. But, alas! there was nothing for this faithful animal but a winding sheet of fire. His cry of agony was heard as his master told the story. It was but a moment that he supplicated the aid of man. He was a cinder; and his sufferings had ended.

“Oh, what an affecting story you have told us, Uncle John! It makes one feel as if something was rising up in the throat and choking, to hear of the end of such a good dog.”

Do not feel too great a sorrow, said Uncle John, for the sufferings of this faithful animal. He who created all things, has all things in his hand, and calls nothing away from life without some pain and suffering. Life is a gift which men and animals receive with pain, and part with it with pain.

I will tell you another story of a dog, which I have just read in a respectable London publication, which will not leave so melancholy an impression on your mind as my last tale.

THE FIREMEN'S DOG.

About three years ago, a gentleman, residing a few miles from the metropolis, was called up to town in the middle of the night, by the intelligence that the premises adjoining his house of business were on fire. The removal of his furniture and papers of course immediately claimed his attention; yet, notwithstanding this, and the bustle which is ever incident to a fire, his eye every now and then rested on a dog, whom, during the hottest progress of the devouring element, he could not help noticing, running about, and apparently taking a deep interest in what was going on, contriving to keep him-

self out of every body's way, and yet always present amidst the thickest of the stir.

When the fire was got under, and the gentleman had leisure to look about him, he again observed the dog, who, with the firemen, appeared to be resting from the fatigues of duty, and was led to make some inquiries respecting him. What passed may perhaps be better told in its original shape of question and answer between the gentleman and a fireman belonging to the Atlas Insurance Office.

Gentleman.—(stooping down to pat the dog, and addressing the fireman).—Is this your dog, my friend?

Fireman.—No sir, he does not belong to me, or to any one in particular. We call him the firemen's dog.

Gentleman.—The firemen's dog! Why so? has he no 'master?

Fireman.—No sir, he calls none of us master, though we are all of us willing enough to give him a night's lodging and a penny worth of meat; but he won't stay long with any of us; his delight is to be at all the fires in London, and, far or near, we generally find him on the road as we are going along, and sometimes, if it is out of town, we give

him a lift. I don't think there has been a fire for these two or three years past which he has not been at.

The communication was so extraordinary, that the gentleman found it difficult to believe the story, until it was confirmed by the concurrent testimony of several other firemen; none of them, however, were able to give any account of the early habits of the dog, or to offer any explanation of the circumstances which led to this singular propensity. A minute of the facts was made at the time by the inquirer, with a view to their transmission to some of the journals or periodicals, which publish anecdotes of natural history of animals; but other things interfered, and the intention was lost sight of.

In the month of June, last year, the same gentleman was again called up in the night to a fire in the village in which he resided, Camberwell in Surrey, and to his surprise here he again met with the "firemen's dog," still alive and well, pursuing with the same apparent interest and satisfaction, the exhibition of that which seldom fails to bring with it disaster and misfortune, oftentimes loss of life and ruin. Still he called no man master, disdained to receive bed or board

from the same hand more than a night or two at a time, nor could the firemen trace out his ordinary resting-place.

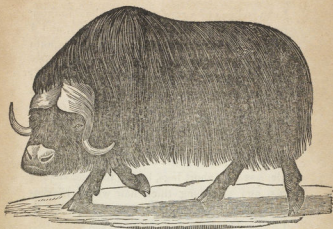
The foregoing account is strictly true, and the truth may be ascertained by inquiry of any of the regular firemen of the metropolis. But who of those best acquainted with the habits of that most sagacious of our quadrupeds shall offer an explanation of the "hobby" of the firemen's dog?

My children, I will add one authentic story more—which is a little nearer home:

NEW-YORK FIREMEN'S DOG.

John Bell, Printer's Carpenter, Skinner-street, New-York, had a dog very much of the character of the above, in some particulars even surpassing.

On the alarm of fire by the usual ringing of the church bells, he would startle and seem to manifest his alarm by barking and running around the premises, then into the streets to see what was doing, then to his master's for company to go to the fire; and, if not successful, he would bound off alone to the fire, where, from his usual attendance, he became a favorite of the firemen, who would preserve him from insult from strangers to his character. What is still remarkable, this dog would distinguish between the sound of the bell for church or for fire. He met his death by the operation of the Dog Law, in the summer of 1831; being off his master's premises, he was taken and killed. He was a dog of remarkable sagacity and docility, being fond of the play of a child. His temper was peaceful, seldom quarreling, but when forced, to combat, he would come off the conqueror.



THE MUSK OX.

In the remote north, nature acts in her strange and fantastic moods. The long and dreary night which reigns unbroken through the winter months, and the dim day that knows no decline for an equal space of time, are objects of wonder to travellers who were born, and have spent the greater part of their lives, in the temperate zones of the earth.

What would you think, my children, if this evening, which has drawn its curtain around us so peacefully, were to last for half a year?

“Oh, we should all like that, Uncle John. We then could have a book full of your grand stories. We should never be sleepy while hearing about strange creatures. What will you tell us next?”

I can tell you of a very singular animal in these regions of frost and almost eternal snows, and I think you will be amused at his picture. Captain Parry, an English navigator, who has within a few years sailed much in the icy seas, killed many of these animals, and has furnished accurate drawings of them, so that we have the means of forming as correct an idea of their looks, as if we had seen them living.

The Musk Ox is about the size of our common cattle, has very short legs, broad, flat and sloping horns, and very long thick hair which reaches down almost to the ground.

Look at his picture, and you will see how admirably he is dressed for the winter weather, and the tremendous storms of the arctic regions.

The Musk Ox is frequently very fat, and will weigh, when he is killed, about eight hundred pounds. His flesh has a strong smell of musk—but is eaten by the Indians and hunters after being smoked.

They are sometimes seen in droves of eighty or a hundred in number, climbing over steep rocks in search of twigs, shrubs, or some green thing for their food. Their flesh and habits, perhaps, are more like the American Moose than any other animal. Their eyes project remarkably through the thickly matted hair, and when they move, according to Capt. Parry, they go in a hobbling

sort of canter, which makes them appear as if every now and then to fall, yet the slowest of these Musk Oxen can outstrip a man in speed. When they were hunted and disturbed, they frequently tore up the ground with their horns, and turned round to look at their pursuers, but never ventured to fight.

The Indians eat the flesh of this animal, make cups and spoons of his horns, make shoes of his thick tough hide, and, in fact, use up the odd looking creature hair and all.

The Musk Ox is rarely found, except beyond the sixtieth degree of north latitude; our warm summers would make him wish to throw off his shaggy overcoat, and dress in finer cloth, like the smooth coated ox and horse.

What would you think, children, if you should happen, when walking out in the country, to see the hills covered with a hundred of these dark-looking grim fellows?

"We should all be glad to see them, let them look as black as they pleased."

Well, I can't say but some of you may some time see such a sight, but it is not probable. The extreme regions of the north are wonderful regions to be sure, but not very inviting. The brave and the hardy only, can face the wind that freezes as it roars over ice-mountains, and seas locked up in eternal silence.

Think you can keep awake to hear another story to-night?

"Awake! yes, Uncle—wide awake. We shall be able to repeat all you say, years after this."



THE BUFFALO.

I will now, my dear children, tell you something about the wild Buffalo, whose skins we often see spread in sleighs and winter carriages for a warm covering.

These animals abound in the far western and south-western parts of our country, and are likewise numerous in South America and Africa. They travel over the vast prairies of the west in droves of hundreds, and sometimes their bellowing resembles distant thunder. The African Buffalo is perhaps a fiercer animal than the American,

as our Buffaloes are easily hunted and killed. The Hottentots say that the Buffalo of the Cape, in South Africa, is fierce, treacherous, and cruel; he will even sometimes make a brave stand against the lion. They say, and a Swedish traveller affirms the same, that this animal will sometimes hide in a thicket when he sees travellers approaching, and suddenly rush out upon them when they get near enough. If he succeeds in goring a man and tossing him with his formidable horns, he will stand over his victim afterwards, for a long time, trampling him with his hoofs, crushing him with his knees, mangling the body with his horns, and stripping off the skin with his rough and prickly tongue. Yet I think these acts of barbarity belong to the African rather than the American Buffalo.

I will repeat the narrative of a Buffalo hunt in Africa as related by a Dutch farmer who has long resided in that country :—

A party of Boors had gone out to hunt a troop of Buffaloes, which were grazing in a piece of marshy ground, interspersed with groves of yellow wood and mimosa trees, on the very spot where the village of Somerset is now built. As they could not conveniently get within shot of the game without crossing part of the marsh, which did not afford a safe passage for horses, they agreed to leave their steeds in charge of their Hottentot

servants, and to advance on foot, thinking that if any of the Buffaloes should turn upon them, it would be easy to escape by retreating across the quagmire, which, though passable for man, would not support the weight of a heavy quadruped. They advanced accordingly, and, under cover of the bushes, approached the game with such advantage that the first volley brought down three of the fattest of the herd, and so severely wounded the great bull leader, that he dropped on his knees, bellowing with pain. Thinking him mortally wounded, the foremost of the huntsmen issued from the covert, and began reloading his musket as he advanced to give him a finishing shot. But no sooner did the infuriated animal see his foe in front of him, than he sprang up and rushed headlong upon him. The man, throwing down his empty gun, fled towards the quagmire; but the savage beast was so close upon him that he despaired of escaping in that direction, and turning suddenly round a clump of copsewood, began to climb an old mimosa tree which stood at the one side of it. The raging beast, however, was too quick for him. Bounding forward with a roar, which my informant (who was of the party) described as being one of the most frightful sounds he ever heard, he caught the unfortunate man with his horns, just as he had nearly escaped his reach, and tossed him in the air with such force

that the body fell, dreadfully mangled, into a lofty cleft of the tree. The buffalo ran round the tree once or twice, apparently looking for the man, until weakened with loss of blood he again sunk on his knees. The rest of the party then, recovering from their confusion, came up and despatched him, though too late to save their comrade, whose body was hanging in the tree quite dead.

"Huzza for Uncle John's stories; they are better than any of our plays," says one!

"I wish that the evening was not spent," says another.

"Have you done now, Uncle John," says a third.

Yes, my girls and boys, I have done for this evening. What have you learned? come, tell me; let one speak at a time, and tell quick.

"I have learned," says one, "that it does not answer to believe appearances at all times, for the Elephant is caught by seducers."

"I have learned," says another, "that a very pretty bird may foretell a storm."

"I have learned," says another, "that faithfulness to our friends will not always save us from harm, even if it preserves them."

"I have learned," says the fourth, "that Buffaloes may as well be let alone. Who can blame them for harming those who seek their lives."

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