

NEW-YORK  
EVENING TALES:

OR

UNCLE JOHN'S TRUE STORIES

ABOUT

*Natural History.*



NUMBER TWO.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

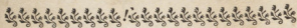
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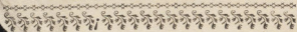
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FRONTISPIECE.



SOCIAL AFRICAN BIRD'S NEST.



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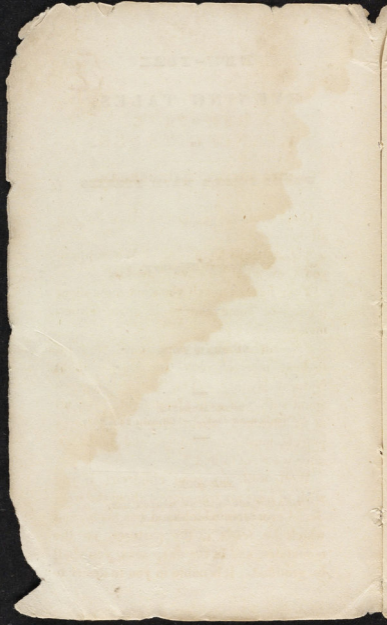


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**NEW-YORK  
EVENING TALES.**

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**THE SOCIABLE GROSBEAK.**

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Good evening! children. How do you all do?

"Quite well, Uncle John! We suppose you know what we have come for."

Yes; likely enough you want some sugar plums—or some candy—or some sweet-meats.

"No such thing, Uncle John! we want to hear more of your true stories about Natural History. The last evening we spent with you went about right. We all of us dreamed about elephants, stormy petrels, musk oxen, dogs, and buffaloes, after we went to bed."

Well, well, my good children; if you wish to hear my true stories about the wonderful creatures which God has made, and which he feeds in the pastures, on the mountains, and in the deep seas, you shall be gratified. It is noble in you to desire to

learn. The child that longs to gain knowledge, shall gain an abundance, and it shall be richer in his mind than stores of gold and silver.

Do you see this beautiful picture? It is called *the social African Birds' nest*. The leaning trunk and spreading branches belong to a tree called the *mimosa*, which grows in the solitudes of Africa. Mr. Patterson, an English traveller, who took great delight in exploring regions where the foot of civilized man never trod before, was the first to discover the nests, and to learn the habits of the *Sociable Grosbeak*. In his account of his travels, he has given a particular description of these birds. The *mimosa* is a tree of large size, and great strength, and is consequently chosen by the *Grosbeaks* to support their curious nests. They live in large families, like a swarm of bees, and all engage in good order in the business of building their house. They select a *mimosa* with a trunk so smooth and so destitute of branches near the ground, that their dreaded enemies, the serpents of the country, cannot climb up to destroy them. The way in which the nests themselves are

made is highly curious. In the one described by Mr. Patterson there could be no less a number, he says, than from eight hundred to one thousand Grosbeaks residing under the same roof. He calls it roof, because it perfectly resembles that of a thatched house; and the ridge forms an angle so acute and so smooth, projecting over the entrance of the nest below, that it is impossible for any reptile to approach them. "The industry of these birds," says Mr. Patterson, "seems almost equal to that of the bee: throughout the day they appear to be busily employed in carrying a fine species of grass, which is the principal material they employ for erecting this extraordinary work, as well as for additions and repairs. Though my short stay in the country was not sufficient to satisfy me by ocular proof that they added to their nest as they annually increased, still from the many trees which I have seen borne down with the weight, and others with their boughs completely covered over, it would appear that this is really the case. When the tree which is the support of this aerial city, is obliged to give way by the increase

of weight, it is obvious they are no longer protected, and must rebuild in other trees. One of these deserted nests I broke down, and found the internal structure equally ingenious with that of the external. There are many entrances, each of which forms a regular street, with nests on both sides, at about two inches distance from each other. The grass with which they build is called the Boshman's grass; and I believe the seed of it to be their principal food, though on examining their nests I found the wings and legs of different insects. From every appearance, the nest which I dissected had been inhabited for many years; and some parts of it were much more complete than others: this, therefore, I conceive, nearly amounts to a proof that the birds added to it at different times as they found it necessary."

Now, my good children, tell me what you think about this account. The oldest one may speak.

"Oh! I think it is wonderful. Don't they live any where else excepting in Africa, Uncle?"

No where else. They have only been



seen in the unfrequented wilderness of that vast continent.

“What would I give to see the very birds, and the fine and durable houses they build for themselves!”

Don't distress yourself about the matter. Although you may never go to Africa and see the Grosbeak, you will remember my story about them, and you may always look at the picture of their beautiful nest. And when you look at a bee-hive, and see how orderly and workmanlike they finish and arrange their cells, you will have a good idea of the African bird's nest. You will all remember too, after this evening, that bees are not the only winged creatures who live in a fine city of their own building.

What shall I tell you next?

“Just what you like, Uncle John! You may carry us, just as you please, all over the world: only tell the stories—we'll listen, and remember all you say—and thank you too.”

Well, my good children, look at the next picture.



### THE AFRICAN LION.

You here see the king of beasts. He has many noble traits of character. He does not know what fear is, and his roar is like the sound of smothered thunder. It is in the burning zone of Africa only, that the lion appears in the full glory of his strength. There, beneath a fiery sun, his eye is too dreadful to look upon.

It is but a few weeks since, that I visited the Menagerie, in the Bowery, in this city, and saw with wonder an African Lion, about thirteen years old, besides two others quite young. The old one had a majesty in his look and action that was quite imposing. Every few minutes he would tune his voice to that terrible roar which shakes

the deserts of Africa. Yet he was so gentle that his keeper could go into his cage with him, and play with his shaggy mane. The younger lions, one of which was only eighteen months old, were as playful as young dogs, and manifested quite an attachment to their keeper. They would play with his hands, pretend to bite him, and lay down on their backs and roll over for joy at his approach.

The mercy frequently shown by this mighty king of beasts to animals which have been thrown to him for food, is well known. On these occasions, he discovers a true magnanimity of character, and almost commands our respect for his moral qualities.

The editor of the New Orleans Emporium, on the 23d of last November, published the following authentic account:—

“We were yesterday informed, that on Tuesday last, a bear was taken to the Menagerie now exhibiting in this city, and let down into the cage of an African lion, twenty-four years of age, with the belief that he would be immediately torn to pieces. Many people assembled under the awning which encompasses the exhibition,

to witness the scene, but all were disappointed and struck with astonishment; for although the bear, as soon as he reached the bottom of the cage, placed himself in a fighting position, and once or twice flew at the Lion, with the apparent intention to commence the battle, the Lion did not attempt to injure, but on the contrary, after some time elapsed, placed his paw on the Bear's head, as if to express his pity for its helpless situation, and evinced every disposition to cultivate friendship.

“Having heard and read much of the Lion's nobleness of disposition, and understanding that the Bear was still in the cage, prompted by curiosity, we visited the menagerie this morning, and actually saw them together. The manager of the Lion tells us, that since the Bear has been put into the cage, no person has dared to approach it, and that the Lion has not slept for three hours, but continues constantly awake to guard his weaker companion from danger. The Lion, says the manager, suffers the Bear to eat of whatever is thrown into the cage until he has enough, but will scarcely touch food himself.

“During the time that we remained, the Lion once or twice walked to the end of the cage opposite to that where the Bear was, but as the Lion saw it he sprang to the Bear, and kept his head resting over it for some time: he is so fatigued himself with watching, that as soon as he lies down he falls asleep, but awakens again at the first noise that is made, and springs to the object of his care.

“This seems to us astounding indeed, and will no doubt attract the notice of naturalists.”

My dear children, as I always try to tell you something about animals, which you cannot find in any books which have been printed and become well known among the people, I will now relate a true story which has never been in print. I heard it from General William Eaton, of Brimfield, Mass., who died nearly twenty years ago. General Eaton was a brave man and an honor to his country. President Jefferson, knowing his determined and fearless character, appointed him to be the American Consul at Algiers, one of the Barbary states distinguished for piracy, and the imprisonment

at hard labor and slavery of all civilized people who fell into their power.

While General Eaton was either at Tunis or Algiers, in his official duty, he went on a hunting excursion into the country, attended by Dr. B. of the American navy, and another friend. They were twelve or fourteen miles from the city, on a barren and desolate plain, with here and there a small clump of trees to relieve the expanse of sandy desert.

As they wandered on, the short and tremendous roar of a lion broke upon their ears. It was that peculiar cry which is uttered only in times of great anger, or pinching and unsupportable hunger. Eaton, always in the calm and cool possession of his courage, advised a hasty retreat to a copse, and the security of a tree. The party had barely time to select a stunted tree, and climb up amongst its branches, before the terrible beast, evidently enraged by extreme hunger, was at its roots. Waving his tail to and fro and lashing the sand, the lion first attempted a leap high enough to seize his living prey among the branches. Failing to effect this, he paused to reflect

a moment, and then commenced digging up the sand at the roots of the tree. In this work he made fearful progress. He rent the strongest roots asunder with his teeth, and threw up the sand like a whirlwind. Eaton saw that something must be done, and descended to one of the lower branches, loading a small carbine which he had with him with two balls. He aimed at his head and fired: the balls struck between his eyes, and seemed to penetrate only far enough to increase his rage: another carbine was handed to him by his friend above, which he fired with no better success. The tree was now waving, and now fairly reeling to its fall. Eaton had a small sword hanging at his side, such as consuls and officers wear at the Barbary courts; he drew it, aimed his plunge, and leaped from the tree, driving his sword into the side of the lion just behind one of his fore legs, at the same time throwing his body over the lion as far as possible on the sand beyond; he cleared himself from the dying struggles of the monster. His sword had reached the lion's heart.

After General Eaton's friends became

satisfied that their enemy was quiet, they descended the tottering tree; but the lion, although in the agonies of death, had still strength enough to lift one paw and bring it down in vengeance, tearing a deep furrow in one of the gentlemen's legs, from the hip to the ankle.

This lion was skinned, and the skin was stuffed and brought to this country, where I have often seen it, with the ball holes between the eyes, and the sword cut in the side. It is now, I believe, in the New England Museum, in Boston.

“Good! good! Uncle John. We've had a good one now. I could hardly sit in my chair, I was so afraid the monster would get Eaton and his friends.”

“And I too held my breath as hard as I could: for I expected to hear you tell that down the tree came, and the beast made a supper of one of them at least.”

No, my fine children, Eaton lived many years after this, and at last fell into the jaws of the roaring lion of intemperance. After a life of bravery and honor, he died a drunkard. Take care, children, and never give up your happiness and health to the cruel ruin of those *who tarry long at the wine.*





### THE PENGUIN.

I will now tell you, children, about some birds which Capt. Morrell became particularly acquainted with in the South Seas—the Penguin and the Albatross.

“Captain Morrell—why he belongs to this city, does he not?”

Oh yes: he is a brave seaman, and you may remember that about a year or more ago he brought two South Sea Indians to this city, who were exhibited in Peale’s museum near the Park. They were bloody-minded fellows. Their nation killed thirteen of Captain Morrell’s crew.

But I will tell you the wonderful things which he relates of these two birds.

“Of Penguins,” says the Captain, “there are four different kinds which resort to the Falkland Islands, viz: the king penguin, the

macaroni, the jackass, and the rookery. The first of these are much larger than a goose; the other three are smaller. They all walk upright, as their legs project from their bodies in the same direction with their tails; and when fifty or more of them are moving in files, they appear at a distance like a company of Juvenile soldiers. They carry their heads high, with their wings drooping like two arms. As the feathers on the breast are delicately white, with a line of black running across the crop, they have been aptly compared, when seen at a little distance, to a company of children with white aprons tied round their waists with black strings. This feathered animal is said to have the qualities of men, fishes, and fowls; upright like the first; their wings and feet acting the part of fins, like the second, and furnished with bills and feathers, like the third. Their gait on land however is very awkward; more so than that of a jack tar, just landed from a long voyage; their legs not being much better adapted for walking than their wings are for flying.

**THE ALBATROSS.**

The next most remarkable bird to be found on these shores, says Capt. Morrell, is the Penguin's intimate associate, and most particular friend, the albatross. This is one of the largest of the South Sea birds, being of the gull kind, and taking its prey upon the wing. Like many other oceanic birds, the albatross never comes on land, except for the purpose of breeding, when the attachment between it and the Penguin is evinced in many remarkable instances; indeed it seems as firm as any that can be formed by the sincerest friends. Their nests are built with great uniformity near to each other; that of the albatross being always in the centre of a little square, formed by the nests of four Penguins.

When a sufficient number of penguins, albatross, &c. are assembled on the shore, after a consultation on the subject, they proceed to the execution of the grand purpose for which they left the ocean. In the first place, they select a level piece of ground, of four or five acres, and as near the water as possible, always preferring that which is the least covered with stones, and other hard substances, which would break their eggs. As soon as they are satisfied on this point, they proceed to lay out the plan of their encampment; which task they commence by tracing a square sufficient to accommodate the whole, say from one to five acres. One side of this square runs with the water's edge, and is always left open for going out and coming in.

The industrious feathered laborers next proceed to clear all the ground within the square, picking up the stones in their bills, and carefully laying them outside of the lines, until they sometimes, by this means, create a little wall on three sides of the rookery. Within this range of stones and rubbish, they form a pathway, six or eight feet in width, and as smooth as any of the

payed or gravelled walks in the New-York Park, or on the Battery. This path is for a general promenade by day, and for the sentinels to patrole by night.

Having thus finished their little works of defence on the three land sides, they next lay out the whole area in little squares of equal sizes, formed by narrow paths, which cross each other at right angles, and which are also made very smooth. At each crossing of these paths, an albatross makes her nest, while in the centre of each little square is a penguin's nest; so that each albatross is surrounded by four penguins, and each penguin has an albatross for its neighbor in four directions. In this regular manner is the whole area filled up.

Although the penguin and the albatross are on such intimate terms, and appear to be affectionately and sincerely attached to each other, they not only build their nests in a very different manner, but the penguin will even rob her friend's nest whenever she has a chance. The penguin's nest is merely a slight hole in the earth, just deep enough to keep her single egg from rolling out, while the albatross throws up a little mound of earth, grass, and shells, eight or ten

inches high, and about the size of a water bucket, on the top of which she forms her nest, and thus looks down upon her nearest neighbors and best friends.

None of the nests in these rookeries are ever left for a single moment, until the eggs are hatched and the young ones old enough to take care of themselves. The male goes to sea in search of food until he gets enough; he then returns, and takes the place of his mate, while she goes to sea for food. In these kind offices, they so contrive it as not to leave the eggs uncovered at all; the female making room for the partner of her cares and pleasures on his return from the sea, while he nestles in by her side until the eggs are completely covered by his feathers. By this precaution they prevent their eggs being stolen by the other birds, which would be the case were they left exposed, for the females are so ambitious of producing a large family at once, that they rob each other whenever they have an opportunity. Similar depredations are also committed by a bird called the rook, which is equally mischievous as the monkey. The royal penguin is generally foremost in such thefts, and never neglects an opportunity of robbing a neighbor. Indeed, it often happens that when the young brood are hatched, there will be three or four different kinds of birds in one nest. This is strong circumstantial evidence that the parent bird is not more honest than her neighbors.

To stand at a little distance and see the movements of the birds in these rookeries, is not only amusing but edifying, and even affecting. You will see them marching round the encampment in the outside path, or public promenade, in pairs or in squads of four, six, or eight, reminding you of officers and subalterns on a parade day. At the same time, the camp, or rookery is in continual motion; some penguins passing through the different paths or alleys, on their return from the sea, eager to caress their mates after a temporary absence; while the latter are passing out in their turn, in quest of refreshment. At the same time the air is almost darkened by an immense number of albatross hovering over the rookery like a dense cloud, some lighting and meeting their companions, while others are rising and shaping their course for the sea.

Good night, children! It is getting late or I would tell you another story. Will you come some other evening?

"Come! you have only to speak the word, Uncle John, and we'll be here to the minute, and bring a room full with us if you please."

Well, well—good night! You are not selfish; so you may bring as many the next evening as you can find seats for. How bright your eyes look, my dear children! Can you never get sleepy? Good night!

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