

THE DUGONG.

Legend of the West Branch by John of York.

There is in the West Branch immediately above the mouth of Kettle creek and opposite the Noyes' farm or manor considerable stretch of head waters of varying depth, from ten to twenty feet, more or less. In the early decade of the present century it was much deeper, but the ice jams and floods of recent years have wrought wonderful changes in the bed of the river at this point; great bars of sand and gravel have been washed up in and near the mouth of the creek, where formerly stood pools of deep water, and at no very remote period there was a good landing for rafts, and also, tow boats that carried from ten to twenty tons of freight, principally loaded at Lock Haven for the first fork of Sinnemahoning and intermediate points. There were several of these boats, one owned by Robert McCloskey, of Lock Haven; one by Wilson and Frank King, of Lock Haven; one by Nathan and David McCloskey, of Hyner, and Ephesus Caldwell, of Westport, and John Baird, of William Baird's farm, where Renovo now stands. The landing was called the "pivot" and stood at the junction of the river and the creek. Colonel A. C. Noyes & Bros.' store and warehouse stood close by upon the high bank between the two streams. A large quantity of freight was discharged in those days before railroading at this landing, a good portion of which was destined for Kettle creek. These goods were given storage by the Noyes Bros. to the creek people free of charge.

It is now almost dry land where the landing existed. There is yet, however, in the river above the confluence of the creek with the river a long level body of deep water, which is now more shallow than it was at the close of the last century when Richard Gilmore, Revolutionary soldier, one of the original owners of the Kettle creek flats, in 1796, sold his lands, which included all the level ground on both sides of the creek, including also a hewed log house and a few acres of improved land which lay on the lower side of the creek, to James Caldwell for the consideration of \$75 gold, a certain amount of silver and a yoke of oxen.

Connected with the above body of water is a strange legend, which has been handed down from the red man to the pale face. The story is traditional, may be fabulous, invented, and without any foundation in fact. We say, may be, but at the same time we think it is plausible, and fully as worthy of credence as many other legends handed down by tradition and believed to be founded on fact and historically true. The Indian was an imaginary being.

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[CONTINUED FROM SATURDAY.]

In said water he found himself, at least for the present a prisoner, as he could neither continue his journey upward nor return to the sea by the way which he came, so that he had time, as he lay in his fresh water bed, to reflect and repent at leisure of his adventure and indiscretion. He finally concluded to make the best of it and trust to a favorable flood to release himself from his predicament, for he was an unwilling prisoner in this limited area of dead water, walled in as it was by big mountains that cast their dark shadows around his lonely bed. As a compensating solace, however, he fortunately found plenty of game, fresh and palatable, during the summer months, so that he fattened and grew prodigiously.

He had hoped to be released in the fall from his mountain residence by a flood that would enable him to return to the bosom of his friends, but he was doomed to disappointment, as there was no flood in the fall, so he was really obliged to winter over and run the risk of having his life crushed out by the ice jams.

The fates, however, were propitious and favored him, for the winter was mild, and fish was plenty, for even at that season there was no lack of food, as he had all the river to himself, so he continued to wax in size until he equaled the bulk of an ox or hippopotamus. No better luck awaited him the following spring and summer to extricate himself from his involuntary imprisonment, as the freshets in the river were only sucker floods and he again found the water insufficient to carry him over the Stuart ripples. In fact he found himself grown so large that no ordinary flood would float him over the shoal places, so that he about came to the conclusion that he must succumb to the inevitable, to conform to his new environment and relinquish all hope of deliverance from his fresh water bondage.

At the same time, he was becoming reconciled, becoming acclimated to his changed conditions and he finally became completely weaned from his native element, oblivious of the past. At lucid intervals, however, misty flashes of reminiscences traversed athwart his brain, but these in time grew less frequent and farther and farther between, till they finally ceased, when he had no desire to leave his pebbly home down among the black rocks, for he knew no other home, and ignorance in that respect was bliss. As a result of his adventure, he found himself alone, separated from his family, his element and species, and the only one and sole representative of his kind.

His kind, that was the puzzle. He was not the form or image of anything on

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[CONTINUED FROM YESTERDAY.]

Of late years, however, there are many who doubt the existence of the dugong in these waters. They believe he abandoned his retreat many years ago, and think that he took advantage of the big flood of 1889 and floated off voluntarily; or possibly, against his will, the same cataclysm of flood and debris may have torn him from his rocky bed, and hurled him headlong down the mad current into the heaving Atlantic.

There are others, however, who dissent from this view, and hold to the opinion that he is yet still an inhabitant of the dead water. They argue that long after the June flood, and that on an ordinary rafting flood, too low for safe running, a Clearfield raft, one bright spring day, came leisurely floating down through the dead water, all hands resting on their oars, taking solid comfort, basking in the sunshine and the pure air of the pine clad mountains, when suddenly the raft began to scrape and rub hard on some hidden object, which they supposed to be either a new sand bar thrown up by a recent flood or a rock detached and rolled into the channel by the mighty power of the ice king. The raft swung around, squeaked, strained and finally came to a full stop. Some of the lash poles or couplings were cut and the raft finally winged off, causing but little detention and damage. Simultaneously, when the raft dropped off, the obstruction seemed to disappear, which incident was very strange and puzzling to the old pilot, as he claimed he had his raft in the right channel, the raft course, which he had safely piloted over scores of times. Hence, those who believed that the dugong still lived in the deep water maintained that the raft had come in contact, had run onto him, scratching his back, perhaps his nose, causing the raft to come to a full stop, and the water being shallow would naturally press the dugong down on to the bottom of the river, causing him to kick and roar with pain, which noise some of the men mistook for thunder in a clear sky, while others imagined the noise to be the struggling of the water and the grinding of the timbers over the rocks. So that it appears that the existence at the present day of the dugong in the dark, deep water down in his pebbly bed, beside the big black rocks, is a mooted question, some arguing for and some against his existence. Therefore, the question stands undecided. No one seems willing to investigate for himself, as the water is said to be of great depth, so that it would be accompanied with great danger, for the dugong is said to be a man eater. There are some savants,

or scientists, who actually contend that there is a subterranean passage connecting the bottom of the deep water with the Atlantic ocean, which passage the dugong was at first ignorant of, hence,

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Now to the tale. At a very early period far back, before the pale face invaded the beautiful valley of the West Branch, a marine animal or sea monster is said to have inhabited the dead water above described, making his home down in its depths among the big black rocks. The tradition accounts for his presence in the body of water so remote from the sea in this way: In the early decades of the eighteenth century, long before the present century, long before the Columbia and other dams and obstructions were thrown across the river to intercept the navigation of the migratory tribes of old ocean up into the interior, into the mountains, it was natural for many inhabitants of the briny deep to migrate once a year into fresh water for procreative purposes, to take a trip up the river, an excursion into the country; hence the conclusion, according to the legend, is, that the young monster left his natural element on a good stage of water, in the spring of the year, and being young and inexperienced in travel, he, in his pursuit of the game, followed it up through the great bay; thence into the mouth of the river, and in his excitement and enthusiasm continued the pursuit on and on, up the beautiful river.

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or scientists, who actually contend that there is a subterranean passage connecting the bottom of the deep water with the Atlantic ocean, which passage the dugong was at first ignorant of, hence he has now free and easy access to the ocean by the underground short line route. If this theory of the underground passage is correct, then his presence in this body of water at periodical times is inevitable, a natural sequence, for he is known to be a voracious animal, a great gormandizer for both water and land animals, man included, and we already know that it was his voracious appetite that impelled him in the first place to pursue the shad up the river, and in conjunction with the shad it is to be presumed that he had his eye on the land animals at the same time. Consequently he is here for game, and we presume it matters little to him whether it is fish or land animals, man and boys included. There is one fact, however, that cannot be controverted, and that is fish in the West Branch are not as plentiful as they were one hundred years ago, or prior to the time that the dams were constructed across the Susquehanna and its two main branches, for fish were then caught with little trouble, by the earl load, and the people were well fed, physically strong, brainy and happy. Therefore, we conclude that fish being scarce, the dugong, by necessity, may be driven to attack land animals. As the dugong is not amphibious, not being the nature of the frog and crocodile, he is only able to pursue the chase and attack his game in the water, and as his best hunting season is in summer time, the boys and girls are cautioned when they go in swimming to keep a sharp lookout else they might drop like plums into his mouth.

JOHN OF YORK.