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and the Andes  
George Catlin  
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## THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS AND THE ANDES.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE RATTLESNAKES' DEN.

**T**HE readers of my first volume will have preserved some impression of the shape and position of my father's plantation in the picturesque little valley of the Ocquago, on the bank of the Susquehana river, hemmed in with huge mountains on either side, and in which was situated the "Old Sawmill Lick," and the scene of the "Kettle of Gold," which have been described in the first volume.

As has been said, though not the place of my nativity, it was the tapis on which my boyish days were spent, and rife with legends of Indian lore, its natural features, and its incidents stamped upon my youthful mind impressions which easily beguile me in this, as in my first volume, again to

B

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978-1-108-05291-7 - Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains  
and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

*Ocquago.*

loiter a little about it before I start off with my young readers to the vast and boundless regions where the principal scenes of this little book are to be laid.

“John Darrow” is recollected, and faithful “Johnny O’Neil,” and their singular and respective characters will be better stereotyped in the little episode which is here to follow.

Ocquago (Ohk-qua-gúh), the Indian name of a straight mountain, of six or eight miles in length, in the southern part of the State of New York, having the cool and limpid river Susquehana gliding along at its western base, and a fertile valley of rich alluvion from one to two miles in breadth on the opposite shore, barricaded by the Randolph Mountains on the west.

In the middle of this little valley lay my father’s plantation, and above and below it, during the days of my boyhood, some eight or ten farms of less dimensions, and also bordering on the river shore, were under cultivation; which, together with labourers, hunters, fishermen, &c, counted a population of something like two hundred persons.

This picturesque, but insignificant little valley, which at that time had acquired no place in history, having been settled but a few years, nevertheless had its traditions of an exciting interest, as the rendezvous of “Brant,” the famous and terrible Mohawk chief, and his army during the frontier

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Ocquago.*

3

war, in which the “*Wyoming massacre*” took place, and the finale of which was the subsequent *déroute* of Brant and his Indian forces, through the valley of the Ocquago, and beyond the Randolph Mountains, to the sources of the Susquehana, by the Pennsylvania militia.

These events, and their attendant cruelties, both savage and civil, too recent at that time to be called traditions, accounted (as stated in the first volume) for the vivid and unfading impressions which I received, at an early age, of Indians, of “Indian massacres,” &c. And the singular adventures here to follow will show how I received at the same age impressions not less exciting, nor less lasting, but of another kind, indicated in the heading of this chapter.

Though the Indians had disappeared, and nothing but their oral history, and their bones, and their implements ploughed up in our fields, remained of them, there was yet another enemy, even more numerous, more cruel, and more deadly, and threatening to be more unconquerable and inexterminable to deal with.

The banks and the meadows of the Susquehana, in the beautiful valleys of Wyoming, Tioga, Chenango, Ocquago, and Otsego, were probably more infested than any other portions of the globe, with rattlesnakes of all colours, and various dimensions, that struck at the heels of all that was mortal, man or

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

*The Rattlesnakes' Den.*

beast, in the meadows or fields of grain, in which they crawled and wallowed during the summer season.

Of these localities, the little valley of the Ocquago seemed to be the most cruelly inflicted by this terrible scourge, and no doubt so, from its limited dimensions and peculiar position, receiving the concentration of these reptiles in the summer months, from the desolate mountains surrounding it.

During the hay-making and harvesting season these poisonous creatures were exceedingly dangerous to the lives of the labourers, and from my father's fields their frightful carcasses were daily brought in by my father's hired men, with their heads cut off by the scythe, or killed by the cudgel. And every summer, more or less lives of men, of women, or of children, as well as of horses, of dogs, and other animals were destroyed, in the otherwise peaceable and happy little valley, by these hidden and deadly enemies.

With the habits and peculiarities of an enemy so deadly and so universal (and consequently so "respectable") as this, in the mountains and valleys of America, it may be well for the reader to be made a little more familiar in this place, for they are an enemy more dangerous than Indians, and will probably demand a large space in the narrations of incidents to be given in the following pages, as well as those mentioned in the former volume.

As a natural history fact, and known to all the

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The Rattlesnakes' Den.*

5

inhabitants of those parts where they abound, how curious that these reptiles, after spending the summer season in the grassy valleys, and on the banks of the rivers and lakes, at the first indication of frost in the fall of the year, *en masse*, and simultaneously, from instinct, commence a pilgrimage across rivers, across lakes, and up the mountain sides, no matter what distance, to the "Rattlesnakes' Den," their winter's rendezvous, where not only hundreds, but thousands, assemble. And in their inapproachable cavern, in a torpid state, they await the coming of spring, and the beginning of summer, when they venture forth again, and descend into the valleys, for another summer's campaign.

How curious the fact also, that, in their summer's peregrinations, the male and female are always in company; and how wonderful that instinct that enables them to track each other, and never to lose that company, though, when met, two are never seen together, but are generally within hearing of each other's rattle, or not far distant, following on the trail! Most generally, if we irritate the one, and make it sound its rattle, we hear in the distance the sound of the other's rattle, in answer; and if we kill the one we meet, and leave its carcass over night, we find the other by its side, or near it, the next morning.

And a Rattlesnake Trap! (who has ever heard of it?) first invented, no doubt, by Buel Rowley, one of

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Excerpt

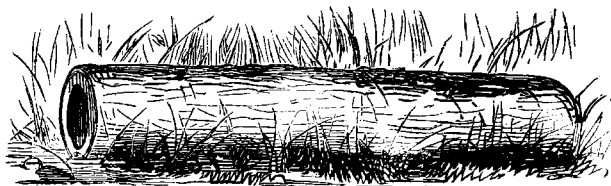
[More information](#)

6

*Rattlesnake Trap.*

my father's labouring men; the same who ploughed up the "kettle of gold," and the rusty tomahawk, which it will be recollected left its indelible mark on my left cheek-bone.

Well, the "Rattlesnake Trap," here it is—



A simple log of wood, some three or four feet in length, and the size of a man's leg, or larger, with a hollow through it, large enough for the reptile to crawl through, but not sufficiently spacious for it to turn about; its forward extremity being partially closed, to prevent the snake from passing out. Rowley, from a practical knowledge he had gained of the close manner in which this creature follows the trail of its mate, conceived the plan of conducting it into a hollow tube from which it could not escape, being unable to retreat in its straitened and confined position, and checked by the reversed position of its scales.

This ingenious machine was lodged in my father's woodhouse,<sup>1</sup> and when a rattlesnake was killed in

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<sup>1</sup> An open shed, in which wood for the winter is stored.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)



Page 7.

1.

THE RATTLESNAKE IN ROWLEY'S TRAP.



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05291-7 - Last Rambles Amongst the Indians of the Rocky Mountains  
and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Buel Rowley.*

7

any of his fields, the trap was transported to a position near the spot, when the carcass of the snake was gently dragged towards it through the grass, by a thong, and pulled through the hollow of the log. After which a tenpenny nail or two driven into the forward end was sufficient to prevent the living snake from passing through, and at the same time to allow the light to enter.

The carcass of the dead snake was then lifted from the ground and carried away; and on Rowley's shoulder the next morning the rattlesnake trap was almost invariably transported back to the woodhouse; the tail of the snake, with its rattles, hanging out, a harmless and amusing toy for the women and children to play with, for by touching them, or striking the log, they were instantly set in motion, and the expression and crescendo of their music controlled by the harmless rage that was boiling within.

Curiosity satisfied (and that curious propensity of the most of mankind "to finger danger when it is iron bound"), Rowley's pincers withdrew the nails in front of the cage, which was then passed between the bars of the fence, enclosing a field containing a number of hogs, and clipping the tail with its rattles as a trophy, the imprisoned reptile lost no time in launching itself out of its prison, and into the jaws of "the old sow," which stood ready, and whose forefeet were instantly upon it and held it, whilst she

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

*Rattlesnake Trap.*

exhibited her swinish taste, by tearing it to pieces and devouring every morsel of it!

My father had learned (I don't know how) that the bite of a rattlesnake was not poisonous to the flesh of swine, and that those reptiles were invariably devoured by hogs that happened to come upon them; both of which singular facts I often saw confirmed in my father's fields of swine, when he had ordered these living serpents to be thrown amongst them.

Rowley's trap, for which he had no patent, was soon adopted in the other parts of the valley, and his enviable standing, as a public benefactor, was soon evident from the number of tails with rattles which were sent to him, and which he had demanded as a sort of Royalty for his invention.

And yet, a *greater trap* than this awaited those poisonous beasts, which were at that time almost threatening the existence of the otherwise happy little colony of the valley of the Ocquago — a trap which, by way of comparison, might be called a *wholesale trap*—a *cataclysm*—a *catastrophe*, as will be seen, which rescued the valley from its dangers, and gained for its inventor, honours, though not immortal, yet of an enviable character, while they lasted. (We shall see anon).

“Darrow” (recollect the empire which his Nimrodic celebrity had gained over my youthful mind —my consummate admiration of his deer-stalking

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and the Andes

George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)*John Darrow.*

9

and panther-hunting qualities), Darrow, not a long time after the scene at the “Old Sawmill Lick,” and, I think, early in the spring of 1810, said to me one day whilst he and I were working in the field together, “George, I intend to play the devil with the rattlesnakes this spring—they’ve had it all in their own way long enough. You recollect poor Mary Judkins, George?”

“Yes, Mr. Darrow, I was close by her when she was bit last summer. I heard her scream when she was struck. There was a whole wagon-load of us, boys and girls, out on Bowman’s ridge picking whortleberries; she was reaching her hand forward when the snake jumped from a rock before her, and about even with her face, and bit her right in the vein of her neck! She gave one scream, and fell backwards, close by me, and never got up. All the party gathered around her, and put her into the wagon, quite dead, and carried her home: and her neck and her arms were just the colour of the rattlesnake itself, which we found under the rocks and killed.”

“And that good soul, Heth, George, bitten on the floor of his own house!”

“Yes; that I didn’t see, Mr. Darrow, but I heard of it.”

“It’s getting too bad, George. These devils are increasing at such a rate that it’s almost as much as a man’s life is worth to work in the fields amongst

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George Catlin

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

*John Darrow.*

them. Now, George, I know where all these beasts come from ; I know the very house they all live in ; and you and I will make a smash among 'em, George, before many days come around."

Darrow then related to me what at that time was new to me, and which has been mentioned in a former page, that these reptiles all leave the valley at the first appearance of frosty nights in the fall of the year, and congregate in one immense cavern, where they spend the winter in a torpid state, and start off in pairs for the valleys as soon as the weather is warm enough in the spring of the year ; and that for a week or two before the nights are warm enough for their travels, during the warmth of the sun in the middle of the spring days, they come out of their den, not only in hundreds, but by thousands, and lie for several hours in front of it basking in the sun, and return into their cave before the coldness of the evening approaches.

"Why, that's the 'Rattlesnakes' Den,' that I have heard my father talk about."

"Yes," said Darrow, "the 'Rattlesnakes' Den ;' it's in the top of Steele's Mountain, back of Hilbourns, under the high ledge looking off into Hemlock Hollow. About ten years ago these devils got to be so bad, that Joe Snidigar, Atwill, and myself, and several others, went out in a spring day and thrashed about three hundred of them to death whilst they lay sunning themselves in