CAPTURING THE CROCODILE.*

THE ACCOUNT OF A HUNTER.

BY JULIAN A. DIMOCK.

MANY Americans use the names crocodile and alligator indiscriminately, for they do not know that representatives of both these genera are found in their country. Indeed, until within a comparatively few years the presence of the crocodile was not suspected even by scientists. In 1875 a couple of specimens were obtained, and thereafter a scattered few found their way to the museums; but it was not until 1889 that any number were obtained, or that there was any general knowledge of their existence. In that year Dr. Viele of the Chicago Museum obtained about a dozen skins and skeletons for his own and other museums, and my father and I secured half as many for college and other collections. It was an old guide of ours who brought the news of the discovery of "alligators that were not alligators," of which rumors had been locally current. With him at the helm we made sail for the Madeira Hammock. This, the habitat of the Florida crocodile, is a narrow strip of land at the extreme southeast end of the peninsula lying between the southern boundary of the Everglades and the Bay of Florida. But for the exploring fever that runs in the veins of mankind, these creatures would have remained undiscovered; for the Everglades sheltered their home on the north, while the bay, on the south, offered scarcely more inducement to the wayfarer. Numerous mud-flats stretch tentacle-like arms across the path, and the intersecting channels are narrow, tortuous and hard to find. The mud is sticky and bottomless. We made our way through this maze, for which the guide merited the commendation from the wreckers of the Keys which he afterward received. We stirred the mud of the bottom for many miles, and barely missed staying ashore on the flats.

"There's a crocodile now!" sung out the guide. Two hundred yards away we saw the two knob-like points of the creature's eyes and nose as they appeared upon the surface of the water. Contrary to his cousin the alligator, the crocodile seems to prefer salt water, and this one was more than a mile from shore. The schooner was thrown up in the wind, the wheel given over to the cook, the skiff tumbled overboard, oars, harpoons and lines thrown in, while the guides and my father jumped for the little boat. In thirty seconds, under the impulse of oars and poles, she was dancing through the water, and big waves were rolling from the bows. But the quarry had taken fright, and when they reached the spot where he had disappeared only some muddied water remained as evidence that our eyes had not deceived us. That night we anchored by Deer Key, and on the morrow the real hunt began. In hunting alligators the rifle is the weapon used, for the reptile is curious to a degree that leads to his destruction, and is not overburdened with shyness. Having once seen his head, you can wait with confidence that it will appear again at no distant time, while at night no alligator can resist the fascination of the jack-lantern. With the crocodile this is all changed—he is not sufficiently curious to show himself as long as he has reason to think that an enemy is at hand, and from the light of a bull's-eye he runs with fright. Many hunters think that the eye of the crocodile does not reflect the rays of light as does that of the alligator, but this is an error. The eye does

of the bay, sometimes you cross his trail of roiled water and follow it to its end. Occasionally you become aware of his proximity by the odor of musk, and diligently seek to pierce the curtain of muddy water that hides him. You may hear him crash into the water from his "slide," or sun-bath, on your approach, or you may find him at home in his cave. These, dug

A DENTAL DISPLAY.

by the creatures themselves, have entrances below the water, but are believed to always rise above its level at the far end, so that the occupants may breathe without leaving shelter. The length of the caves varies from a few feet to more than a score. When your quarry is found, you will see but a quickly-moving shadow below you, and this you must hit with your iron, avoiding the armor-plated back and the impenetrable skull. Your nerves must be steady, your eyesight keen and trained to see beneath the water, and your aim accurate. If the first shot is not successful, the chance of a second is hardly worth considering. It may happen that you will find the reptile in a narrow creek, and with two skiffs one can be kept at either end, and thus make it difficult for him to escape. Our largest specimen was just over fourteen feet long, and was found in such a creek; which was fortunate for us, as before securing him we hit him seventeen times with harpoons. His disposition was considerably ruffled by this treatment, and at last he came to the surface with a rush, prepared to take a hand in the game of pursuit himself. He began on my skiff. With wide-open jaws he attempted to swallow the whole thing. A broken tooth saved the boat, and possibly the occupants. Finding him so difficult to handle, we abandoned our idea of saving him for an aquarium, deciding that he would better befit a museum. Since 1889 I have made several excursions to the crocodile country, capturing the reptiles for

The pursuit, for this purpose, should be modified, for it is of importance that the creature be not injured. The harpoon must be a tiny one and stopped with rope to prevent its penetrating further than just beyond the barb, and it must be carefully placed to avoid the chance of reaching a vital organ. A net may be substituted, or, if the crocodile can be found in his cave, he may be sometimes caught with a noose. Tie his jaws together and he becomes as harmless as a kitten, and may be taken aboard the skiff and carried to any convenient prairie land. Here untie him and follow him around with your camera. It will be quite as exciting as killing him. Sometimes he will jump at you at less than his length away. If you can catch his open jaws on your sensitive plate before you too jump, you will have a memento worth more than twenty stuffed skins and as convincing as the sworn statements of a score of hunters. When he is quiet approach him within a yard and obtain pictures of his head and teeth. When you have exhausted your ingenuity in devising different poses and have used up your plates, turn him loose and let him go, remembering that "there are others."

Although belonging to the same family, the alligator and the crocodile seem to be unneighborly. For, until the practical extinction of the latter, no alligators were found in the Madeira country. Within the last two years, a number of small ones have been seen there, which suggests that it is race antipathy rather than different requirements which has kept these cousins apart. The prominent difference between the two is in the shape of the head. Despite popular belief, the jaw action is the same, and the crocodile is less savage than his relative, though more active and far more shy. Once captured he becomes docile, and so remains as long as his jaws are kept tied, and may be safely handled. The alligator, on the contrary, is safe only after decomposition has set in, for he has a habit of returning to life after he has been "killed," which, with the energetic use of his tail, is disconcerting to the man within his reach. Apart from prejudice, the flesh of both reptiles is eatable, that of the crocodile being more delicate. The eggs are not impossible as food and resemble those of the turtle in taste. The skin of the crocodile will not be accepted by the buyers of hides, as they say that it will not tan satisfactorily. Thus, save as a curiosity, the creature has no commercial value; but so persistently has he been pursued that it is doubtful whether there are to-day enough out of captivity to perpetuate the genus.

According to the Railroad Gazette, an electrician has for several months been working, under the direction of the Superintendent of Motive Power and Machinery of the Union Pacific Railroad, on a system of wireless or remote control of a truck running on the industrial tracks of the Union Pacific shops at Omaha, Neb. The truck, which carries a storage battery, is capable of hauling a load of 10 tons at a speed of six miles an hour. It carries 144 feet of copper wire made into a ring, and an antenna about 2 feet high, by which the electric waves are picked up and transmitted to controlling devices beneath the frame. The experiments

NINE-FOOT CROCODILE BEFORE CAPTURE.

SPRINGING AT HIS PHOTOGRAPHER.

SWIMMING—THE FEET ARE NOT USED.

reflect the gleam, but the creature is too shy to be held by its attraction.

Harpooning is the most practicable way to capture the crocodile. Pursuing this method you stand, harpoon in hand, in the bow of the skiff and are poled across shallow bays and through twisted rivers. Sometimes you see the head of a crocodile on the surface

aquariums and for purposes of photography, but have never killed one, save by accident. It is the tourist-sportsman who has doomed this race. If he could be induced to throw away his rifle and use the camera in its place he would contribute to the knowledge of natural history, to the entertainment of his friends, and preserve for the interest of posterity a harmless and curious creature.

have progressed so far that it is now possible, by the use of the device, to move forward, reverse, stop, or to move at any desired speed by means of the specially shaped antenna and traveling ground communication. Similar antennæ built like a cylinder and tuned to the car apparatus swing from a flag pole 65 feet above the central controlling station. From these are sent waves that control the movement of the truck.

* Country Life (London).