

Three Floridian Episodes*

by JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

The following are extracts from the Journal of J. J. Audubon, the great observer and painter of birds. It occurred to us that perhaps they were not as well known to the public as they are to those who make ornithology their avocation, and that it might be worth-while reprinting them for the benefit of our members. The reader will not find in these passages details on bird-life such as he might expect to discover in the field-book of a modern scientist, but he will be rewarded by the quaint atmosphere of these essays.

Audubon came to spend the winter in Florida after his return, in August 1831, from London, England, where he had spent a rather unhappy time trying to obtain subscriptions to his great work on the *Birds of America*.

Provided with "letters from the secretaries of the Navy and Treasury of the United States, to the commanding officers of vessels of war in the revenue service, directing them to afford . . . any assistance in their power," he set out for Florida, then only a territory of the United States.

After wending his way slowly down the peninsula, on foot, on horseback, and by boat, he reached the southern end by mid-winter and must have stayed until spring, collecting specimens and making sketches.

Upon his return north, Audubon wove all the most interesting incidents of his trip into a series of "Episodes," factual in content and amusing to the modern reader because of their extremely gradiloquent style.

Three of these "Episodes" pertaining more particularly to our part of the state, are reproduced here, for the enjoyment of the reader, by permission of G. P. Putnam's Sons, Publishers.

Sandy Island

I LEFT YOU ABRUPTLY, perhaps uncivilly, reader, at the dawn of day on Sandy Island, which lies just six miles from the extreme point of South Florida. I did so because I was amazed at the appearance of things around me, which, in fact, looked so different from what they seemed at night, that it took some minutes' reflection to account for the change.

When we laid ourselves down on the sand to sleep, the waters almost bathed our feet; when we opened our eyes in the morning, they were at an immense distance. Our boat lay on her side, looking not unlike a

**The Life of J. J. Audubon, The Naturalist*. Edited by His Widow. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1879. Chapters XIX, XX, XXI.

whale reposing on a mud bank; the birds in myriads were probing their pasture-ground. There great flocks of ibises fed apart from equally large collections of "godwits," and thousands of herons gracefully paced along, ever and anon thrusting their javelin bills into the body of some unfortunate fish confined in a small pool of water. Of fish-crows I could not estimate the number, but from the havoc they made among the crabs, I conjecture that these animals must have been scarce by the time of the next ebb. Frigate pelicans chased the jager, which himself had just robbed a poor gull of its prize; and all the gallinules ran with spread wings from the mud-banks to the thickets of the island, so timorous had they become when they perceived us. Surrounded as we were by so many objects that allured us, not one could we yet attain, so dangerous would it have been to venture on the mud; and our pilot having assured us that nothing could be lost by waiting, spoke of our eating, and on this hint told that he would take us to a part of the island where "our breakfast would be abundant, although uncooked." Off we went, some of the sailors carrying baskets, others large tin pans and wooden vessels such as they use for eating their meals in. Entering a thicket of about an acre in extent, we found on every bush several nests of the ibis, each containing three large and beautiful eggs, and all hands fell to gathering. The birds gave way to us, and ere long we had a heap of eggs, that promised delicious food. Nor did we stand long in expectation; for, kindling a fire, we soon prepared, in one way or other, enough to satisfy the cravings of our hungry maws. Breakfast ended, the pilot, looking at the gorgeous sunrise, said, "Gentlemen, prepare yourselves for fun; the tide is a-coming." Over these mud-flats a foot or two of water is quite sufficient to drive all the birds ashore, even the tallest heron or flamingo; and the tide seems to flow at once over the whole expanse. Each of us, provided with a gun, posted himself behind a bush, and no sooner had the water forced the winged creatures to approach the shore, than the work of destruction commenced. When it at length ceased, the collected mass of birds of different kinds looked not unlike a small haycock. Who could not with a little industry have helped himself to a few of their skins? Why, reader, surely no one is as fond of these things as I am. Everyone assisted in this, and even the sailors themselves tried their hand at the work. Our pilot, good man, told us he was no hand at such occupations, and would go after something else. So taking "Long Tom" and his fishing-tackle, he marched off quietly along the shores. About an hour afterwards we saw him returning, when he looked quite ex-

hausted; and on our inquiring the cause, said, "There is a dew-fish (sic) yonder, and a few balacoudas (sic), but I am not able to bring them, or even to haul them here; please send the sailors after them." The fishes were accordingly brought, and as I had never seen a "dew-fish," I examined it closely, and took an outline of its form, which some day hence you may perhaps see. It exceeded one hundred pounds in weight, and afforded excellent eating. The balacouda is also a good fish, but at times a dangerous one, for, according to the pilot, on more than one occasion "some of these gentry" had followed him, when waist-deep in the water in pursuit of a more valuable prize, until in self-defence he had to spear them, fearing that the "gentlemen" might at one dart cut off his legs, or some other nice bit with which he was unwilling to part. Having filled our cask from a fine well, long since dug in the sand of Cape Sable, either by Seminole Indians or pirates, no matter which, we left Sandy Isle about full tide, and proceeded homewards, giving a call here and there at different keys, with the view of procuring rare birds, and also their nests and eggs. We had twenty miles to go "as the birds fly," but the tortuosity of the channels rendered our course fully a third longer.

The sun was descending fast, when a black cloud suddenly obscured the majestic orb. Our sails swelled by a breeze that was scarcely felt by us, and the pilot requesting us to sit on the weather gunwale, told us that we were "going to get it." One sail was hauled in and secured, and the other was reefed, although the wind had not increased. A low murmuring noise was heard, and across the cloud that now rolled along in tumultuous masses shot vivid flashes of lightning. Our experienced guide steered directly across a flat towards the nearest land. The sailors passed their quids from one cheek to the other, and our pilot having covered himself with his oil jacket, we followed his example. "Blow, sweet breeze," cried he at the tiller, "and we'll reach land before the blast overtakes us; for, gentlemen, it is a furious cloud yon." A furious cloud indeed was the one which now, like an eagle on outstretched wings, approached so swiftly, that one might have deemed it in haste to destroy us. We were not more than a cable's length from the shore, when with imperative voice the pilot calmly said to us, "Sit quite still, gentlemen, for I should not like to lose you overboard just now; the boat can't upset, my word for that, if you will but sit still; here we have it!" Reader, persons who have never witnessed a hurricane, such as not unfrequently desolates the sultry climates of the south, can scarcely form an idea of their terrific grandeur. One would think that, not content

with laying waste all on land, it must needs sweep the waters of the shallows quite dry to quench its thirst. No respite for a moment does it afford to the objects within the reach of its furious current. Like the scythe of the destroying angel, it cuts everything by the roots, as it were, with the careless ease of the experienced mower. Each of its revolving sweeps collects a heap that might be likened to the full sheaf which the husbandman flings by his side. On it goes, with a wildness and fury that are indescribable; and when at last its frightful blasts have ceased, nature, weeping and disconsolate, is left bereaved of her beautiful offspring. In instances, even a full century is required before, with all her powerful energies, she can repair her loss. The planter has not only lost his mansion, his crops and his flocks, but he has to clear his land anew, covered and entangled as they are with the trunks and branches of the trees, that are everywhere strewn. The bark overtaken by the storm is cast on the lee-shore, and if any are left to witness the fatal results they are the "wreckers" alone, who, with inward delight, gaze upon the melancholy spectacle.

Our light bark shivered like a leaf the instant the blast reached her sides. We thought she had gone over; but the next instant she was on the shore, and now, in contemplation of the sublime and awful storm, I gazed around me.

The waters drifted like snow, the tough mangroves hid their tops amid their roots, and the loud roaring of the waves driven among them blended with the howl of the tempest. It was not rain that fell; the masses of water flew in a horizontal direction, and where a part of my body was exposed, I felt as if a smart blow had been given me on it.

But enough: in half an hour it was over. The pure blue sky once more embellished the heavens, and although it was now quite night, we considered our situation a good one. The crew and some of the party spent the night on board; the pilot, myself, and one of my assistants took to the heart of the mangroves, and having found high land, we made a fire as well as we could, spread a tarpaulin, and fixing our insect-bars over us, soon forgot in sleep the horrors that had surrounded us.

Next day the *Marion* proceeded on her cruise, and in a few more days, having anchored in another safe harbor, we visited other keys, of which I will, with your leave, give you a short account.

The deputy collector of Indian Isle gave me the use of his pilot for a few weeks, and I was the more gratified by this, that besides knowing him to be a good man and a perfect sailor, I was now convinced that he

possessed a great knowledge of the habits of birds, and could without loss of time lead me to their haunts. We were a hundred miles or so farther to the south. Gay May, like a playful babe, gambolled on the bosom of his mother nature, and everything was replete with life and joy.

The pilot had spoken to me of some birds which I was very desirous of obtaining. One morning, therefore, we went in two boats to some distant isle, where they were said to breed. Our difficulties in reaching that key might to some seem more imaginary than real, were I faithfully to describe them. Suffice it for me to tell you that, after hauling our boats and pushing them with our hands for upward of nine miles over the flats, we at last reached the deep channel that usually surrounds each of the mangrove isles. We were much exhausted by the labor and excessive heat, but we were now floating on deep water, and by resting under the shade of some mangroves, we were soon refreshed by the breeze that gently blew from the gulf.

The heron which I have named *Ardea occidentalis* was seen moving majestically in great numbers, the tide rose and drove them away, and as they came towards us, to alight and rest for a while on the tallest trees, we shot as many as I wished. I also took under my charge several of their young alive. At another time we visited the Mule Keys; there the prospect was in many respects dismal enough. As I followed their shores, I saw bales of cotton floating in all the coves, while spars of every description lay on the beach, and far off on the reefs I could see the last remains of a lost ship, her dismantled hulk. Several schooners were around her; they were "wreckers." I turned me from the sight with a heavy heart. Indeed, as I slowly proceeded, I dreaded to meet the floating or cast-ashore bodies of some of the unfortunate crew. Our visit to the Mule Keys was in no way profitable, for besides meeting with but a few birds, in two or three instances I was, while swimming in the deep channel of a mangrove isle, much nearer a large shark than I wish ever to be again.

The Wreckers

LONG BEFORE I reached the lovely islets that border the south-eastern shores of the Floridas, the accounts I had heard of "The Wreckers" had deeply prejudiced me against them. Often had I been informed of the cruel and cowardly methods which it was alleged they employ to allure vessels of all nations to the dreaded reefs, that they might plunder their

cargoes, and rob their crews and passengers of their effects. I therefore could have little desire to meet with such men under any circumstances, much less to become liable to receive their aid; and with the name of "wrecker" there were associated in my mind ideas of piratical depredation, barbarous usage, and even murder. One fair afternoon, while I was standing on the polished deck of the United States revenue cutter, the *Marion*, a sail hove in sight, bearing in an opposite course, close-hauled to the wind. The gentle sway of her masts, as she rocked to and fro in the breeze, brought to my mind the wavings of the reeds on the fertile banks of the Mississippi. By and by the vessel, altering her course, approached us. The *Marion*, like a seabird with extended wings, swept through the waters, gently inclining to either side, while the unknown vessel leaped as it were from wave to wave, like the dolphin in eager pursuit of his prey. In a short time we were gliding side by side, and the commander of the strange schooner saluted our captain, who promptly returned the compliment. What a beautiful vessel, we all thought, how trim, how clean rigged, and how well manned. She swims like a duck, and now, with a broad sheer, off she makes for the reefs, a few miles under our lee. There in that narrow passage, well known to her commander, she rolls, tumbles, and dances like a giddy thing, her copper sheathing now gleaming, and again disappearing under the waves. But the passage is made, and now, hauling on the wind, she resumes her former course, and gradually recedes from the view. Reader, it was a Florida wrecker. When at the Tortugas, I paid a visit to several vessels of this kind, in company with my friend Robert Day, Esq. We had observed the regularity and quickness of the men then employed at their arduous tasks, and as we approached the largest schooner, I admired her form, so well adapted to her occupation, her great breadth of beam, her light draught, the correctness of her water-line, the neatness of her painted sides, the smoothness of her well-greased masts, and the beauty of her rigging. We were welcomed on board with all the frankness of our native tars. Silence and order prevailed on her decks. The commander and the second officer let us into a spacious cabin, well lighted, and furnished with every convenience for fifteen or more passengers. The former brought me his collection of marine shells, and whenever I pointed to one that I had not seen before, offered it with so much kindness, that I found it necessary to be careful in expressing my admiration of any particular shell. He had also many eggs of rare birds, which were all handed over to me, with an assurance that before the month should

expire a new set could easily be procured; for, said he, "We have much idle time on the reefs at this season." Dinner was served, and we partook of their fare, which consisted of fish, fowl and other materials. These rovers were both from down east, were stout active men, cleanly and smart in their attire. In a short time we were all extremely social and merry. They thought my visit to the Tortugas in quest of birds was rather a curious fancy, but notwithstanding, they expressed their pleasure while looking at some of my drawings, and offered their services in procuring specimens. Expeditions far and near were proposed, and on settling that one of them was to take place on the morrow, we parted friends. Early next morning several of these kind men accompanied me to a small key called Booby Island, about ten miles distant from the lighthouse. Their boats were well manned, and rowed with long and steady strokes, such as whalers and men-of-war's men are wont to draw. The captain sang, and at times, by way of frolic, ran a race with our own beautiful bark. The Booby Isle was soon reached, and our sport there was equal to any we had elsewhere. They were capital shots, had excellent guns, and knew more about boobies and noddies than nine tenths of the best naturalists in the world.

But what will you say when I tell you that the "Florida wreckers" are excellent at a deer hunt, and that at certain seasons, "when business is slack," they are wont to land on some extensive key, and in a few hours procure a supply of delicious venison. Some days after the same party took me on an expedition in quest of sea-shells. There we were all in the water at times to the waist, and now and then much deeper. Now they would dip like ducks, and on emerging would hold up a beautiful shell. This occupation they seemed to enjoy above all others. The duties of the *Marion* having been performed, intimation of our intended departure reached the wreckers. An invitation was sent me to go and see them on board their vessel, which I accepted. Their object on this occasion was to present me with some superb corals, shells, live turtles of the hawk-bill species, and a great quantity of eggs. Not a picayune would they receive in return, but putting some letters in my hands, requested me to be so good as to put them in the mail at Charleston, adding that they were for their wives down east. So anxious did they appear to be to do all they could for me, that they proposed to sail before the *Marion*, and meet her under weigh, to give me some birds that were rare on the coast, and of which they knew the haunts. Circumstances connected with the service prevented this, however, and with sincere regret, and a good

portion of friendship, I bade these excellent fellows adieu. How different, thought I, is often the knowledge of things acquired from personal observation, from that obtained by report. I had never before seen Florida wreckers, nor has it since been my fortune to fall in with any; but my good friend, Dr. Benjamin Strobel, having furnished me with a graphic account of a few days he spent with them, I shall present you with it in his own words:

“On the 12th day of September, while lying in harbour at Indian Key, we were joined by five wrecking vessels. Their licenses having expired, it was necessary to go to Key West to renew them. We determined to accompany them the next morning, and here it will not be amiss for me to say a few words respecting these far famed wreckers, their captains and crews. From all that I had heard, I expected to see a parcel of dirty, pirate-looking vessels, officered and manned by a set of black-whiskered fellows, who carried murder in their very looks. I was agreeably surprised on discovering that the vessels were fine large sloops and schooners, regular clippers, kept in first-rate order. The captains generally were jovial, good-humored sons of Neptune, who manifested a disposition to be polite and hospitable, and to afford every facility to persons passing up and down the reefs. The crews were hearty, well dressed, and honest-looking men. On the 18th, at the appointed hour, we all set sail together, that is, the five wreckers and the schooner *Jane*. As our vessel was not noted for fast sailing, we accepted an invitation to go on board of a wrecker. The fleet got under weigh about eight o'clock in the morning, the wind light but fair, the water smooth, and the day fine. I can scarcely find words to express the pleasure and gratification which I this day experienced. The sea was of a beautiful, soft, pea-green color, smooth as a sheet of glass, and as transparent, its surface agitated only by our vessels as they parted its bosom, or by the pelican in pursuit of his prey, which, rising for a considerable distance in the air, would suddenly plunge down with distended mandibles, and secure his food. The vessels of our little fleet, with every sail set that could catch a breeze, and the white foam curling around the prows glided silently along, like islands of flitting shadows on an immovable sea of light. Several fathoms below the surface of the water, and under us, we saw great quantities of fish diving and sporting amongst the sea-grass, sponges, sea-feathers, and corals, with which the bottom was covered. On our right hand the Florida Keys, as we made them in the distance, looked like specks upon the water, but as we neared them, rose to view as if by enchantment, clad in the

richest livery of spring, each variety of color and hue rendered soft and delicate by a clear sky and brilliant sun overhead. All was like a fairy scene; my heart leaped up in delighted admiration, and I could not but exclaim, in the language of Scott,

Those seas behold,
Round thrice an hundred islands rolled.

“The trade-winds played around us with balmy and refreshing sweetness; and to give life and animation to the scene, we had a contest for the mastery between all the vessels of the fleet, while a deep interest was excited in this or that vessel, as she shot ahead or fell astern. About three o’clock of the afternoon we arrived off the Bay of Honda. The wind being light, and no prospect of reaching Key West that night, it was agreed we should make a harbor here. We entered a beautiful basin, and came to anchor about four o’clock. Boats were launched, and several hunting parties formed. We landed, and were soon on the scent, some going in search of shells, others of birds. An Indian who had been picked up somewhere along the coast by some wrecker, and who was employed as a hunter, was sent on shore in search of venison. Previous to his leaving the vessel a rifle was loaded with a single ball, and put into his hands. After an absence of several hours he returned with two deer, which he had killed at a single shot. He watched until they were both in range of his gun, side by side, when he fired and brought them down. All hands having returned, and the fruits of our excursion being collected, we had wherewithal to make an abundant supper. Most of the game was sent on board of the largest vessel, where we proposed supping. Our vessels were all lying within hail of each other, and as soon as the moon arose, boats were seen passing from one to the other, and all were busily and happily engaged in exchanging civilities. One would never have supposed that these men were professional rivals, so apparent was the good feeling that prevailed amongst them. About nine o’clock we started for supper. A number of persons had already collected, and as soon as we arrived on board the vessel, a German sailor, who played remarkably well on the violin, was summoned to the quarter-deck, when all hands with a good will cheerily danced to lively airs until supper was ready. The table was laid in the cabin, and groaned under its load of venison, wild ducks, pigeons, curlews and fish. Toasting and singing succeeded the supper, and among other curious matters introduced, the following song was sung by the German fiddler, who accompanied his voice with his

instrument. He was said to be the author of the song. I say nothing of the poetry, but merely give it as it came on my ear. It is certainly very characteristic.

The Wreckers' Song

Come all ye good people one and all,
 Come listen to my song;
 A few remarks I have to make,
 It won't be very long.
 T'is of our vessel, stout and good,
 As ever yet was built of wood;
 Among the reef where the breakers roar,
 The wreckers on the Florida shore.

Key Tavernier's our rendezvous,
 At anchor there we lie;
 And see the vessels in the Gulf
 Carelessly passing by.
 When night comes on we dance and sing,
 Whilst the current some vessel is floating in;
 When daylight comes, a ship's on shore,
 Among the rocks where the breakers roar.

When daylight dawns we are under weigh,
 And every sail is set;
 And if the wind it should prove light,
 Why then our sails we wet.
 To gain her first each eager strives,
 To save the cargo and the people's lives;
 Amongst the rocks where the breakers roar,
 The wreckers on the Florida shore.

When we get 'longside, we find she's bilged,
 We know well what to do;
 Save the cargo that we can,
 The sails and rigging too.
 Then down to Key West we soon will go
 When quickly our salvage we shall know;
 When every thing it is fairly sold,
 Our money down to us it is told.

Then one week's cruise we'll have on shore,
 Before we do sail again;
 And drink success to the sailor lads
 That are plowing of the main.
 And when you are passing by this way,
 On Florida Reef should you chance to stray,
 Why, we will come to you on the shore,
 Amongst the rocks where the breakers roar.

“Great emphasis was laid upon particular words by the singer, who had a broad German accent. Between the verses he played a symphony (sic), remarking, ‘Gentlemen, I make dat myself.’ The chorus was trolled by twenty or thirty voices, which in the stillness of the night produced no unpleasant effect.”

The Turtlers of Florida

THE TORTUGAS are a group of islands lying about eighty miles from Key West, and the last of those that seem to defend the peninsula of the Floridas. They consist of five or six extremely low uninhabitable banks, formed of shelly sand, and are resorted to principally by that class of men called wreckers and turtlers. Between these islands are deep channels, which, although extremely intricate, are well known to those adventurers, as well as to the commanders of the revenue cutters whose duties call them to that dangerous coast. The great coral reef or wall lies about eight miles from these inhospitable isles, in the direction of the Gulf, and on it many an ignorant or careless navigator has suffered shipwreck. The whole ground around them is densely covered with corals, sea-fans, and other productions of the deep, amid which crawl innumerable testaceous animals; while shoals of curious and beautiful fishes fill the limpid waters above them. Turtles of different species resort to these banks, to deposit their eggs in the burning sand, and clouds of sea-fowl arrive every spring for the same purpose. These are followed by persons called “egggers,” who, when their cargoes are completed, sail to distant markets to exchange their ill-gotten ware for a portion of that gold on the acquisition of which all men seem bent.

The *Marion* having occasion to visit the Tortugas, I gladly embraced the opportunity of seeing these celebrated islets. A few hours before sunset the joyful cry of ‘land’ announced our approach to them, but as the breeze was fresh, and the pilot was well acquainted with all the

windings of the channels, we held on, and dropped anchor before twilight. If you have never seen the sun setting in those latitudes, I would recommend you to make a voyage for that purpose, for I much doubt if, in any other portion of the world, the departure of the orb of day is accompanied with such gorgeous appearances. Look at the great red disc, increased to triple its ordinary dimensions. Now it has partially sunk beneath the distant line of waters, and with its still remaining half irradiates the whole heavens with a flood of light, purpling the far-off clouds that hover over the western horizon. A blaze of refulgent glory streams through the portals of the west, and the masses of vapor assume the semblance of mountains of molten gold. But the sun has now disappeared, and from the east slowly advances the gray curtain which night draws over the world. The night-hawk is flapping his noiseless wings in the gentle sea-breeze; the terns, safely landed, have settled on their nests; the frigate pelicans are seen wending their way to distant mangroves; and the brown gannet, in search of a resting place, has perched on the yard of the vessel. Slowly advancing landward, their heads alone above the water, are observed the heavily-laden turtles, anxious to deposit their eggs in the well-known sands. On the surface of the gently rippling stream I dimly see their broad forms as they toil along, while at intervals may be heard their hurried breathings, indicative of suspicion and fear. The moon with her silvery light now illumines the scene, and the turtle having landed, slowly and laboriously drags her heavy body over the sand, her flippers being better adapted for motion in water than on the shore. Up the slope however she works her way, and see how industriously she removes the sand beneath her, casting it out on either side. Layer after layer she deposits her eggs, arranging them in the most careful manner, and with her hind paddles brings the sand over them. The business is accomplished, the spot is covered over, and with a joyful heart the turtle swiftly retires toward the shore and launches into the deep.

But the Tortugas are not the only breeding places of the turtle: these animals, on the contrary, frequent many other keys as well as various parts of the coast of the mainland. There are four different species, which are known by the name of the green turtle, the hawk-billed turtle, the logger-head turtle, and the trunk turtle. The first is considered the best as an article of food, in which capacity it is well known to most epicures. It approaches the shore, and enters the bays, inlets, and rivers, early in the month of April, after having spent the winters in the deep

waters. It deposits its eggs in convenient places, at two different times, in May, and once again in June. The first deposit is the largest, and the last the least, the total quantity being at an average about two hundred and forty. The hawk-billed turtle, whose shell is so valuable as an article of commerce, being used for various purposes in the arts, is the next in respect to the quality of its flesh. It resorts to the outer keys only, where it deposits its eggs in two sets, first in July and again in August, although it "*crawls*" the beaches much earlier in the season, as if to look for a safe place. The average number of its eggs is about three hundred. The logger-head visits the Tortugas in April, and lays from that period until late in June three sets of eggs, each set averaging one hundred and seventy. The trunk turtle, which is sometimes of an enormous size, and which has a pouch like a pelican, reaches the shore latest. The shell and fish are so soft that one may push the finger into them almost as into a lump of butter. This species is therefore considered as the least valuable, and indeed is seldom eaten, unless by the Indians, who, ever alert when the turtle season commences, first carry off the eggs which it lays in the season, and afterwards catch the turtles themselves. The average number of eggs which it lays at two sets may be three hundred and fifty.

The logger-head and the trunk turtles are the least cautious in choosing the places in which to deposit their eggs, whereas the two other species select the wildest and most secluded spots. The green turtle resorts either to the shores of the Main, between Cape Sable and Cape Florida, or enters Indian, Halifax, and other large rivers or inlets, from which it makes its retreat as speedily as possible, and betakes itself to the open sea. Great numbers, however, are killed by the turtlers and Indians, as well as by various species of carnivorous animals, as cougars, lynxes, bears, and wolves. The hawk-billed, which is still more wary, and is always the most difficult to surprise, keeps to the sea-islands. All the species employ nearly the same method in depositing their eggs in the sand, and as I have several times observed them in the act I am enabled to present you with a circumstantial account of them.

On first nearing the shores, and mostly on fine calm moonlight nights, the turtle raises her head above the water, being still distant thirty or forty yards from the beach, looks around her, and attentively examines the objects on the shore. Should she observe nothing likely on the shore to disturb her intended operations, she emits a loud hissing sound, by which such of her enemies as are unaccustomed to it are startled, and so are apt to remove to another place, although unseen by her. Should she

hear any noise, or perceive indications of danger, she instantly sinks and goes off to a considerable distance; but should everything be quiet, she advances slowly towards the beach, crawls over it, her head raised to the full stretch of her neck, and when she has reached a place fitted for her purpose she gazes all round in silence. Finding 'all well,' she proceeds to form a hole in the sand, which she effects by removing it from under her body with her hind flippers, scooping it out with so much dexterity that the sides seldom if ever fall in. The sand is raised alterately with each flipper, as with a large ladle, until it has accumulated behind her, when supporting herself with her head and fore part on the ground fronting her body, she with a spring from each flipper, sends the sand around her, scattering it to the distance of several feet. In this manner the hole is dug to the depth of eighteen inches, or sometimes more than two feet. This labor I have seen performed in the short period of nine minutes. The eggs are then dropped one by one, and disposed in regular layers to the number of a hundred and fifty, or sometimes two hundred. The whole time spent in this part of the operation may be about twenty minutes. She now scrapes the loose sands back over the eggs, and so levels them and smooths the surface, that few persons on seeing the spot could imagine anything had been done to it. This accomplished to her mind, she retreats to the water with all possible despatch, leaving the hatching of the eggs to the heat of the sand. When a turtle, a logger-head for example, is in the act of dropping her egg, she will not move, although one should go up to her, or even seat himself on her back, for it seems that at this moment she finds it necessary to proceed at all events, and is unable to intermit her labor. The moment it is finished, however, off she starts, nor would it then be possible for one, unless he were as strong as Hercules, to turn her over and secure her. To upset a turtle on the shore one is obliged to fall on his knees, and placing his shoulder behind her forearm, gradually raise her up by pushing with great force, and then with a jerk throw her over. Sometimes it requires the united strength of several men to accomplish this, and if the turtle should be of very great size, as often happens on that coast, even hand spikes are employed. Some turtlers are so daring as to swim up to them while lying asleep on the surface of the water, and turn them over in their own element, when, however, a boat must be at hand to enable them to secure their prize. Few turtles can bite beyond the reach of their fore-legs, and few, once they are once turned over, can, without assistance, regain their natural position. But notwithstanding this, their flippers

are generally secured by ropes, so as to render their escape impossible. Persons who search for turtle-eggs are provided with a light stiff cane or gun-rod, with which they go along the shore, probing the sand near the tracks of the animal, which, however, cannot always be seen on account of the winds and heavy rains that often obliterate them. The nests are discovered not only by men but also by beasts of prey, and the eggs are collected or destroyed on the spot in great numbers.

On certain parts of the shore hundreds of turtles are known to deposit their eggs within the space of a mile. They form a new hole each time they lay, and the second is generally dug near the first, as if the animal was quite unconscious of what had befallen it. It will readily be understood that the numerous eggs seen in a turtle on cutting it up could not be all laid the same season. The whole number deposited by an individual in one summer may amount to four hundred; whereas if the animal be caught on or near her nest, as I have witnessed, the remaining eggs, all small, without shells, and as it were threaded like so many beads, exceed three thousand. In an instance where I found that number, the turtle weighed nearly four hundred pounds.

The young, soon after being hatched, and when yet scarcely larger than a dollar, scratch their way through their sandy covering, and immediately betake themselves to the water. The food of the green turtle consist chiefly of marine plants, more especially the grass-wrack (*Zostera marina*), which they cut near the roots, to procure the most tender and succulent parts. Their feeding-grounds, as I have elsewhere said, are easily discovered by floating masses of these plants on the flats or along the shores to which they resort. The hawk-billed species feeds on seaweeds, crabs, and various kinds of shell-fish and fishes; the logger-head mostly on the fish (sic) of conch-shells, of large size, which they are enabled, by means of their powerful beak, to crush to pieces with apparently as much ease as a man cracks a walnut. One which was brought on board the *Marion*, and placed near the fluke of one of our anchors, made a deep indentation in that hammered piece of iron that quite surprised me. The trunk-turtle feeds on mollusca, fish, crustacea, sea-urchins, and various marine plants. All the species move through the water with surprprising speed; but the green and hawk-billed in particular remind you by their celerity, and the ease of their motions, of the progress of a bird in the air. It is therefore no easy matter to strike one with a spear, and yet this is often done by an accomplished turtler. While at Key West and other islands on the coast, where I made the

observations here presented to you, I chanced to have need to purchase some turtles to feed my friends on board the *Lady of the Green Mantle*—not my friends, her gallant officers, or the brave tars who formed her crew, for all of them had already been satiated with turtle soup; but my friends the herons, of which I had a goodly number in coops, intending to carry them to John Bachman of Charleston, and other persons for whom I felt a sincere regard. So I went to a “crawl,” accompanied by Dr. Benjamin Strobel, to inquire about prices, when to my surprise I found the smaller the turtles, “above ten pounds’ weight,” the dearer they were, and that I could have purchased one of the logger-head kind, that weighed more than seven hundred pounds, for little more money than another of only thirty pounds.

While I gazed on the turtle I thought of the soups the contents of its shell would have furnished for a lord-mayor’s dinner, of the numerous eggs which its swollen body contained, and of the curious carriage which might be made of its shell, a car in which Venus herself might sail over the Caribbean Sea, provided her tender doves lent their aid in drawing the divinity, and provided no shark or hurricane came to upset it. The turtler assured me that, although the great monster was in fact better meat than any other of a less size, there was no disposing of it, unless indeed it had been in his power to have sent it to some very distant market. I would willingly have purchased it, but I knew that if killed the flesh could not keep much longer than a day, and on that account I bought eight or ten small ones, which “my friends” really relished exceedingly, and which served to support them for a long time. Turtles such as I have spoken of are caught in various ways on the coasts of the Floridas, or in estuaries or rivers. Some turtlers are in the habit of setting great nets across the entrance of streams, so as to answer the purpose either at the flow or at the ebb of the waters. These nets are formed of large meshes, into which the turtles partially get entangled. Others harpoon them in the usual manner; but in my estimation, no method is equal to that employed by Mr. Egan, the pilot of Indian Isle.

That extraordinary turtler had an iron instrument which he called a “peg,” and which at each end had a point, not unlike what nailmakers call a “brad,” it being four-cornered, but flattish, and of a shape somewhat resembling the beak of an ivory-billed woodpecker, together with a neck and shoulder. Between the two shoulders of this instrument a fine tough line, fifty or more fathoms in length, was fastened by one end, being passed through a hole in the center of the peg, and the line

itself was carefully coiled up and placed in a convenient part of the canoe. One extremity of this peg enters a sheath of iron that loosely attaches it to a long wooden spear, until a turtle has been pierced through the shell by the other extremity. He of the canoe paddles away as silently as possible whenever he espies a turtle basking on the water, until he gets within a distance of ten or twelve yards, when he throws the spear so as to hit the animal about the place which an entomologist would choose, were it a large insect, for pinning to a piece of cork. As soon as the turtle is struck, the wooden handle separates from the peg, in consequence of the looseness of its attachment. The smart of the wound urges on the animal as if distracted, and it appears that the longer the peg remains in its shell, the more firmly fastened it is, so great a pressure is exercised upon it by the shell of the turtle, which being suffered to run like a whale, soon becomes fatigued, and is secured by hauling the line with great care. In this manner, as the pilot informed me, eight hundred green turtles were caught by one man in twelve months.

Each turtle has its "crawl," which is a square wooden building or pen, formed of logs, which are so far separated as to allow the tide to pass freely through, and stand erect in the mud. The turtles are placed in this enclosure, fed and kept there till sold. There is, however, a circumstance relating to their habits which I cannot omit, although I have it not from my own ocular evidence, but from report. When I was in Florida several of the turtlers assured me, that any turtle taken from the depositing ground, and carried on the deck of a vessel several hundred miles, would, if then let loose, certainly be met with at the same spot, either immediately after, or in the following breeding season. Should this prove true, and it certainly may, how much will be enhanced the belief of the student in the uniformity and solidity of nature's arrangements, when he finds that the turtle, like a migratory bird, returns to the same locality, with perhaps a delight similar to that experienced by the traveller who, after visiting different countries, once more returns to the bosom of his cherished family.