the firſt great diſtinction appears in their size ; no other tribe of animals differing ſo widely in this particular. This tribe of animals, like that of fiſhes, ſeems to have no bounds put to their growth : their bones are in a great meaſure cartilaginous, and they are consequently capable of great extenſion : the older, therefore, a ſerpent becomes, the larger it grows ; and as they ſeem to live to a great age, they arrive at an enormous ſize.

Leguat aſſures us, that he ſaw one in Java that was 50 ſeet long. Carli mentions their growing to above 40 feet ; and we have now the skin of one in the Britiſh Muſaeum that meaſures 32. Mr Wentworth, who had large concerns in the Berbices in America, aſſures us, that in that country they grow to an enormous length. He one day ſent out a ſoldier, with an Indian, to kill wild-fowl for the table ; and they accordingly went ſome miles from the fort : in purſuing their game, the Indian, who generally marched before, beginning to tire, went to reſt himſelf upon the fallen trunk of a tree, as he ſuppoſed it to be ; but when he was juſt going to sit down, the enormous monſter began to move ; and the poor ſavage perceiving that he had ap­proached a *bon,* the greateſt of all the ſerpent kind, dropped down in an agony. The ſoldier, who percei­ved at ſome diſtance what had happened, levelled at the ſerpent’s head, and by a lucky aim ſhot it dead : however, he continued his fire until he was aſſured that the animal was killed ; and then going up to reſcue his companion, who was fallen motionleſs by its side, he, to his aſtoniſhment, found him dead likewiſe, being killed by the fright. Upon his return to the fort, and telling what had happened, Mr Wentworth ordered the animal to be brought up, when it was meaſured, and found to be 36 feet long. He had the ſkin fluff­ed, and then ſent to Europe as a preſent to the prince of Orange, in whoſe cabinet it was lately to be ſeen at the Hague : but the ſkin is ſhrunk, by drying, two or three feet. In the Eaſt Indies they grow alſo to an enormous ſize, particularly in the iſland of Java, where, we are aſſured, that one of them will deſtroy and devour a buf­falo. See Boa.

But it is happy for mankind that the rapacity of theſe frightful creatures is often their puniſhment ; for when­ever any of the ſerpent kind Rave gorged themſelves in this manner, whenever their body is ſeen particularly diſtended with food, they then become torpid, and may be approached and deſtroyed with ſafety. Patient of hunger to a ſurpriſing degree, whenever they ſeize and ſwallow their prey, they ſeem, like ſurfeited gluttons, unwieldy, ſtupid, helpleſs, and ſleepy : they at that time ſeek ſome retreat, where they may lurk ſor ſeveral days together, and digeſt their meal in ſafety : the ſmalleſt effort at that time is capable of deſtroying them ; they can ſcarce make any reſiſtance ; and they are equally unqualified for flight or oppoſition : that is the happy opportunity of attacking them with succeſs; at that time the naked Indian himſelf does not fear to assail them. But it is otherwiſe when this ſleepy in­terval of digeſtion is over ; they then iſſue, with famiſhed appetites, from their retreats, and with accu­mulated terrors, while every animal of the foreſt flies before them.

But though theſe animals are of all others the most voracious, and though the morſel which they ſwallow without chewing, is greater than what any other crea­ture, either by land or water, can devour ; yet no ant. mals upon earth bear abſtinence so long as they. A ſingle meal, with many of the ſnake kind, ſeems to be the adventure of a ſeaſon ; it is an occurrence, of which they have been for weeks, nay ſometimes for months, in patient expectation. When they have ſeized their prey, their induſtry for ſeveral weeks is entirely diſcontinued ; the fortunate capture of an hour often ſatisfies them for the remaining period of their annual activity, As their blood is colder than that of moſt other terrestrial animals, and as it circulates but ſlowly through their bodies, ſo their powers of digeſtion are but feeble. Their prey continues, for a long time, partly in the stomach, partly in the gullet, and is often ſeen in part hanging out of the mouth. In this manner it digeſts by degrees ; and in proportion as the part below is disſolved, the part above is taken in. It is not therefore till this tedious operation is entirely performed, that the ſerpent renews its appetite and its activity. But ſhould any accident prevent it from iſſuing once more from its cell, it ſtill can continue to bear famine for weeks, months, nay ſor years together. Vipers @@\* are of­ten kept in boxes ſor six or eight months, without any food whatever ; and there are little ſerpents ſometimes ſent over to Europe from Grand Cairo, that live for ſeveral years in glaſſes, and never eat at all, nor even ſtain the glaſs with their excrements.

Other creatures have a choice in their proviſion : but the ſerpent indiſcriminately preys upon all ; the buf­falo, the tiger, and the gazelle. One would think that the porcupine’s quills might be ſufficient to protect it ; but whatever has life serves to appeaſe the hunger of theſe devouring creatures : porcupines, with all their quills, have frequently been found in their ſtomachs when killed and opened ; nay, they moſt frequently are ſeen to devour each other.

A life of ſavage hoſtility in the foreſt offers the ima­gination one of the moſt tremendous pictures in nature. In thoſe burning countries, where the ſun dries up eve­ry brook for hundreds of miles round ; when what had the appearance of a great river in the rainy ſeaſon, be­comes, in ſummer, one dreary bed of sand ; in thoſe countries, a lake that is never dry, or a brook that is perennial—is conſidered by every animal as the greateſt convenience of nature. When they have diſcovered this, no dangers can deter them from attempting to flake their thirſt. Thus the neighbourhood of a rivu­let, in the heart of the tropical continents, is generally the place where all the hoſtile tribes of nature draw up for the engagement. On the banks of this little envied ſpot, thouſands of animals of various kinds are ſeen ven­turing to quench their thirſt, or preparing to ſeize their prey. The elephants are perceived in a long line, march­ing from the darker parts of the foreſt ; the buffaloes are there, depending upon numbers for ſecurity ; the gazelles relying ſolely upon their ſwiſtneſs ; the lion and tiger waiting a proper opportunity to ſeize ; but chief­ly the larger ſerpents are upon guard there, and defend the acceſſes of the lake. Not an hour passes without ſome dreadful combat ; but the ſerpent, defended by its ſcales, and naturally capable of ſuſtaining a multitude of wounds, is, of all others, the moſt formidable. It is the moſt wakeful alſo ; ſor the whole tribe ſleep with their eyes open, and are conſequently for ever upon the watch : ſo that, till their rapacity is satisfied,

@@@[m] See Abstinence.