Asia, as far as Lake Baikal. It is a common species in England, where it occurs in woods and hedges, as well as in marshes. Mr Jenyns informs us, that it is particularly abundant in the fens of Cambridgeshire, where it sometimes attains a great size.@@1 We shall merely add, that it is eaten in several continental countries. *col. viperinus,* another European species, pertains to this genus ; as do also a con­siderable amount of exotic kinds, which we cannot here so much as name.

Genus Homalopsis. Body bulky, head very thick, muzzle short and rounded ; eyes and nostrils small, and opening upwards ; form usually cylindrical, sometimes slight­ly compressed ; abdomen broad and convex ; tail short, co­nical, robust.

This genus inhabits the great fresh waters of the inter tropical countries both of Asia and America, although it seems less extended than the preceding, being seldom seen beyond the tropics. A Bengal species occurs also in Java, and a few are found identically the same in both the Ame­ricas. The majority attain a considerable size ; but though as thick as a man’s arm, they rarely exceed the length of four feet. Their heavy inelegant forms, small insidious eyes, and large gaping mouths, confer upon them a peculiar and repelling physiognomy ; yet they are quite innocuous, in spite of the malignity of their aspect, a proof that we should never judge from appearance. These are the most truly aquatic of all the fresh-water serpents, passing almost their entire lives submerged, and feeding chiefly on fish. They are endowed with great muscular strength and strong powers of locomotion in their favourite element. Their colours are usually dark and lugubrious,—a schistose gray, brown, olive, or a blackish hue prevailing over the upper surface ; while a yellower tint, with large square spots, is frequent on the abdominal region. We are acquainted with few details regarding their habits of life ; and the spe­cies are rare in collections, probably in consequence of their fish-like activity in the water rendering their capture diffi­cult. They are distributed over a variety of genera by dif­ferent naturalists ; and M. Schlegel describes fourteen spe­cies, among which are included *Hom. herpeton (Erpeton tentaeulatus,* Lac.@@2), a serpent remarkable for two fleshy ap­pendages covered with scales, which extend from the ter­mination of the muzzle. (See Plate CCCCXLIII. fig. 4.) The abdominal plates are scarcely broader than the other scales, and each is surmounted by a couple of ridges. Its native country is unknown.

*family VI.—Boas.*

This family, according to M. Schlegel’s views, compre­hends the greater number of those species which modern naturalists have comprised under the genera *Boa, Python,* and *Acrochοrdus.* It is one of the most natural of the en­tire order, and has been too often erroneously separated, merely on the consideration of a few unimportant charac­ters. We here find species, some of them the largest of the Ophidian race, distinguished by a prehensile tail, and a body possessing the power of twisting itself around other bodies with great force and facility. The surface is en­compassed by numerous small scales, which advance upon the head and encroach on the abdomen, so that the former part never exhibits the regularly-formed plates of the Co­lubers, while those of the latter are unusually narrow. The

vertical position of the nostrils and small-sized eyes an­nounce a combination of aquatic with terrestrial habits of life. The first genus, that of *Boa* properly so called, is cha­racterized by simple plates beneath the tail; the second, *Python,* peculiar to the ancient world, exhibits the sub- caudal plates divided, a supernumerary bone on the upper margin of the orbits, and intermaxillary teeth ; the third, *Aerochordus,* is destitute of anal hooks, and has the surface entirely covered over by small granular unimbricated scales. All these generic groups have many characters in common, both in habits and organization, and we shall here point out a few of their generalities.

The term *Boa,* according to Pliny,@@3 is derived from *Bos,* because the young of these reptiles are wont to nourish themselves on cow’s milk.@@4 We are farther informed by that credulous author, of the great Boa slain in the Vatican, within the abdomen of which was found an entire infant. Linnæus applied the name to all serpents provided with simple sub-caudal plates. It is obvious that his genus, founded on a character of such slight importance, while it excludes the Pythons, necessarily brings together several heterogeneous groups. The defect in the modern arrange­ment of these reptiles arises chiefly from the practice of viewing a single and often subordinate character, and rul­ing, as it were, the forms of nature in simple accordance with its absence or existence. We thus find the Pythons almost always separated from the Boas, and placed in the genus Coluber, while the Acrochordi, estranged from both, comprise two distinct genera, sometimes placed among ve­nomous serpents, sometimes classed with the innocuous kinds. “ Nos temps,” says M. Schlegel, “ fertiles en inva­sions de toute sorte, ont vu démembrer la famille des Boas en autant de divisions génériques que l’on en compte d’es­pèces, qui elles-mêmes sont multipliées sans le moindre fondement de verité. Π n’est pas rare de voir la même espèce distribuée en deux ou trois genres differens, et ces genres placés au hazard parmi d’autres Couleuvres ou parmi les vipères.” The opportunities enjoyed by the author just named, of studying the various species, has led him to the belief that these are much less numerous than generally supposed. He thinks that the majority of such as exist in nature are now in some measure known, and that they do not amount to more than fifteen, including *Acrochordus.* Various anomalies exist among the species when compared among each other. Some are spread over a vast tract of territory, while others are confined within narrow limits. They are all, however, inhabitants of countries either si­tuate beneath the equator or near the tropics. They oc­cur in both the Old and New World, but none is found in Europe, North America, or Japan. The South Ame­rican species are frequent in collections ; those of the (so- called) more ancient countries of the earth are rather rare. Some are oviparous, others produce their young alive. The Boas usually attain, in truth, to an enormous size, although their actual dimensions have been greatly exaggerated. Thus at the very name of *Boa constrictor* the imagination is filled “ with folds voluminous and vast,” although the species really so called scarcely ever exceeds ten or twelve feet in length. The largest Ophidian reptiles in the world are *Boa murina* and *Python Schneideri* and *bivirrarus ;* but it may be greatly doubted whether the first named, which is the most gigantic of all, ever exceeds twenty-five feet in these degenerate days, and we have no sufficient

*@@@, British Vertebrate Animais,* p. 296. Figured in Bell's *British Reptiles.*

*@@@3 Annates des Mus.,* ii. 280, pl. 50 ; Guérin, *Iconog. Reptiles,* pl. 20, fig. 3.

*@@@· Bist. Nat.* 8—14.

@@@\* “ Quant aux véritable serpens, il n’en est pas qui mâchent réellement, de même qu’il est evident qu'aucun ne peut sucer ou

opérer le vide dans la bouche, et que, par consequent, c'est un préjugé de croire que plusieurs de ces animaux, comme les Boas et les Couleuvres, puissent téter les vaches ; outre l’absence des lèvres charnues, le defaut de voile du palais et de l’épiglotte, qui rendraient la succion impossible, il est evident que les crochets acérés et recourbés en arrière, qui garnissent leurs mâchoires et leur palais, s'accrocheraient connue des hameçons aux tétines des mammifères et qu’ils ne pourraient s’en detacher.” *(Erp. Gén,* i. 135.)