

**The landmarks of snake-poison literature : being a review of the more important researches into the nature of snake-poisons ... / [Vincent Richards].**

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Richards, Vincent.

**Publication/Creation**

Calcutta : Thacker, Spink, 1886.

**Persistent URL**

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THE LANDMARKS  
OF  
SNAKE-POISON LITERATURE.



RECEIVED 1910-11-11

THE LANDMARKS  
OF  
SNAKE-POISON LITERATURE

BEING

*A REVIEW OF THE MORE IMPORTANT RESEARCHES  
INTO THE NATURE OF SNAKE-POISONS.*

BY

VINCENT RICHARDS, F.R.C.S., ED., &C.,

CIVIL MEDICAL OFFICER OF GOALUNDO, BENGAL;  
LATE MEMBER OF THE INDIAN SNAKE-POISON COMMISSION.

SECOND EDITION.

Calcutta :

THACKER, SPINK AND CO.,

PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

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1886.



SNAKE BITES

F. C. Y (2)



CALCUTTA :  
PRINTED BY THACKER, SPINK AND CO.



Photo-Collotype.

Survey of India Offices, Calcutta, June 1886.

CAST OF COBRA (NAJA TRIPUDIANS) TAKEN AT  
THE CALCUTTA SCHOOL OF ART.





TO

DR. S. WEIR MITCHELL,

PHYSICIAN AND PHYSIOLOGIST,

POET AND NOVELIST,

AND

THE PIONEER OF MODERN INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE  
NATURE OF SNAKE-POISONS,

THIS LITTLE WORK

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE

AUTHOR.



SNAKE BIT

REF CY (2)



## PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE present volume will be found to contain a few alterations and some additional matter, which the author considers to be either of interest or of scientific importance. It is very gratifying to the author to find that this little work has been so well received, and that, within four months of its publication, a second edition has been called for. To his reviewers and to those Governments who have so liberally acknowledged his efforts in a difficult and not too promising field of research, the author tenders his grateful thanks. The author was very pleased to find that the book found such favour among laymen. On one occasion he learnt that a copy which he had given to a friend had been borrowed and read by no fewer than twenty-one persons. This was a compliment, no doubt; but it would have been more substantial, and, of course, a little dearer, if some at least of those gentlemen had purchased the book they were so desirous of reading.

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## PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

THE main objects of the publication of this sketch, which in part originally appeared in separate papers, are to assist future investigators in discovering what has already been done to throw light upon the difficult subject



of which it treats, so that their time may not be wasted in useless investigations ; and to prevent an unnecessary and reckless sacrifice of animal life. Experiments performed upon the lower animals, either in ignorance of what has already been accomplished, or out of mere scientific curiosity, are alike inexcusable. But, unfortunately, owing to the want of some such little work as this, investigators have sometimes unconsciously travelled over the same ground, only to prove that which had already been placed beyond doubt. An old friend once remarked to the author that he thought the conduct of these researches was a useless expenditure of time and labour, for, said he, "*Contra vim mortis non herbulâ crescit in hortis.*" But if we are to interpret this old saw as meaning that all scientific enquiries directed towards the prevention of death are worthless, and to accept it in principle, then we must either admit the truth of the tenets of the "peculiar people," or abandon ourselves to the ignorant superstitions or impostures of self-constituted "faith-healers,"—neither of which consequences, he is assured, would commend itself either to an intelligent and enlightened people, or to the learned friend of

THE AUTHOR.



# THE LANDMARKS OF SNAKE-POISON LITERATURE.

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## CHAPTER I.

Snakes most commonly met with in India — Distinguishing features of poisonous snakes — The horn-snake — Rattle of the rattlesnake — Habits of snakes — How to feed them — Fascination, a myth — Wonderful snake stories — Propagation — Peculiar odour of snakes — Two-headed snakes — The bite, a very complex act — Causes of an ineffectual bite — Collection of venom — Snake-wallahs' superstition about killing snakes — Training and charming of snakes — Manipulation of snakes — Supposed love for music — The holy men of the Soonderbunds — The panseurs of St. Lucia — The fer-de-lance — Indian snake-charmers — Snakes used for criminal purposes.

**A**S a prelude to the more critical portions of my theme, some observations upon snakes and their habits may be interesting and instructive. Much of what I have to say is, of course, not original, but rather a *rèchauffage* of the materials which practical acquaintance with the subject has enabled me to gather, collate, and estimate the value of. We learn from the pages



of Sir Joseph Fayrer's magnificent work, "The Thanatophidia of India," that, of the twenty-one families of Indian Ophidia, only four are venomous, namely, the Elapidæ and Hydrophidæ (sea-snakes), constituting the colubrine sub-order; and the Viperidæ and Crotalidæ (pit-vipers), forming the viperine sub-order. Of the colubrine snakes, the Cobra, Ophiophagus, or Hamadryad, Krait (*Bungarus Cœruleus*), and the *Bungarus Fasciatus*; and of the viperine snakes, the *Daboia Russelli* are the most commonly met with, and the most destructive of human life.\*

Cobra.

The Cobra, *Naja Tripudians*,—*Nalla Pamba* of Madras, *Mwé Nowk* of Burmah,—is found all over Hindustan, and is too well known to need description. The different species vary considerably in their markings on the hood and in their colour. I have had in my possession specimens of all kinds—from a dead-black to a yellowish-white, and even salmon-colour. The lighter coloured ones come from near the Coast, where the soil is sandy. Nearly all cobras have a single or double ocellus upon the hood; the

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\* In the course of making an analysis of the snake-bite returns received from Bengal, Behar, Orissa, Assam, and Cachar, in 1873-74, I found that the *cobra* was credited with having caused the injury in 1,660 cases, the *krait* in 166, the *daboia* in 205, and unknown and innocent snakes in 2,129 cases.



former marked, are termed by the natives *Keuntiah*, and the latter, *Gokurah*. The *Gokurah* is the snake usually selected by snake-charmers for their *tamashas*, because its movements are slower and more under control than those of the *Keuntiah*. The latter is fond of water, and its habitat is the jungle or paddy-fields; the former is not particularly partial to water, and it is to be found usually amongst old buildings or heaps of rubbish. I have never seen a cobra exceeding six feet in length, though I have had hundreds in my possession.

The Ophiophagus, Hamadryad,—*Sunkerkhor* of Ophiophagus, the natives of Bengal, and *Gnánbók* of Burmah,—is the largest of all Indian venomous snakes, is hooded like the cobra, and lives in damp jungly places. This snake also is a favourite with the snake-charmers, because of the facility with which it is handled and its formidable appearance. It grows to the length of fourteen feet or more, is very powerful, and is said to be aggressive. It is certainly more aggressive than any other snake with which I am acquainted, but Dr. Wall and I found little more difficulty in manipulating a large fresh specimen than in handling a fresh *Keuntiah Cobra*. Indeed, the latter, from its extreme activity and restlessness when first captured, is, in my opinion, a more dangerous



creature to manipulate. The Ophiophagus feeds, as its name implies, on other snakes, but it is doubtful whether they constitute its ordinary food; it, no doubt, accommodates its taste to the supply, and takes anything that falls in its way.

Krait.

The *Krait*, *Bungarus Coeruleus*,—*Anali* of Madras,—as generally seen, is about three feet long, but it grows to the length of four feet. It is either steel-blue black, or brown, striped white. I believe the colour depends upon the age of the snake, the darker one being older, as I have never yet seen a very large *brown* creature. I cannot at all agree with Dr. Nicholson in his remarks that this snake is jet-black, and that *Arcuatus* is a preferable name, as there is not the slightest cœrulean colour about the snake. On the contrary, the larger snakes have a magnificent bluish tint, and are never jet-black. It is easily recognized by the colour *and the single row of hexagonal scales running along the centre of its back*. Very serious consequences have sometimes resulted from the innocent snake, *Lycodon Aulicus*, having been mistaken for it, though there is really little resemblance between the two. The row of hexagonal scales is, of course, wanting, and it is lighter in colour.

Lycodon.

Harmless-fanged snakes.

It is almost universally thought that the presence of fangs is a distinguishing feature of a



venomous snake ; such, however, is not the case. The whole of the *Lycodontidæ*, including the little snake above-mentioned, have well-marked fangs or long maxillary teeth, though they are neither grooved nor hollow as in the thanatophidia, and on this account they are called the harmless-fanged snakes. Two of the *Dipsadidæ* have elongated and grooved teeth, which might be mistaken for poison-fangs.\* The fangs of the *Krait* are much smaller than those of the *Cobra*.

The *Bungarus Fasciatus*—*Raj Samp*, and *Sankni* of the natives of Bengal, and *Gnándawja* of Burmah—is triangular-shaped, and has a prominent back, along which runs—as in the only other snake, the *Krait*—a row of hexagonal scales. It has alternate bands of blue and yellow running across its body. I have seen one six feet long, though much smaller ones are usually met with. The natives of Eastern Bengal believe that this snake has two heads.

The *Daboia Russelli*—*Shiah Chunder*, *Chun-dra Bora*, and *Ulubora* of the natives of Bengal, *Tic Polonga* of Ceylon, *Mandali* of Madras, and *Mwebwé* of Burmah—is usually found about four feet long. It has a triangular-shaped head and a distinct neck ; its body is robust, and its tail thin ; its body has a grey or chocolate-

\* Vide page 137, "Local effects of snake-bite."



coloured ground with black white-edged rings, some round, and others somewhat oval, running along the back like a chain. The fangs are larger than those of any other Indian snake. It is believed that these snakes are common in Bengal, but much correspondence, and the offer of rather large rewards for live creatures have brought me only one miserable specimen during the whole year.\* I think, however, that they must be rather numerous in the 24-Pergunnahs.

Hydrophidæ.

The Hydrophidæ (sea-snakes) are all poisonous, and may be at once recognized by their head-scales and their peculiarities of conformation, which are adapted to their aquatic mode of life. The head is small, the body robust, and the tail flattened vertically, whence they are able to swim with rapidity and grace—indeed, “to out-swim the fish.” The species of the Hydrophidæ—the Platurus—differs from the rest in its general formation, and in having large ventral *scutæ*, which indicate its power of progression on land. I have found the venom of these Pelagic snakes very virulent, quantity for quantity even more so, I think, than that of the cobra. The following case of sea-snake bite, which took place

Platurus.

The poison  
of sea-snakes  
very deadly.

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\* Since writing the above, three good specimens have been sent from Midnapore, but the poison-fangs had been removed.



in 1837, on board H. M. Brig *Algerine*, while in Madras roads, illustrates the rapidity with which the poison acts, as well as its deadly character. It must be remembered that, although the snake was of great length, the head, and consequently the poison-gland, as in all sea-snakes, was very much smaller than that of any of the terrestrial thanatophidia :

“ On the 9th October, while the ship lay at anchor in Madras roads, a water-snake was caught, measuring seven feet six inches long, and six inches and-a-half in girth at the thickest part. After the patient had handled the reptile for some time, it suddenly bit him on the inside of the index finger of the right hand, inflicting a wound resembling that caused by the point of a pin. He declined having the wound fomented, having been bitten by reptiles of the same kind, as he supposed, in the Straits of Malacca, without any bad consequences. At 8 A.M., half an hour after the inflicting of the wound, he made a good breakfast, dressed, and about 10 o'clock went on deck. After taking a few turns, he was suddenly seized with vomiting, the matter ejected being of a dark brown colour, resembling coffee-ground, and of a very offensive odour. After a short time his pulse became small, variable and intermitting, and the pupils were dilated, but contracted



readily by the stimulus of light. The left side of the face was slightly paralyzed; there was *subsultus tendinum*, and the skin was covered with a cold, clammy perspiration, the countenance was anxious and indicative of much distress. In consequence of the spasmodic action of the muscles of the glottis, he breathed with great difficulty. The integuments from the wound to the wrist were slightly swollen, and on the right side of the neck and face, they presented a mottled appearance of dark purple and livid colours. A ligature having been placed above the wrist, and fomentations applied to the hand, a liniment, composed of turpentine, liquor ammoniæ, and olive oil, was rubbed on the throat and neck. He made frequent attempts to swallow a mixture containing liquor ammoniæ and tincture of opium, but failed. At 10-20, in consequence of the spasmodic action of the muscles of the glottis, he was put into a warm bath, which apparently relieved the symptoms, and enabled him to take a dose of the mixture, which caused him to vomit a dark ropy fluid. About twenty minutes after coming out of the bath (in which he remained ten minutes), the spasmodic action of the muscles of the neck and throat became more severe, and the whole body assumed a purple colour; the breathing became



very difficult, from the obstruction caused by a dark brown substance, which came away in a stringy form from the air passages. . . .

At 11-20, not quite four hours from the time he was bitten, he died." (Chevers.)

Besides the before-mentioned there are other *Echis*, &c. poisonous snakes in India, such as the *Xenurelaps*, the *Callophis*, and the *Echis Carinata*, the bite of which is said not to be fatal to man. But Sir Joseph Fayrer doubts the accuracy of the statement in reference to the last named, the poison of which he found to be fatal to a fowl in two minutes, and to a dog in four hours.

We have also certain of the *Crotalidæ*—or pit- *Crotalidæ*. vipers—which are distinguished by the broad triangular head, short thick body, and the pit, which is situated between the eye and nostril, in the loreal region.

The *Trimeresuri*, the most important genus, *Trimeresuri*. are distinctly marked in vivid colours, differ considerably in colour, and are said to adapt themselves to the localities in which they live—the dark ones being found on the ground, and the green ones amongst the foliage of trees or shrubs.

Of the *Crotalidæ*, the *Halys* has a caudal- *Halys*. appendage in the form of a horny spine. I am not aware whether the tail in question is of evil repute, but I read in Miss Hopley's very enter-



Horn-snake. taining book on snakes :—" Of the horn-snake," says Lawson, " I never saw but two that I remembered. They are like the rattlesnake in colour, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like a goose when anything approaches them. They strike at their enemy with their tail, and kill whatsoever they wound with it, which is armed at the end with a horny substance like a cock's spur. This is their weapon. I have heard it said by those who were eye-witnesses that a small locust tree, about the thickness of a man's arm, being struck by one of these snakes at ten o'clock in the morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four o'clock in the afternoon was dead, and the leaves dead and withered. Doubtless, be how it will, they are very venomous." Nevertheless, this snake no more poisons with its tail than does the rattlesnake. Mr. Lawson's work was dedicated, " To His Excellency William Lord Craven, Palatine; the Most Noble Henry, Duke of Beaufort; the Right Honourable John Lord Cateret, and the rest of the True and Absolute Lords Proprietor of the Province of Carolina in America. As a debt of gratitude, the sheets were laid at their Lordships' feet, having nothing to recommend them but truth, a gift which every author may be master of if he will."

Rattle of the rattlesnake.

I have in my possession a rattlesnake's rattle, which was sent to me by Dr. Mitchell; it is a



fair specimen, about two inches long, and when shaken makes a noise similar to that made by the shaking of a "dry bean-pod." When I showed this to a friend, he exclaimed, "What, is that all! I thought the thing made a noise like a policeman's rattle;" and so, I imagine, do many of my readers. A very fine specimen of a rattle is figured in Miss Hopley's work.

As regards the habits of snakes, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the distinguished American physician and physiologist, tells us that he had an opportunity of observing the habits of the *Crotalus durissus* when in captivity for a period of two years. The rattlesnake of the Northern States of America, when at liberty, sometimes lives in the company of its fellows, but more frequently alone. In this particular it resembles our Indian snakes; though it is worthy of note, that if a collection of snakes is kept as nearly as possible in their natural state, where snakes are at all common, they will undoubtedly attract other snakes. Rattlesnakes, we are told, show no hostility towards one another, even when ten to thirty-five are kept in a box together, and even when fresh snakes were dropped upon those in captivity, no attempt was made to annoy the new-comers. This is also the case with most Indian snakes, especially vipers. But I have

Habits of the  
rattlesnake.



Habits of the  
cobra.

kept sixty to seventy cobras in a pit together, and they very often, on the slightest provocation, began to fight in a most savage and curious fashion. On being provoked, several commenced to hiss fiercely, and some would raise themselves up, expand their hoods, and begin a vigorous attack in all directions, and, after making several ineffectual darts,—for they are by no means so skilful at taking aim as is generally believed—two would catch each other by the mouth, rapidly entwine themselves as it were, and, after wriggling and struggling about in this state for some time, relax their hold. Then one would be seen gliding away, vanquished, to the corner of the cage, while the triumphant one raised to its full balancing height, hissed out its challenge for a renewal of the combat. In what consisted of getting the worst of it, I could never discover, as neither of the combatants ever seemed any the worse for the fight; nor can I understand why one snake dreads another if no danger is involved.\* The

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\* Weir Mitchell says, he is convinced that the poison of the *Crotalus* can kill itself when hypodermically injected. Fayrer did not think that the poison of the cobra was poisonous to itself. The question, apparently so easy to decide, is really a very difficult one, as the snake sometimes dies very rapidly in captivity. I came to the conclusion, after numerous experiments, that one species of snake could kill another.



head is almost invariably the point of attack, though less injury could be inflicted by the fangs there than in several parts of the body. Snakes are singularly inactive in their habits. Even in warm weather, when they are the least sluggish, they will lie together in a knotted mass, only occasionally changing their position, and then relapsing into perfect rest. The sluggish movements and the perilous rapidity of the dart of vipers when molested, are dangerously deceptive. The mode of attack of these snakes and all other non-hooded venomous ones, is in wonderful contrast to that of the hooded-snakes, whose every movement may be almost invariably anticipated by an expert manipulator; hence the facility with which they are handled by so-called snake-charmers.

Mode of  
attack.

Snakes, when kept in captivity, usually refused food; cobras, however, sometimes consume it readily. Weir Mitchell, finding the food supplied so frequently unconsumed, adopted the plan of feeding such of the snakes as seemed feeble and badly nourished with milk and insects, in the following manner:—"The snake was secured, and the lower jaw held in the grasp of a pair of forceps, while a funnel with a long stem was thrust down the œsopha-

Feeding of  
snakes.



gus. Into this, insects, such as flies and grasshoppers, were pushed, or milk poured in proper quantity." I have had to feed a large *Ophiophagus*, by pushing pieces of meat down its throat with a stick—an operation not altogether pleasant for either the operator or the reptile. One of my little boys had a pet snake, *Chrysopelea Ornata* (golden tree-snake), which he fed with milk out of a saucer. He held the snake near the head, and put the saucer to it, when it readily drank the milk and in comparatively large quantities at a time. Miss Hopley says: "We, of late, so often see it said of any particular snakes that 'they neither ate nor drank at first, or that 'they drank, though they would not eat,' that we almost wonder their bibulous propensities were ever doubted; especially as the majority of snakes are fond of water and swim readily; we are surprised, therefore, that the second edition of Mr. Lealy's really valuable work, published so lately as 1870, should still retain the assertion that snakes have never been *seen* to drink. Mr. Frank Buckland saw his *Coronella* drink frequently, though she ate nothing; and, as the discovery of this interesting lady and her brood, born in London in 1862, formed the subject of many papers in the scientific journals at the time, one would suppose that they would have



been heard of in Germany, where the species *C. lævis* is well known."

As regards the shedding of the skin, Miss Hopley, who has several times witnessed the process, describes how the snakes crawl out of their skins. Weir Mitchell thus describes it: "My snakes lost their integuments at different periods during the summer. In all cases the old skin became very dark as the new one formed beneath it. If, at this time, the snakes were denied access to water, the skin came off in patches. When water was freely supplied, they entered it eagerly at this period, and not only drank of it, but lay in it for hours together. Under these circumstances, the skin was shed entire—the first gap appearing at the mouth or near it. Through this opening the serpent worked its way, and the skin reverting, was turned inside out, as it crawled forth in its new and distinctly marked outer covering: when the old skin was very loose, the snake's motions were often awkward for a time. It is said to be blind during this period, which is probably true to some extent, since the outer layer of the cornea is shed with the skin, and there must obviously be a time when the old corneal layer lies upon the new formation. It is also said that the fangs are lost at the

Periodical  
sloughing  
of skin.



same time as the skin. In some instances this was observed to be the case; but whether or not it is a constant occurrence, I am unable to say from personal observation." Sir Joseph Fayrer and I have observed that the *cobra* when in captivity sheds its skin about once a month, even in the winter months, and is certainly blind at this time; but the fangs are not invariably shed synchronously with the shedding of the skin. I have seen the sloughed skin entire from head to tail together with the corneal layer intact. In captivity, however, when the reptile has been deprived of water, the skin has been shed in patches, which came off easily when the snake was handled. In a state of nature, I doubt very much whether the casting of the skin takes place nearly so frequently as when the reptiles are in captivity. I have occasionally observed that birds line their nests with the sloughed skins of snakes.

Power of  
fascination  
said to be  
possessed  
by snakes.

As to the power of snakes to fascinate small animals, Weir Mitchell remarks:—"After such numerous and long-continued opportunities of observation, it might be supposed that I should be prepared to speak authoritatively as to the still disputed power of the snake to fascinate small animals. If the former exist at all, it is probable that it would only be made use of when



the serpent required its aid to secure food." He does not appear to think that it exists; nor do I, for the same reasons. He says: "I have very often put animals, such as birds, pigeons, guinea-pigs, mice, and dogs into the cage with a rattlesnake. They commonly exhibited no terror after their recovery from alarm at being handled and dropped into a box. The smaller birds were usually sometime in becoming composed, and fluttered about in the large cage, until they were fatigued, when they soon become amusingly familiar with the snakes, and were seldom molested, even when caged with six or eight large *Crotali*. The mice, which were similarly situated, lived on terms of easy intimacy with the snakes, sitting on their heads, moving round on their gliding coils, undisturbed and unconscious of danger." Recently I put two rats into a cage containing forty cobras, all possessing more or less venom. On their first introduction to the snakes, their appetites appeared to be considerably affected, as they refused all food and were evidently much perplexed by the novelty of their position. "Fascination" failed to overcome the contempt which familiarity is said to breed; for in a short time the rats recovered their usual spirits, and caused considerable commotion amongst the cobras by running all over their



heads and bodies. The snakes resented this familiarity in their own peculiar and stupid fashion by darting at each other and at imaginary foes. Occasionally, however, one of the intruders would receive attention, but easily avoided the attack. The rats lived and partook of food in the cage for ten or twelve days, when one after the other they were found dead—victims, no doubt, of misplaced confidence. *Apropos* of “fascination,” Dr. Nicholson says, in his interesting and excellent little work, “We have but little knowledge of the habits of snakes when at liberty, owing to the difficulties attending the observation of such animals in tropical climates; vigilant and patient, they mostly remain during the day in a state of repose, seeking their prey at those hours when most animals have relaxed from their usual watchfulness and are at rest for the night. Whether ground or tree-snakes, they remain patiently in the same attitude until their prey approaches, then gently gliding over the short distance which intervenes, they pounce on the unsuspecting victim.\* The approach is so often imperceptible that, doubtless, a certain amount of curiosity must often fix the attention of animals on perceiving the snake for two or three seconds before they become aware of their

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\* Much as a lizard attacks an insect.



danger: but of fascination, as it is called, there appears to be none.

“There are several explanations of the stories in which snakes are supposed to have fascinated their victims — ‘Fascination then,’ says Miss Hopley, ‘may be sometimes imputed to curiosity, sometimes to an anticipated morsel. It may partake of fear, or it may be an involuntary approach; it may be struggles of a poisoned creature unable to get away, or the maternal anxieties of a bird or small mammal whose offspring has fallen a victim to the snake.’” Miss Hopley's explanation.

The following amusing story appears in Pepys's Diary under entry February 4th, 1661-2. A marvellous snake.

“To Westminster Hall, when it was full terme. Here all the morning, and at noon to my Lord Crewe's, where one Mr. Templer (an ingenious man, and a person of honor he seems to be) dined; and discoursing of the nature of serpents, he told us some in the waste places of Lancashire do grew to great bigness, and do feed upon larks which they take thus:—They observe when the lark is soared to the highest, and do crawl till they come to be just underneath them; and there they place themselves with their mouth uppermost, and there, as is conceived, they do inject poison upon the bird; for the bird do suddenly come down again in its course of a circle, and



falls directly into the mouth of the serpent, which is very strange.”\*

Propagation.

Dr. Nicholson tells us that the young of snakes are produced once a year ; the period between the impregnation of the female and the birth of her young is uncertain, but it would appear to be from four to five months. In the majority of snakes the eggs are exuded after about three months' gestation, the development of the embryo taking place in the period between laying and hatching ; most snakes are, therefore, oviparous. Some of them retain the eggs until maturity more or less perfect. Originally all venomous snakes were called vipers, under the idea that the class was distinguished by its viviparous habit. As a fact, however, though most of the viperine snakes and many harmless snakes are so, the venomous colubrine snakes, such as the cobra and ophiophagus,

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\* Scarcely more strange than that which follows. Pepys continues:—“ He is a great traveller, and speaking of the tarantula, he says that all the harvest long (about which times they are most busy,) there are fiddlers go up and down the fields everywhere, in expectation of being hired by those that are stung.” Many marvellous stories are told by “great travellers.” It would appear “that travelling” not only expands the mind, but also the imagination, or possibly the gullibility of the traveller. Chateaubriand, another great traveller, says of a certain snake—which, by the way, is perfectly innocent—“He hisses like a mountain eagle and bellows like a bull !” Du Chaillu tells stories that almost take one's breath away.



are oviparous. All sea-snakes, and nearly all the fresh-water snakes, are viviparous, and many tree-snakes are ovoviviparous. Nicholson says that "the cobra at Bangalore is impregnated about January; the eggs are hatched in May, and up to the beginning of June, as many as nineteen young will be found in a brood." In Bengal, however, impregnation takes place in April or May, and the eggs are hatched in September. I possessed a brood of forty vipers (*Daboias*).

Regarding the disagreeable odour which snakes sometimes have, Weir Mitchell says—Odour of snakes.  
"When a rattlesnake is roughly handled, specially about the lower half of its length, a very heavy and decided animal odour is left upon the hands of the observer. If the snake be violently treated, causing it to throw itself into abrupt contortions, then streams of a yellow or dark brown fluid are ejected to the distance of two or three feet. This fluid appears to come from glands alongside of the cloaca. Its odour is extremely disagreeable, and it is irritant when it enters the eye, although not otherwise injurious." I have, while handling Indian snakes, experienced this disagreeable qualification of theirs. Chateaubriand appears to have met with A terrible snake. a far more disagreeable snake in the States of America. He says—"When approached it be-



comes flat, appears of different colours, opens its mouth hissing. Great caution is necessary not to enter the atmosphere which surrounds it. It decomposes the air, which, imprudently inhaled, induces languor. The person wastes away, the lungs are affected, and in the course of four months, he dies of consumption!" A terrible snake this, if the story only were true!

Two-headed  
snake.

I am sometimes asked, in all seriousness, whether there are such creatures in existence as two-headed snakes; and a gentleman once gave me a description of one which he declared that he had seen in the jungles in Australia, where he said such snakes were common. After so positive a statement, I did not, of course, venture to suggest that he was mistaken. I should only have got for an answer, "But I tell you I have seen them." Two-headed snakes certainly have existed and do exist. The *Amphisbæna*, for example, existed in the imagination of the ancients, and the *do mookh ka samp* exists in the imagination of the natives of India.\* There are, however, monstrosities of the kind, as there are of other animals in some museums. One *lusus naturæ* is, or was, certainly to be seen in

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\* Nicholson says—"The double-headed snake is manufactured by snake-jugglers and exhibited to the credulous European or Indian."



the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. A moment's reflection would convince even the most credulous that such creatures could not possibly exist. What embarrassment would arise in the event of a disagreement between the two heads as to the direction in which food should be sought for!—a decided exception to the rule that “two heads are better than one.” Miss Hopley tells us that “several of the burrowing family are remarkable for a similarity of head and tail, obscure features, inconspicuous eyes, and very small mouth, rendering it difficult at first sight to decide which is the head and which the tail. All being feeble, inoffensive and entirely harmless, the evil attached to them of having two heads, is only another proof of the prejudice and animosity displayed towards every creature in the shape of a snake, however innocent.” These poor little “blind worms, admirably organized to dig and burrow and find their food in deep and hidden places, have their uses . . . . . We must note one other of the family of burrowing snakes which, from the very earliest ages, have been suppositiously endowed with two heads. Its name, *Amphisbæna*, or double walker (going both ways), however, is well merited, because, like *Typhlops*, it can progress either way, forwards or backwards,



with equal facility . . . . . Of this harmless and useful reptile, Pliny seriously wrote : ‘The *Amphisbæna* has two heads, that is, it has a second one at its tail, as though one mouth were too little for the discharge of all its venom !’ One cannot help thinking that Pliny must have met at least one of the human species whose ‘mouth was too little for the discharge of all his venom,’ but it is doubtful whether he credited him with possessing too much head.

I once purchased a beautiful specimen of the *Xenopeltis Unicolor*, iridescent earth - snake, which was being exhibited by a *samp-wallah* in the streets of Calcutta as a two-headed snake. This reptile has a very short abrupt tail, which, viewed from a distance, looks very like a head, and more especially so when in motion, as is generally the case. On my taking the snake up and pointing out that it had only one head, the *samp-wallah* assured me with a bland smile that the head would make its appearance in six months.

The bite, a  
very complex  
act.

The manner in which functions of the various parts concerned combine to effect a poisonous bite is certainly remarkable. The act, apparently simple in itself, consists really of a series of complex acts following rapidly one upon another, in ordered sequence, to effect a certain



end; and as Dr. Weir Mitchell says: "The physician may learn from their study how he may be deceived as to the occurrence of poisoned wounds, and how the snake which appears to strike, may really fail in its object, even though seeming to have inflicted a wound," and then he gives the details of the manner in which the reptile inflicts an effectual bite. "At the instant, and while in motion, the jaws are separated widely, and the head is bent somewhat back upon the first cervical bones, so as to bring the point of the fang into a favourable position to penetrate the opposing flesh. Owing to the backward curve of the tooth, this, of necessity, involves the opening of the jaws to such an extent, that an observer, standing above the snake, can see the white mucous membrane of the mouth as the blow is given. . . . . Consentaneously with the forward thrust of the body, and with the opening of the mouth, the speno-pterygoids act from their firm cranial attachments to draw forward the pterygoid plate, and thus through its attachment to the maxillary, to erect the fang . . . . . As the speno-pterygoid acts, the submaxillary bone rocks forward upon its lachrymal articulation, when the motion reaches its limit, and is checked by the ligament which I have described, the support-



ing lachrymal bone in turn yields to the power applied through the maxillary bone.

"These movements elevate a little the muzzle of the snake, so as to give to the snake a very singular expression during the act of striking. Their more obvious and important result is the elevation of the fang, which rising, thrusts off from its convexity the cloak-like vagina-dentis, so that it gathers in loose folds at its base.

The bite described.

"As the unsheathed tooth penetrates the flesh of the victim, a series of movements occur, which must be contemporaneous, or nearly so. The body of the snake still resting in coil, makes, as it were, an anchor, while the muscles of the neck contracting, draw upon the head so violently, that when a small animal is the prey, it is often dragged back by the effort here described. If now the head and fang remain passive, the pull upon the head would withdraw the fang too soon, but at this moment, the head is probably stayed in its position by the muscles below or in front of the spine; while the pterygoideus externus and spheno-palatine, acting upon the fang through their respective insertions into the posterior apophysis of the submaxillary bone, and the inside of the palate bone, draw its point violently backward, so as to drive it more deeply into the flesh. At this instant occur a third series of



motions, which result in the further deepening of the wound, and in the injection of the poison."

The lower jaw is closed upon the bitten part or member. Where the surface struck is flat and large, this action will have but slight influence. Where the jaw shuts on a small limb or member, the consequent effects will be far more likely to prove serious, since the power thus to shut the mouth materially aids the purpose of the blow. . . . The first two muscles tend simply to shut the mouth; the anterior temporal, however, is so folded about the poison-gland, that while it draws up the lower jaw, it simultaneously compresses two-thirds of the body of the poison-gland. This force is so applied as to squeeze the fluids out of the upper and back parts of the gland and drive them forward into the duct. The anterior lower angle of the gland, as well as a portion of the duct, is subjected to similar pressure at the same instant, owing to the flat tendinous insertion of a part of the external pterygoid upon the parts in question. It will thus be observed, that the same muscular acts which deepen the wound, fix the prey and inject the venom through the duct and into the tissues penetrated by the tooth. Now, in the case of the cobra, the act is still more complicated by the preliminary expansion of



the hood, and the greater distance of the strike.

It would, of course, be anticipated, in such an elaborate sequence of movements as those above described, that in the event of the failure of one of the essential motions, the ultimate essential of the whole would be materially interfered with, and an imperfect or ineffectual bite would be the result.

Causes of the  
infliction of an  
ineffectual  
bite.

The causes of an ineffectual bite, when the snake is poisonous and in full vigour, are :—

1st.—Miscalculation of distance.

2nd.—The object being too near, the blow is lost, and the fang does not enter the part attacked.

3rd.—Insufficient elevation of the fangs, which are driven back by the force of the forward impulse.

4th.—When the fang enters, and from the quick starting of the animal injured, or from other cause, it is withdrawn so soon, that a large portion of the venom is thrown harmless upon the surface near the wound.

5th.—When from the nature of the part struck the snake is unable to close its jaws upon the parts.

There are other causes of an ineffectual bite referable to the snake itself:



1st.—Its gland may contain little or no venom,  
(a) from recent exhaustion, (b) from  
impeded secretion through sickness.

2nd.—The efficient fangs may have been shed  
or lost.

Here I may note that fangs are renewed.

When snake-poison is required for immediate experimental purposes or for collection, it is absolutely necessary either to handle the reptiles yourself, or to have them manipulated under your own supervision. In the former case, to ensure accuracy of observation, and in the latter, to obtain a supply of the genuine article. The specimens supplied by *samp-wallahs* are dirty and unreliable, though high prices are often given.\* On one occasion, through an obliging correspondent, I was supplied with a large quantity of supposed poison, which subsequently was found to be a "gum," which the poison much resembles. On another, I bought what appeared to be the genuine article, and it proved to be strychnine and gum mixed.

Collection of  
snake-poison.

Fontana obtained the poison of the viper by killing the animal, and compressing the poison-glands, which are situated behind the eyes, until the fluid exuded through the ducts. Barnett

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\* I have paid as much as five rupees for one grain of snake-poison.



and others chloroformed the animal, and then exerted pressure on the glands. Prince Bonaparte made the snake bite upon soft substance which imbibed venom readily, and from which it could be easily removed by water.

Weir Mitchell's  
method of col-  
lecting snake-  
poison.

Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's method is here described:

As it is sometimes essential to detain the snake on the table for some time without being forced to employ a person to guard it, I devised a little apparatus which, although imperfect, answered my ends well enough. A box about four inches square and thirty-six inches long was divided lengthwise, and arranged with hinges so as to close readily. The two sections were deeply grooved so that where the sides of the box met, the grooves formed a tube large enough to receive the body of a serpent five feet in length. The large length of the box was fitted with a sliding door which could be secured by a wooden wedge driven in behind it. The lower edge of the door was made concave, and a piece of leather was tacked across the concavity, designed to press on the snake's neck and secure without injuring it.

To employ this arrangement, the box was closed and the door raised, a cord having been previously run through the central tube. This cord bore on its extremity a loop which was thrown over the tail of the snake, and carried up between three and four inches. To effect this manœuvre, I was usually obliged to hold the snake down with a long stick notched at the end. The serpent being thus noosed, the loop was tightened, and an assistant tilted the box over the cage and rapidly drew the snake backwards into the tube, while a second person standing in front guided the snake with a long rod.

As soon as the tail appeared at the small end of the



box, it was secured by the assistant, and the looped string which held it was wound around a nail. At this instant the head sometimes retreated into the box. After waiting a moment, it usually re-appeared again, and was then seized with a pair of long forceps and held, while the door was pushed down on the neck and made fast with the wedge. When the snake was small, it sometimes contrived to turn around in the box before the tail emerged and thus reverse its desired position. This occurrence twice exposed the operator to great danger; it was finally provided against by the aid of a large cork, which was strung upon the cord and was used to close the small end of the tube when the snake was of a size to make it possible for it to turn in the tube. When the snake was thus properly imprisoned, it could be placed on the table and studied to great advantage, while it was still able to bite with sufficient vigor. At various times I have employed all the methods of procuring venom, which I have enumerated at the commencement of this note. I have finally laid aside all but the plan of stupefying the snake by chloroform. This is accomplished by seizing the snake about the middle with the looped staff, and placing it on the table. An assistant then controls the head and neck, by confining the latter with a notched stick, while with the other hand he slips over the head a glass vessel about two inches wide, and containing at the closed end a sponge soaked in chloroform. About twenty minutes are required to complete the process. If it is then found that the lower jaw hangs relaxed when opened, the neck is seized firmly, the fangs caught on a saucer edge, and the glands stripped from behind, forwards, by pressure with the thumb and forefinger. The venom usually escapes alongside of the fang, from under the mucous cloak. One snake in every four died within from two to five days,



and this after apparent recovery from the effects of the chloroform. It is not impossible that too severe a compression of the venom glands may produce rupture of its substance and consequent blood-poisoning. This, however, is but conjecture; and I have not further examined the subject experimentally.

Our method  
of collecting  
venom.

The method adopted by us in India, though, perhaps, more dangerous, is infinitely more simple and efficacious. The reptile is caught by the tail, and the end of a walking-stick is then placed upon the head, pressing it not too forcibly against the ground or floor. When secured, the tail is handed over to an assistant, or it may be let go, and with the hand the snake is seized just behind the stick, which is then removed. Care is, of course, required that the fingers do not slip, as they sometimes will, more particularly when the animal is shedding its skin, and that the animal is not held so tightly as to injure it. *Samp-wallahs* hold the tail of the snake between the toes of the left foot. Expert manipulators do not require to use any stick, especially for cobras, but at once place the fingers upon the neck and then grasp it. To remove the poison, the creature is made to bite through a strip of plantain leaf placed transversely around a mussel shell, the concavity of which is turned upwards. The fangs pierce the leaf, and the poison flows freely through the



fangs into the shell. An extra quantity of poison is obtained by exerting pressure upon the glands. The snakes do not always bite readily, but occasionally require a good deal of irritating; sometimes only one fang penetrates, and it is then necessary to make the snake bite again, in which there is generally some difficulty. The venom is then removed and poured into watch-glasses, to be dried and bottled off for use as occasion arises. Poison thus dried will retain its power for years. I have experimented with some fifteen years old, and found that it had lost none of its virulence.

Natives tell many extraordinary stories about snakes; amongst others, that a snake called the *Dhnarash* milks cows. The belief that snakes have the power to suck is not confined to natives. A gentleman told me of a story he heard from another, to the effect that a lady, who was suckling her infant one night, woke up, and found a snake sucking at the other breast. Suction cannot, however, be accomplished without the aid of lips and a broad tongue, both of which are absent in the snake. This story, like many others, is a myth.

The cow-milk-ing snake.

A curious case of the effects of the bite of a rattlesnake is described by Dr. Barston. The milk of a woman bitten by a rattlesnake is said

A curious case.



to have killed her child, and two puppies and three lambs employed to draw off the milk.

The following passage occurs in a letter which was sent to me from Madras by a gentleman, who, by the way, asked me to allow him to translate the first edition of this work into Canarese! "The belief that snakes suck milk from cows is prevalent in Canara. I have heard it said by many, otherwise creditable people, that there is a kind of reptile with two heads. The animal is harmless in other respects. It always traces out where women are confined, and begins to suck the mother when she is a little careless. Consequently many women in South Canara are afraid of this animal. The wonder of it is, that once the creature begins to suck the mother, it is difficult to get rid of it; it is so very perverse, obstinate, and reluctant. The animal is called '*Malunda*,' in Canara.\* I am very earnest to collect more information on this, and have written to a friend of mine to procure me one animal like this. On my receiving it from him, I hope to send it to you." I have been anxiously awaiting the arrival of this wonderful creature, but have heard nothing further on the subject.

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\* In Canara, when children are wayward and obstinate, their mothers call them "*Malunda*."



There is a well-known superstition prevailing amongst the natives of India to the effect that, when a person is bitten by a snake, the reptile should be protected from injury: the belief is, that if it is killed, the bitten person will surely die. I have reported such a case in Sir Joseph Fayrer's "Thanatophidia." Again, *samp-wallahs*\* will never kill a snake, for fear their power over the kind should be destroyed. It is singular to find that such a belief exists also amongst the Caribs. Captain Pim, in his entertaining book, "Dottings on the Roadside," says—"On another occasion I saw a smaller, but no less deadly, member of the same species; it was on the banks of the San Juan, in the hands of my faithful Simon (a Carib), who had just landed from my canoe to make a fire and cook our breakfast. Simon allowed the creature to coil round him, and commenced talking to it in his musical language, holding the head close to his face. Presently he put it gently on the ground, when it slowly made its way into the adjacent undergrowth. I gave Simon a good blowing up for letting the brute escape, but he told me that he was a snake-doctor, and that had he inflicted the slightest injury on it, his influence would have been at an end for ever."

Superstition  
against killing  
snakes.

\* Snake-men; that is, men who habitually handle snakes for a living.



Training and  
charming of  
snakes.

It is thought that snake-charmers train or charm their so-called performing snakes, so as to make them do certain acts at the will of the "charmers." Now, this is not the case. In the process of training a mammal, such as a horse for instance,—the animal is made to do certain acts, it may be foreign to its usual behaviour, or even its nature, at the will of the trainer, and in the process the animal's intelligence is appealed to. But in the case of the cobra (and in that of performing birds, in a lesser degree), the manipulator anticipates the natural behaviour of the reptile under certain conditions, which alone he has command over. And he is the best "charmer" who is the most intimately conversant with the movements of the creatures under varying conditions. For example, I say, this cobra, which is now balancing itself before me, shall turn to the right, raise itself higher, turn to the front again, suddenly dart, and, after rebalancing itself, put its head down upon the table. To make the snake accomplish this, I wave my right hand very gently, and turn it to the right, raise it towards the head of the snake ; then bring it to the front, and wave it at first very gently, then rapidly, and suddenly bring my hand down in front of the snake, which now strikes. I then smartly extend my arm above, so that when the



snake rebalances itself, the palm of my hand nearly touches its head, and, lastly, I bring my hand down gently towards the table.\*

Since the foregoing was written, I have read <sup>Manipulation of snakes.</sup> the following amusing account of snake manipulation by Dr. Nicholson: "To take a snake out of the box, when he is not sufficiently domesticated to be taken up with the hand, lift his body with a hooked stick, and, as his tail glides over, take hold of it and deposit him on the floor or in a spare box. If you wish to tame the snake, he must be taken out daily, and gradually accustomed to being handled; if you could persuade him to drink milk" (which you can do by dropping it on to his head), "the offer of it would become a great inducement to good behaviour. A cobra must always be taken out daily and gradually tired out of his wildness, but in the

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\* I had several little birds, *Mooniahs*, and I found that they would go through the following performance by themselves. On taking one on to one index finger, and putting the other index finger before it, the bird would step or hop from one to the other as often as I changed them, if I just touched its breast. If I wanted the bird to fly for a short distance, I brought the disengaged finger sharply up to its breast, and at the same time I lowered the engaged finger. If I removed one finger and held the bird some distance from the cage, it would fly from my finger into the cage. Nearly every bird would go through this performance.



intervals of his performances he should be left alone, and not worried. There is very little danger about handling this snake: nerve is all that is required. I have very little of it myself, and can never handle venomous snakes with confidence. I have often envied the nerve of a friend in Rangoon, who, emboldened by the possession of a fancied antidote in case of accident, handles cobras with perfect freedom; he puts his hand into a narrow-mouthed basket, containing several cobras, and picks out the one he wants without the slightest objection on the part of the snake beyond the usual hard swearing. When the cobra is on the floor, he squats down before him and brings him to attention, if he is making tracks, by a smart smack on the back; then by a side to side movement of the knees or gently moving in front of him a piece of chalk or a rolled-up handkerchief held in the left hand, he can be kept steady for a long time, following your movements." (The hand alone answers the purpose equally well if you are at all expert.) "If your attention relaxes, he comes down and backs away; catch hold of him by the tail or smack him on the back, and he will come to attention again. Keep him occupied with an object in front of him, and you may do anything to him; place your right



hand above his head, and you can bring him flat to the ground, but without any attempt at resistance. After he has stood up some time, it is easy to provoke a strike; this, however, is rarely done viciously, and the injury inflicted is generally confined to his own nose. Most captured cobras have their noses barked raw from frequent hits against hard substances."

As for the snake's supposed love for music, I Supposed love for music. have certainly not noticed it. As Dr. Nicholson remarks, the country-music played by snake-charmers during the cobra's performance is quite superfluous, and from the very imperfect condition of the auditory apparatus, it is highly probable that the creature has very little appreciation of sound. It has been said that when a large number of remedies are to be found for any particular disease, that disease is either very easy, or impossible, to cure. There is probably no disease—not even excepting cholera,—for which such numerous remedies are in existence, as for snake-poisoning, or, more correctly speaking, for snake-bite, for the two are by no means synonymous. The thousands of antidotes are almost all of a secret nature, very few being known and having professional sanction. Every district in India has its own *samp-wallahs*, and each one is the happy possessor of an antidote and



a *mantra*\* to assist it. Whether these men believe in the efficacy of their remedies, I am not quite sure, but I have never yet seen the man who was willing to submit his remedy to a crucial test in his own person even for a consideration. The excuse has always been that he might forget his *mantra* at a critical moment. This reminds me of a curious story which was told to me some time ago.

The holy men  
of the Soonder-  
bunds.

It appears that before the Mahomedan wood-cutters will go into a fresh patch of jungle in the Soonderbunds, they send a holy man (strange to say, a Hindoo) to the place to propitiate the wild animals. He erects a small *maichan*, in which he stops for the night, if he is not eaten in the meantime. If all goes well, and the *jogi* is untouched, it is assumed that the jungle may be safely worked. Occasionally it happens that a hungry brute refuses to be propitiated in any but a natural manner, and it eats the *jogi*. When the wood-cutters are asked to explain why the holy man has been eaten, notwithstanding his *mantras*, they say that he must either have had a very indifferent character, which was probably true, or he *had forgotten his mantras when attacked by the tiger*. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this story, but *se non é vero, é ben trovato*. I have, however, seen at several differ-

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\* *Mantra*, means an incantation.



ent parts of the Soonderbunds *maichans* which were said to have been occupied by *jogis*. From time to time "infallible cures," "certain antidotes," and "never-known-to-fail remedies" are sent to me from all parts of the world to be submitted to the crucial test of experiment, always with the same result—utter failure. Many of them come accompanied by certificates of infallibility, and not a few with the intimation that the sender would be happy to disclose the secret, on the Government sending him the reward which is supposed to have been offered. I have experimented with "antidotes" sent from Brazil, the United States of America, Australia, Africa, and all over India; and in many instances the directions for the administration and application of the antidotes were amusingly absurd.

For extraordinary cures of *snake-bite*, the *Panseurs* (snake-doctors) of St. Lucia certainly excel all others. The Government of India, observing in the Immigration Report of St. Lucia for the year 1879, that reference was made to the successful treatment of snake-bite, asked for further information on the subject. And the result is a most extraordinary contribution to snake-poison literature. All of the contributors, *with the exception of the medical officer*, appear to be quite satisfied that the *panseurs*

The panseurs of  
St. Lucia.



are really able to cure snake-poisoning. One gentleman remarks, however, that "It is my impression that when the bite is inflicted by a large vigorous serpent in such a manner that the venom is deposited within a blood-vessel or deep in the tissues, or, as sometimes happens, in the trunk, death is inevitable." He makes the extraordinary statement that he believes that the bite of the "Fer-de-Lance" is more fatal to whites than to the black or coloured people. The medical officer, after pointing out some of the conditions under which the snake may not have inflicted an effectual bite, remarks—"It is important to bear the above in mind when we hear many persons boasting (some of them, no doubt, honestly) of their success with, and their ability to cure, serpent-bites."

"There are *many remedies* (italics mine) believed by the inhabitants to be efficacious; some kept a secret, some used locally, others internally, and some both local and internal, while passes are made and words used by the professional snake-bite curers, which, no doubt, are useful with the class on whom they are practised, on the principle of the 'influence of mind over matter.' The preparations consist of a heterogenous collection, chiefly of various herbs steeped in rum. These must be gathered on a certain day (generally a Friday)



and at a certain phase of the moon." The *recipes* are reported to be obtained from old Africans.

"The St. Lucia Almanac of 1852 gives 'six modes of treatment.' Many of these seem absurd, and one positively dangerous from the amount of arsenic it contains. Mention is made of the guaco\* having been re-introduced by Governor Darling from Venezuela, and 'that it now luxuriates in the garden of every gentleman in the Island.' I believe it has again become extinct!" Note in the above extract that the "panseurs" assist their antidotes with "passes" and "words": the *jharhan*† and *mantras* of Bengali snake-charmers; also that they have *many remedies*, notwithstanding that guaco (the great remedy) has become extinct. The medical officer winds up his letter with the following paragraph:—

The remedies  
used by  
panseurs.

"The treatment adopted by some of these serpent-doctors can only be described as 'lynch law,' and I believe often gives rise to mortification of the bitten part. Others practise by more gentle means, inflicting no injury. A powder named Theriaque‡ is in great repute. This consists of

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\* The *Milkania guaco* has had many advocates, amongst them, Andrieux in 1849, Vargas 1798, and others.

† The expulsion of evil spirits or venom by incantations. It means literally to dust out.

‡ Advocated by Arctæus in 1772.



a forago of seventy-two different ingredients, the flesh of the viper being one;\* each drachm of the powder contains a little more than a grain of opium, and to the soothing effect of this drug is to be ascribed such influence for good as the powder may have. Rum and ammonia are largely used in all the nostrums, and are probably the only efficacious constituents." The marvel is, that any person so treated ever recovers from the effects of the treatment. We find mentioned no fewer than four articles which have a reputation in India, namely: arsenic (as given in the Tanjore pill), opium (opium-eaters are supposed to be proof against snake-poison), alcohol, and ammonia. Over-stimulation in a case of snake-poisoning can only expedite the absorption of the poison, which it should be our aim to prevent being taken up into the general circulation. Ammonia, like alcohol, is only a stimulant—not an antidote. Hence, in a true case of poisoning, it is not only useless but hurtful. But to return to the "panseurs" of St. Lucia. One gentleman writes:—"I cannot state with certainty what is *generally* the exact course of treatment observed, 'panseurs' evincing a disinclination to give definite information on the subject. In almost every instance they have acquired the know-

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\* A very ancient remedy.



ledge from Africans, who have charged heavily for transmitting it. Fathers have bequeathed the information thus obtained to their sons, so that a family for many generations have been acknowledged as professional 'panseurs;' consequently, a knowledge of the kind, which, as a rule, is a source of pecuniary advantage to the 'serpent-doctor,' is cautiously and jealously guarded by every member of the faculty." Two 'panseurs,' however, hearing that information was required by Her Majesty's Government, "loyally elected to be exceptions to the rule," and so we are afforded information as to the composition of two of these marvellous remedies; and, according to the "panseurs," nothing could be more successful, seeing that one man has had sixty-two cases, and lost only one patient; while the other had two hundred and fifty, and he too lost only one patient, and that one died, not from the effects of the bite, but "from being too much frightened." Here are the prescriptions:—Take of each of the following herbs, *viz*: "Zebe Giente, En haut bois, confied Cayé, Petit Fongére, Zebe á Couresse, Zebe Dahi, Zebe á Colete, Chadron, Beni, Soumatié, Zimeron, Treffe, Charhentier, Zebe astro, Jarpanyai, and Balier doux, pound the same in a mortar, add thereto  $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. of alkali,  $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of laudanum, put all

A great secret  
divulged.



in a quart bottle full of very strong spirits, shake and mix well, administer internally half a wine-glassful according to condition and constitution of patient. Dress the wound twice a day and oftener, if necessary, with the same preparation."

*"1st—Dose.*

- 1 grain powdered Peruvian bark.
- 1 grain emetic.
- 3 drops spirits of hartshorne.

*2nd—Tison.*

One handful Bois mal estomac leaves, coco figæ, small piece raisin, citron small piece.

*3rd—Cataplasme.*

Pied Poulli, a handful of Moron, ditto fevilles, Pistaches l'Ecorce, Quina bois pilled, 1 Corce d'ail or garlic, 9 grains preserve guinié, un morceau de gingerbre or ginger un cuillier poud á fusil, un morceau de tieff.

*4th.*

After applying the above-stated, then cut the bite to run out the poison.

Then a small tumbler containing some rum, light fire to the rum, and apply upside down on the bites called vantouse."

This is a rough form of "cupping," but both that and suction utterly fail to "draw out" a single drop of venom, for the simple reason that it is rapidly diffused, and becomes intimately



amalgamated with the products of the specific local inflammation.

*“5th—Vomiting.*

To make the patient vomit, take some leaves of quina bois, boil in one quart of water, to be reduced to three tea-cups.

*6th—Friction.*

After 4 days 1° savon Francais, 1° Chandelle mole, 2 spoonsful of white rum, melt together on fire, and rub part very hot.”

This could do only harm in a true case of snake-poisoning.

*“7th—To avoid pains.*

Take one leaf smoking tobacco (or merely) apply above, friction of No. 6, on the inside part, pass it on fire and apply over the part for three or four days, then wash the part with (some hot water, and the patient is radically cured.)”

Mirabile dictu!

By the way, there is internal evidence that the above prescriptions are certainly not amongst those which have been obtained “at great cost” from the Africans. Where did these Africans learn to make “laudanum” and “spirits of hartshorne?”

The old, old story of the mangoose is introduced to shew that there certainly must be an antidote in existence. In fact, all the old, dead,

The old, old story of the mangoose.



buried, and disintegrated *post hoc ergo propter hoc* arguments are exhumed and patched together to do duty as veritable and convincing proofs. A man is bitten, therefore by a poisonous snake. The snake is poisonous, therefore the man is poisoned. The man is poisoned, therefore he will die. An antidote is administered to the bitten individual, the individual does not die, therefore the antidote cured him. A "M. de Lanbenque's" method of treatment is mentioned. While there is nothing new in it, there is much that is ludicrous. The method includes the old treatment of the application and administration of oil, which was declared useless nearly two hundred years ago (*vide* Chapter II). The absurd advice is given to keep the patient roused by every means. If it were a case of real poisoning, nothing would keep the patient roused. Far from rousing the patient, it is good practice to keep him as quiet as possible, so that the absorption of the poison—which you desire to keep out of the general system—may be retarded as much as possible. The wonderful snake-doctors of St. Lucia, like many other snake-doctors, evidently owe much of their fame and reputation to the non-identification of the snake, and the timidity of the people. Dr. Shadling says (as quoted by Miss Hopley), "I believe every country



has a pet bugbear among serpents. *Fer-de-lance* is the cry in St. Lucia, when a snake rustles away in the bush, or inflicts a bite unseen." After all, the "*Fer-de-lance*"—*Trigonocephalus lanceolatus*—is not nearly so formidable as most of our Indian poisonous snakes, notwithstanding the infamous character which has been given to it by the people of St. Lucia.

The *Fer-de-lance*.

A very interesting note is given in Sir Joseph Fayrer's "*Thanatophidia*," on the snake-charmers of Bengal, from the pen of Dr. Rajendralala Mitra: "In Bengal we have four different classes of men who deal in snakes. The first, and by far the most expert among them, is the *Mal*, a low-caste Hindu, who earns his livelihood by catching and exhibiting snakes and selling simples in the bazaar" [in more ways than one], "but never professes witchcraft, jugglery, or the healing art. Many of this class are certainly very poor, and have to lead a vagrant life, but I have never heard that they are much given to thieving. In the North-Western Provinces they are replaced by *Modaris*, a few of whom occasionally come to Calcutta to ply their vocation. I have never had an opportunity of studying them carefully, and cannot, therefore, say anything about them. Apparently, however, they seem to have

Indian snake-charmers.



been confounded with the *Bediyahs*, or gipsies of Bengal. The latter are jugglers, bear and monkey dancers, sellers of simples, fortune-tellers, reputed adepts at curing rheumatism, gout, tooth-ache, and other complaints ; professors of witchcraft, experts in cupping, applying moxas and actual cautery, as well as snake-charmers. In fact, they take to whatever comes in their way to protect themselves from being taken up by the police as thieves, for thieves they are of the most inveterate type. Some time ago I put a few notes together about them. . . . .

“As snake-charmers these people are by no means successful or noted. They differ from the *Mal* in taking their women to join them in their profession, which the *Mals* never do. I have never seen a *Mal* woman. The *Sanyis* are known in Bengal by the name of *tubri-wallahs*. I am not aware of where their head-quarters are, but there is no doubt they come to Bengal from the North-West. They are always dressed in yellow clothes and a large turban, and have a double pipe mounted on a gourd shell—the *tubri*—with the music of which they pretend to charm and draw out snakes from holes and cracks, not unoften from the bedding in the houses of the persons who employ them. For this purpose they carry about several snakes on their persons hidden under the folds of their flowing



garments; but openly they shew only a few or none. As professed vagrants they may purloin whatever falls in their way, but they are by no means notorious as thieves. They may be seen everywhere in the North-West, and I believe (though I cannot speak from personal knowledge) also in Southern India. I have met with notices of them in old Sanskrit books, and it is probable that, as a class, they have existed in India from a very early age. Their pipe is peculiar to them; it is never used by the *Mals*, the *Modaris*, and the *Bediyas* for charming snakes, nor by any of the Indian races for musical entertainment." Most of these snake-charmers, especially the *tubri-wallahs*, are very fond of alcohol, particularly brandy; the more fiery the better.

The crime of homicide by snake-bite, we are told by Chevers, has rather a full history from very ancient times.\* Snakes were employed also for purposes of war. Hannibal and Antiochus defeated the Romans in a novel action by throwing earthen pots filled with the reptiles into their ships. In Paradin's "Chronique de Savoye," it is mentioned, that a Saracen ship was taken, in

Snakes used  
for criminal  
purposes.

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\* For an interesting case related by this eminent medico-legal authority, *vide* p. 85.



which were snakes in cages, which were intended to be thrown among the Christians in their camp. He gives other instances of the practice. The following curious mention of the crime of using snakes as homicidal instruments, made in both ancient Hindu and Mahomedan law, is referred to by Dr. Chevers:—

Hindu and Mahomedan law regarding

“If a man by violence throws into another person’s house a snake, or any other animal of that kind, whose bite or sting is mortal, this is *snakish*,—*i. e.*, violence. The Magistrate shall fine him five hundred puns of cowries, and make him throw away the snake with his own hand.” (Halhed’s Code of Gentu Laws, pp. 262, 263.) It was enacted in the ancient Mahomedan law that “if a person bring another into his house, and put a wild beast into the room with him, and shut the door upon them, and the beast kill the man, neither *hisas* nor *diyat* is incurred. And it is the same if a snake or scorpion be put into the house with a man, or if they were there before, and sting him to death. But if the sufferer be a child, the price of blood is payable.”

Execution by snake-bite.

Dr. Chevers mentions that some of Sir Thomas Roe’s suite were present at an execution by snake-bite, ordered by the Moghul.

“There was another condemned to dye by the Mogul himself while we were at Amadavar



[ ' Amedabad ? ' ] for killing his own mother, and at this the king was much troubled to think of a death suitable for so horrid a crime ; but, upon a little pause, he adjudged him to be stung to death by snakes, which was accordingly done. There were some mountebanks there which keep great snakes to show tricks with them ; one of these fellows was presently called to bring his snakes to do that execution, who came to the place where that wretched creature was appointed to dye, and found him there all naked (except a little covering before) and trembling. Then, suddenly, the mountebank (having first angered and provoked the venomous creatures) put one of them to his thigh, which presently twined itself about that part, till it came to his groin, and there bit him till blood followed ; the other was fastened to the outside of his other thigh, twining about it (for those snakes thus kept are long and slender), and there bit him likewise. Notwithstanding the wretch kept upon his feet near a quarter of an hour, before which time the snakes were taken from him ; but he complained exceedingly of a fire that with much torment had possessed all his limbs, and his whole body began to swell exceedingly.

. . . . .  
' About half - an - hour after they were taken



from him, the soul of that unnatural monster left his growing carcase, and so went to its place."

Chevers observes that the coincidence of the existence, first of this practice in Hindu law, and again of its spread as a Saracen custom to Northern Europe, doubtlessly by the early crusaders, and to India by the Mahomedan conquerors, is very interesting.

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## CHAPTER II.

Francesco Redi — The viper as a symbol of divine power — The Psylli and Marsi — Poisoned arrows — Dr. Richard Mead, his theory and microscopic examination of the viper's venom — Various antidotes — The bite of the rattlesnake, a cure for elephantiasis — Felix Fontana's researches — Discovery of the poison-gland — Tricks of old viper-catchers of Europe — Schlegel — Fontana's criticisms — De Buffon — Fontana appeals to posterity — Fontana's theories — M. Sage on ammonia — Quantity of viper-venom shed at one bite — Effects of viper-poison on the blood — Fontana refutes the ammonia theory — Dr. Patrick Russell's experiments — The mongoose — A fight between the cobra and mongoose — Mr. Boag recommends ammonia — Mr. Boag's theory — Suction, &c. — Artificial respiration — Mr. John Williams and his cases — Dr. Macrae and Mr. Breton — Dr. Butler recommends opium — Recurrent symptoms after snake-bite — Livingstone's case — Snake-stone — Davy's researches — Fayrer and Brunton's theory.

**M**ORE than two hundred years have elapsed since Francesco Redi— “a man of the widest knowledge and most versatile abilities, distinguished alike as scholar, poet, physician, and naturalist ” (Huxley) “ and the originator of the doctrine of Biogenesis ”—first gave to Europe the result of his investigations into the nature

Francesco  
Redi.



of the venom of the viper. Previous to his time the grossest ignorance prevailed not only regarding the nature of the poison, but even as to the organ by which the snake inflicted its deadly injuries. It is true this great man did little more than correct the principal fallacies which prevailed; still, he it was who first directed men's minds to the subject, and collected by patient enquiry the crude material which Fontana, a century later, moulded into something like definite shape.

Physiology has, thanks to Chemistry and Mechanical Art, made rapid progress. For example, the theory of "*omne vivum ex ovo*," which was only very roughly demonstrated by Redi, is now demonstrated (and by nearly all savants considered *positively* proved) by the most elaborate processes. What was in Redi's time a rough outline is now a well-filled-in picture, not quite complete in all its details, but a picture nevertheless; and the microscope has been the principal means by which the theory has been, and is still being, sifted to the most minute particular.

The viper, the symbol of divine power.

From time immemorial the viper has been the symbol of divine power, not only in Asia and Europe, but in other parts of the world. It was as sacred to the Egyptians and Arabians as it is now to the Indian snake-charmer, and a



man who could manipulate the reptile or was bitten without injury was honored as a god. We have an instance of this in the history of St. Paul, who, after being shipwrecked off the island of Malta, was received by the "barbarous people" of the island, and while lighting a fire was attacked by a viper, which he shook off into the fire, whereupon "the people said that he was a god."

The Psylli, an ancient nation of Africa, and the Marsi, in Italy, were supposed to be able to resist the fatal effect of the poison of the viper, and the most marvellous stories are related of them; but, as in the case of our Indian snake-charmers, there was evidently some trick at the bottom of their supposed immunity from the ill-effects of the poison. Some supposed that the viper would not touch them, and it was said that this was made a test of the legitimacy of their children. I have observed in the previous chapter, that nothing will induce a snake-charmer to kill a cobra, especially if he happens to have been bitten by it.

It is recorded that the king of Calicut actually had huts built in which snakes might take shelter during the rains, and that the punishment awarded to any one who harmed these reptiles was death.

The Psylli and Marsi.

The sheltering of snakes.



The legend of  
Parasurāmen.

Dr. Nicholson says, that, in Malabar, the legend of Parasurāmen teaches forbearance towards the cobra. Parasurāmen (an incarnation of Vishnu) standing on the heights which then formed the coast of the Western Sea, threw his hatchet into the sea; it flew as far as Gokarnam, and so far the sea receded all along the coast. He then rendered the land stable by foundations of gold, and brought in Brahmins from different countries; but the newly formed land was so infested with snakes that the colonists would not stay and returned to their own countries, leaving Kérala to Nagattānmār (Nagas or Naga-demons). Parāsuramen went in search of new colonists, and having brought Arya Brahmans, he divided the land into sixty-four parishes, and in each allotted a part to the snakes. He ordered that the snakes should be propitiated by púja and regarded as household divinities, and this being done the colonists were troubled by them no more. Read in connection with the statement made by Sir Madhava Rao in his "Stray Notes," the above legend is interesting. It appears that, "in Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, snakes are an item of heritable, transferable, and saleable property. In selling a house and garden, the seller says in the sale-deed—'I sell you such and such piece of land, together with the house, and also



the minerals under the ground, all the stones and all the trees above the ground, and the snakes thereon.' Ancient and honorable families generally set apart a bit of their garden for the snakes to live in. The trees and bushes therein are never allowed to be cut. It is a reserved jungle for the use of the snakes. It is locally known as '*Sarppa Kaur.*' "

Snakes are sometimes used as custodians of concealed treasure.

While the venomous snake was made the symbol of divine power, the non-venomous snake was made the emblem of health, possibly on account of its shedding its skin every month. The venom has been used for many purposes, especially for those of war. The Scythians are said to have poisoned their arrows with the venom of the viper and human blood,\* as the South American Indians did with the Wourara or Curara poison (this was erroneously supposed to contain snake - poison also); the Tartars are believed to use viper - venom in a similar way; and the Hottentots are known to use cobra-poison for the same purpose. It is

Non-venomous  
snakes, the em-  
blem of health.

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\* I have in my possession some Fijian arrows which are said to have been rendered poisonous by being first plunged into the decomposing corpse of a human being, and then smeared with some vegetable poison.



Poisoned  
arrows  
and spears.

more than probable, also, that many savage hill-tribes of India apply cobra-poison to their spears and arrows.

Dr. Richard  
Mead.

One of the most celebrated of those men who have spent much of their time enquiring into the subject of snake-poisoning, was Dr. Richard Mead,\* Physician to King George II.

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\* “ Dr. Richard Mead was an eminent English physician, born at Stepney. At sixteen years of age he was sent to Utrecht, where he studied three years under the celebrated Grævius, and then choosing the profession of physic, he went to Leyden and attended the lectures of Pitcairn and Hermann. Having visited Padua in 1695, he took his degree of doctor of philosophy and physic, and returning home, he settled at Stepney and practised physic with great success.

In 1703, Dr. Mead was elected a member of the Royal Society, of which Sir Isaac Newton was then President. The same year he was elected physician to St. Thomas's Hospital, and was also employed by the Surgeons to read anatomical lectures in their hall. In 1707, his Paduan diploma for Doctor of Physic was confirmed by the University of Oxford; and on the death of Dr. Radcliff, Mead enjoyed the most extensive practice of any physician of his day. In 1727, he was made physician to George II, whom he had served in that capacity whilst he was Prince of Wales. During almost half a century he was at the head of his profession, and he was admired no less as a man than as a physician. His reputation, not only as a physician but as scholar, was so universally established, that he corresponded with the principal literati in Europe. This great physician, naturalist and antiquary, died on the 16th of February 1754.” (*Cyclopædia Britannica*.)



In 1702, he published an account of his investigations, which is pregnant with interest. The introduction to the essay is somewhat mystical, and contains not a few unsubstantial hypotheses, but this fact in no way detracts from the value of the more practical portion of the work. Previous to the year 1700, the subject had engrossed the attention of Monsieur Charas and the Abbé Francesco Redi; the latter especially being a very enthusiastic enquirer. The theory Mead's theory. which Mead adopted was, that "venomous animals, when they bite or sting, inflict a wound and instil into it a drop of liquor, which infects the fluid of the nerves, and by this means inflames the membranes," etc. In fact, he thought that the poison did not act through the blood, but directly through the nervous system. It is owing to his having enunciated this theory that we find no mention of a ligature having been used before Kempfer recommended and Fontana adopted it. Regarding his theory, Mead says, "these experiments" (scanty and unsatisfactory to a great degree) "upon the viper-poison and the blood are a sufficient confirmation of what has been advanced in the introduction that the nervous liquor only is affected by this venom." Severity of symptoms depends upon meteorological and other conditions. After giving the symptoms, the severity of which, he states, depends on the climate, the



season of the year, the greater or less rage of the viper, the size of the reptile and animal bitten, and the depth of the wound, he proceeds to explain why snakes live so long without food. On this point he observes: "owing to the length of time the process of digestion takes, and to the fact that the blood of the snake is a grosser or more viscid fluid than that of most other animals, so that there is very little expense of it by transpiration, it is able to go without food for five or six months." Sir J. Fayrer kept a *Daboia* for one year without food or water, and it was vigorous as regards its power to kill up to the last. I have had one in my possession for seven months, and it has not partaken of either food or water during the whole time.

Mead's  
microscopic  
examination  
of snake-  
venom.

Mead's microscopic examination of snake-poison is most curious. He examined it in the following manner: "I have oftentimes, by holding a viper advantageously, and enraging it till it stuck out its teeth, made it bite upon somewhat solid so as to void its poison," which having put under the microscope, he proceeded to examine. "Upon first sight," he remarks, "I could see nothing but a parcel of small salts nimbly floating in the liquor; but in a very short time the appearance was changed, and these saline particles were now shot out, as it were, into



crystals of an incredible tenuity and sharpness, with something like knots here and there, from which they seemed to proceed, so that the whole texture did, in a manner, represent a spider's net, though infinitely finer and more minute; and yet so rigid were these pellucid *spiculæ*, or darts, that they remained unaltered upon my glass for several months." What Mead really saw was nothing more nor less than the drying of the poison.

One would have imagined that the source from which the poison was derived could not have been very difficult to decide. It appears, however, to have been otherwise, for Mead tells us that he performed an experiment "with a view to the controversy between Redi in Italy and Charas in France." The former affirmed that "the venom of the viper lay in the yellow liquor of the gums." The latter, in opposition to this theory, espoused a notion advanced first by Von Helmont, "and placed it altogether in the enraged spirits of the creature, calling this yellow liquor a pure innocent saliva," and citing experiments in proof of his theory. But, as Mead very rightly observes, "there is a great deal of difference in the success of the same experiments when faithfully and judiciously made, and when they are cautiously and timor-

Source from  
which venom  
is derived.



ously managed, lest they should overthrow a darling hypothesis." Redi's conclusions were confirmed by Monsieur du Verney and Drs. Areskine and Mead.

Viper fat as  
an antidote.

The treatment recommended by Mead is suction of the wound, an emetic with oil and warm water, and *Axungia Viperinæ*, or viper's fat. He did not believe in external management, "since it cannot prevent the sudden communication of the poison to the nerve." The following case, in which suction of the wound was had recourse to, is well worth citing:—

"A man was bit on one of his fingers by a rattlesnake, just then brought over from Virginia. He immediately put his finger into his mouth, and sucked the wound. His underlip and tongue were presently swelled to a great degree; he faltered in his speech, and in some measure lost his senses. He then drank a large quantity of oil" [a reputed antidote] "and warm water upon it, by which he vomited plentifully. A live pigeon was cut in two and applied to the finger. Two hours after this, the flesh about the wound was cut out and the part burnt with a hot iron, and the arm embrocated with warm oil. The man recovered."

Warm oil as  
a remedy.

The application of warm oil in cases of snake-bite appears to have enjoyed a great reputation



in England, but the Physicians of the Royal Academy of Paris, after investigating the subject, pronounced the treatment ineffectual, "any further than it might be a fomentation to the tumefied part." Mead attaches the greatest value to the *Axungia Viperinæ*, or viper's fat, which was said to have been the remedy used by the English viper-catchers, from whom, after a great deal of trouble, Mead obtained the secret. He gives two experiments with a view to proving its efficacy, but both are vague and unsatisfactory. He indulges in a very wild theory to account for the efficacy of the treatment.

The "cordial remedies" recommended are Confect "Confect Raleigh and the salt of vipers, or, in Raleigh and want of this, Ammonia." It is believed by many, even in the present day, that the viper has about it the antidote to its own poison, and it was suggested to Sir Joseph Fayrer, by an American gentleman who found "that crushed Tincture of centipede and spirit, when applied to the part, spirit and always cured the injury done by a centipede," crushed cobra that a tincture of spirit and cobra should be tried recommended. in cobra-bite.\* The flesh of viper dressed as eels was strongly recommended by Galen as a remedy for elephantiasis (leprosy), and it is said that

\* This treatment, which is of old date, was put to the test, and, of course, failed.



Viper-jelly.

Balsam of  
bats.Snakes as  
food.

the flesh of the cobra was prescribed in Bengal for wasting diseases; and the physicians of Italy and France very commonly prescribed the broth and jelly of viper's flesh for the same uses. It appears also to have been given in England, for Mead observes, "the patient ought to eat frequently of viper-jelly, or rather as the ancient manner was to boil vipers and eat them like fish; or if the food will not go down, though really very good and delicious fare, to make use, at least, of wine in which dried vipers have been digested six or seven days in a gentle heat." This was actually an acknowledged preparation of the London Pharmacopœia. About the middle of the seventeenth century, physicians were in the habit of prescribing compounds which would scarcely be relished by patients in the present day. Charles II.'s physician in ordinary, Dr. Thomas Sherley, recommended what he termed "Balsam of Bats" as a remedy for hypochondria; it was composed of "adders, bats, sucking-whelps, earth-worms, hog's greese, the marrow of a stag, and the thigh-bone of an ox." One would scarcely have thought that such a mixture was calculated to give one an appetite. The Santhals, Dhangars, Burmese, and many natives of India partake of snakes as food.



The following case recently came under my observation: "It is a common belief in many parts of South America—a country as besotted in superstitious observances and customs as Spain is—that the bite of the rattlesnake acts as a cure for elephantiasis. In one sense it may be said to be a specific for the disease, as all who have tried the remedy have died within a few hours of the experiment. The following case appears to have acted as a rude shock to the believers in the efficacy of the poison of the *crotalus horridus*: José Machada, aged fifty years, originally a fine athletic man, had been laid up in the hospital of Rio de Janeiro for four years with elephantiasis in a form which obstinately resisted all treatment. The disease extended all over his body, producing such loathsome disfigurement that the unfortunate man eventually resolved to embrace the alternative of subjecting his hand to the fang of the deadly snake. Accompanied by his medical attendants (a circumstance that will strike European practitioners with profound surprise), who had taken the precaution to secure a declaration in which the patient affirmed that he acted entirely of his own free-will and against their advice—the unfortunate man proceeded to a house in which a rattlesnake was kept caged. He put his hand

The bite of the rattlesnake, a cure for elephantiasis.



to it and grasped the animal firmly, which immediately buried its fangs in his fingers, without, however, causing him any sensation of pain; a result, no doubt, due to the disorganized condition of his tissues. This occurred at 11-50 A.M. In less than an hour the hand had swollen, and his sight had become dim, while the pulse increased in frequency. Soon there supervened acute pains, and the respiration became laboured, with hæmorrhages and excessive evacuation of urine. During the progress of the symptoms, little medical interference was attempted on the first day. He was given aqua ardente, the common spirit of the country, and made from the fermented juice of the sugarcane. He died next day at 11-30."—(*Lancet*, April 18th, 1874.) For a singular case of an attempt to cure elephantiasis by the bite of a rattlesnake, *vide Lancet*, Vol. I, 1838 and 1839, p. 443.

Viper-venom a  
remedy for  
tertian ague.

Viper-bite is said to have cured a woman of tertian ague.

Snake-venom  
an antidote to  
Rabic Virus.

In a recent number of the *Lancet*,\* appeared an article, in which the writer, a gentleman of considerable professional acquirements and natural acumen, informs us that "while brooding over our failures" in regard to the treatment of hydro-

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\* No. II, Vol. I, 1866, page 60.



phobia, it struck him "that nature could not be so improvident and callous as to leave us so thoroughly helpless and unprotected." The result of these meditations was the suggestion that the sub-cutaneous injection of one drop of snake-venom, diluted with glycerine, every two hours according to the symptoms observed, "affords a rational presumption for success in the treatment of hydrophobia." If the only object of treatment in this terrible disease is to put an end to all suffering, I have no doubt the procedure advocated would be eminently successful. So would a mortal dose of prussic acid, and more expeditiously. The writer appears to claim originality for the suggestion, but I am afraid it must be denied even that small merit. So far back as 1783, Demathis treated a dog, supposed to be mad, by allowing him to be bitten numerous times by a viper. The dog died, but the experimenter attributed the failure to the large number of bites, and inferred that the venom is a specific against—as he called it—hydrophobic rage. Again, in 1821, Poletta failed to cure canine madness by the bite of the viper. In 1844, there appeared in England a book containing some very wild theories and statements regarding the nature of snake-venom, and amongst other matters was a reference to its



use in hydrophobia.\* Traditions that partake of the marvellous find a suitable soil for their vitality in the shades of ignorance and superstition, though they rapidly die on exposure to the light of intelligence and learning. It is not, therefore, surprising to learn, that "in Wales there is a belief prevailing among the common people that a dog that has been bitten by an adder will never be subject to hydrophobia."†

I doubt whether any sane person in India will be venturesome enough to submit himself to the operation of inoculation for snake-poisoning, as a certain Van Chol is said to have done in Surinam; but, from my knowledge of the gullibility of most people as regards wonderful stories of snakes and their poisons, I have no hesitation in saying that many will be found to believe in the efficacy of the inoculation of venom as a prophylactic against snake-poisoning, and will look upon the account of this gentleman's doings as a proof thereof. I may premise that I have never experienced a case in which an animal, having once been bitten or injected, has recovered from a second bite or injection of venom. After describing the performance, which

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\* Weir Mitchell's Researches into the nature of the Venom of the Rattlesnake.

† *Lancet*, No. III, Vol. II, page 121.



took place before the Governor—whether for a pecuniary consideration or not, is not stated,—the writer of the account above-mentioned remarks: “It is hard to make out what did prove of avail,—the inoculation, the antidote taken by him prepared from herbs of all sorts along with snakes’ heads, or the incisions made that same evening in one of his arms, after which he had arms, shoulders, and breast rubbed hard with limes and different herbs.” Dealing seriously with the matter, and granting even that the bite was an efficient one,—that is to say, that the fangs penetrated the flesh, and that some poison was injected beneath the skin,—there is no reason whatever to credit either the inoculation or the so-called remedies with having been of any avail in preventing a fatal issue. A man or an animal may be very seriously poisoned by a rattlesnake, or, indeed, by any snake, and yet recover under subjection to various or even no treatment. It is stated in the account under notice that, “experts here hold stoutly that Van Chol could not have recovered had it not been for the inoculation or antidote,” they being besides of opinion that “the bite of a rattlesnake unavoidably brings on death within two or three hours at the utmost.” The fact is, however, that the majority of persons bitten by rattlesnakes recover



no matter what remedies are administered. Thus, of sixteen cases mentioned by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, twelve terminated in recovery, some after exhibiting a train of symptoms indicating serious disturbance of the vital functions. In his "Researches upon the Venom of the Rattlesnake," Dr. Weir Mitchell gives some cases, of which he says :—" The cases here related are selected from a large number of a similar nature, all illustrating the more or less grave character of the symptoms, and also the possibility of recovery, even under apparently unfavourable circumstances. The next case and the last of this kind I have placed alone, because it has especial value, as shewing how exceedingly grave may be the signs of poisoning, and yet how rapid and complete may be the rally and escape."\* So much then for the opinions of the "experts" alluded to. I venture to assert that the result to Mr. Van Chol would have been very different had the snake not been kept without food for three weeks, and had its gland been stored with a fair quantity of venom; and, perhaps, Mr. Van Chol was not altogether ignorant of the fact. The exhibition, which was apparently got up for the edification "of several gentle-

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\* *Vide* page 172.



men, amongst whom was the governor," must have been of a refined nature. That it should have taken place under such auspices will, no doubt, be a gratifying circumstance to the Anti-Vivisection Society, who so strenuously advocate the performance of experiments upon man instead of upon the lower animals. Another advocate of the cause was one William Burton, who, in 1734, we are told, tried experiments to show the utility of olive-oil as a remedy in viper-bites; but he, as some may think wisely, practised on others, and not on himself. Inoculation of snake-venom is no new idea; it has been advocated as a prophylactic against yellow fever.

For more than half a century the subject of snake-poisoning appears to have received little attention, but in 1776, Felix Fontana, naturalist to His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and a very able man, published his researches. While it is true that Francesco Redi and Richard Mead were the pioneers of the subject, the value of their researches was nothing as compared with that of Fontana's. He wrote a most elaborate work, setting forth the results of his numerous experiments. He performed "more than six thousand experiments, employed upwards of three thousand vipers and had bit more than four thousand animals."

Felix Fontana's  
researches.



Discovery of  
the poison-  
gland.

After entering into some anatomical questions regarding the fangs and the situation of the poison-gland, he informs us that Mead, and after him, Dr. James, asserted that the true reservoir of the poison was the sheath which covered the fangs, but he very clearly shows the position of the poison "vesicle," which is found above and behind the fang. He asserts that the poison of the viper is not a poison to itself, and in this statement he is confirmed by more recent authorities.\* Arguing from the fact "that certain substances are known to be poisonous to certain animals, whilst far from being hurtful to some others," he thought that the venom of the viper may not be a poison to all animals.

The venom of  
the viper not  
poisonous to  
cold-blooded  
animals.

He made several experiments with a view of determining the point, and came to the conclusion that the poison was perfectly harmless to such cold-blooded animals as leeches, slugs, snails, and three kinds of innocent snakes. Regarding the effects of the poison on warm-blooded animals, he remarks, "I am not afraid to advance that the venom of the viper is a poison to all warm-blooded animals." "There is not," he says, "a warm-blooded animal in all Italy that can withstand the effects of the poison."

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\* As has been previously pointed out, Weir Mitchell is doubtful whether the rattlesnake cannot poison itself.



In the latter assertion recent authorities will concur, but certainly not in the former. An innocent snake succumbs to the poison of a venomous one as certainly as does a dog, though not so rapidly, by reason of its anatomical conformation.

A curious tale is told by Fontana, when discussing the taste of the venom. It appears Redi's viper-catcher Jacques. that Redi had a viper-catcher named Jacques, who boasted that he could swallow spoonfuls of the venom of the viper, and Redi declared that he had been seen to do so; he does not, however, assert that he was ever a witness to the fact. With all due deference to the memory of the late M. Jacques, one cannot place implicit confidence in his statements, since he belonged to a class of men as celebrated for their tricks as the snake-charmers of Bengal. Very few people in India have not heard of an instance in which a snake-charmer has offered to let himself be bitten by one of his snakes, in order to demonstrate the value of a certain antidote he possesses; the snakes in all such cases have had the poison-gland removed previously, so that although wounds are caused if the animal bites, no poison can be injected.

The old viper-catchers of Europe were in the habit of stopping up the passage and hole in the poison-fang with wax, from a similar motive. Tricks of old viper-catchers of Europe.



Some such deception was, no doubt, practised by the Psylliand Marsi, to whom I have previously alluded.

Fontana did not believe that the poison was absorbed by mucous membranes.\* Schlegel, in his "Essai sur la Physionomie des Serpens," refers to the question. It has almost universally been held that the poison of snakes may be taken internally without any ill-effects following, but Dr. Fayrer's experiments prove beyond doubt that the poison is not only absorbed, but may prove fatal. I have made several experiments with a view to clearing up this point, and my conclusion was that the poison certainly kills if taken in large doses on an empty stomach. Schlegel says:—" *Appliqué sur la langue il produit des sensations semblables à celles produites par la graisse; on peut même, suivant Fontana, le prendre l'intérieur, sans que se déclarent les moindres conséquences facheuses, cette observation cependant a été récemment contredite par les expériences que le Docteur Hering a faites à Surinam sur la nature du venin d'un crotale muet. Ce voyageur, prenant à différentes reprises des doses diverses de ce poison mele avec de l'eau,*

Schlegel's theory as to the poisonous nature of venom when taken internally.

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\* He subsequently altered his opinion, as was pointed out to me by a kindly critic in the *Pioneer*.



*en ressentait les effets pendant huit jours et plus ; ils se manifestaient par des douleurs dans le larynx et dans d'autres parties du corps, par une sécrétion multipliée de mucus dans les membranes du nez et de l'œsophage, par une diarrhée fréquente accompagnée de douleurs dans le rectum, etc. ; à ces symptômes s'en joignaient plusieurs autres assez curieux, dûs à l'influence que ce poison aurait, selon M. Hering, sur les facultés morales."* Mead maintained, on perfectly insufficient grounds, that the poison would not kill if taken internally ; firstly, because human saliva was an antidote ; secondly, that if it should pass into the stomach and intestines, "the balsam of the bile will be an antidote there, powerful enough to overcome its force. Dr. Mead quotes Galen in support of his statement that the poison is inert when taken into the stomach, and further refers to Lucan, who introduces Cato when marching the remains of Pompey's army through Africa, very wisely telling the soldiers almost choked with thirst, yet afraid to drink of a spring they came to, because full of serpents—

*"Noxia serpentum est admisto sanguine pestis.  
Morsu virus habent, et fatum dente minantur  
Pocula morte carent."*

Professor Mangili considered that the venom



of the viper was harmless when taken internally, as did Harlan, Russell, and Davy. Weir Mitchell appears to agree with them, but he seems not to have put the question to the test of experiment. Jeter very rightly observes that, when given to fasting dogs and cats, venom produces vomiting and all the symptoms of snake - poisoning. Cobra - venom undoubtedly does.

Fontana's  
criticisms.

Fontana's criticisms of the different theories then advocated are instructive, and occasionally amusing. The first reviewed is the spontaneous-coagulation-of-the-blood theory, which he disposes of by asserting that the blood is sometimes found fluid, which was a sufficient bar to the acceptance of the theory. Strangely enough, however, this appears to be the theory which he attempted to establish in after years, though the objection which he here advanced still held good and was a sufficient refutation of it.\* He

Melloni's  
theory.

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\* Fontana is not singular in having advanced a theory that was incompatible with facts which he had previously demonstrated by experiments. Melloni, in his latter days, advocated a theory entirely opposed to results he obtained practically in former years. Miller says: "A consideration of the preceding facts led Melloni to expect that, by a combination of screens, which allow light of a given colour to pass, radiant heat may be arrested; and, in fact, he thus effected an apparent separation of light



next deals with the hypothesis that the poison causes death by universal inflammation. He contended that *post-mortem* appearances did not indicate anything of the kind. With reference to Mead's theory, he denies that any salts are to be found in snake-poison, and holds that what Mead saw under the microscope must have been a "kind of skin from the mouth of the snake" (*epithelium*) "which he himself occasionally observed." The celebrated De Buffon, on the other hand, maintained that the

De Buffon—  
Foreshadowing  
of the germ  
theory.

from heat. By transmitting the solar rays, first through a glass vessel filled with water, which arrests the less refrangible rays, and then through a plate of a peculiar green glass tinged by means of oxide of copper, which stops the more refrangible rays, a greenish beam was obtained, which was concentrated by lenses, and furnished a greenish light of great intensity, but yet produced no perceptible heating action when it was allowed to fall upon the face of a sensitive thermoscope. A similar separation of light and heat seems to be effected in nature, in the light reflected by the moon. Melloni concentrated the rays of the moon by means of an excellent lens of a metre in diameter, and obtained a brilliant focus of light of one centimetre in diameter, the intensity of which consequently was nearly ten thousand times greater than that of the diffused light of the moon; upon directing this focus of light upon the face of a very sensitive thermomultiplier, only an extremely feeble indication of heat was obtained." Miller adds in a foot-note, "Notwithstanding these results, Melloni maintained during the latter days of his life the identity of the agent which produces light and heat."



"salts" observed by Mead were "animalcules," on which the activity of the venom, as well as other active poisons, depend. This looks like something approximating to a belief in the germ theory of disease. Fontana, of course, flatly contradicts De Buffon, and insists that nothing of the kind exists, a fact of which he satisfied himself by frequent and repeated experiments. He appeals to posterity in the following strong and forcible terms:—"How many are there who judge after others! We may include in this number all those who are not capable of immediately consulting nature; who prefer hypothesis to fact, and eloquence to truth; a severe and candid posterity will, without doubt, be astonished to find that there have been philosophers and naturalists in the eighteenth century, who, even in the most important particulars, have ventured to substitute conjecture to experiment, notwithstanding that the latter would have been made with as much ease, as it would have been decisive." Fontana, if alive, would be grieved to find that the world has not yet improved so much as he expected. What was a grievance in his day remains so in the nineteenth century.

Appeal to  
posterity.

Fontana's  
theory of the  
destruction of

Fontana at first originated the theory that death was caused by the direct destruction of



the irritability of the muscles; his reasons for abandoning this theory will be referred to subsequently. He was of opinion that opium acted in a similar manner. He disputed the fact that snake - poison in any way acted on the nervous system, but even, supposing him "to be of another opinion, his discovery of the proximate cause of death would lose no part of its importance, for, whether the poison operates immediately on the nervous fluid, or on the muscular fibres, it is not less true that it kills by depriving the animal of all motion and the muscles of the power of contracting." He maintained that the irritability of the muscular fibres was destroyed, not only during life, but after death. It will be seen hereafter that cobra - poison rapidly paralyzes the spinal nervous system, and that it has also a marked paralyzing effect upon muscle.

In the year 1777, M. Sage, of the Academy of Sciences at Paris, published a pamphlet on the advantages of the volatile alkali (ammonia) as an antidote in cases of snake-poisoning, which was first recommended to the faculty by Jussieu. This mode of treatment appears to have been founded on Mead's theory that the active principle of the venom was an acid salt. Fontana had already condemned the treatment, but he

muscular irritability.

M. Sage on ammonia as an antidote.



Fontana  
disputes its  
value.

again performed a number of experiments before Dr. Troja, Member of the Royal Academy of Naples, and M. Jean Fabroni, of Florence, and attached to the Cabinet of Natural History of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. After performing numerous experiments, he again condemned the ammonia as useless, if not positively hurtful. The sentiments he then expressed may safely be repeated here. He observes: "I place the greatest importance on repeated experiments, for I know of what weight the prejudice for a favourite hypothesis and the authority of a celebrated writer are." It is more difficult to uproot error than to establish truth, especially when the scientific reputation of an "authority" is at stake; every man may err, but more especially he who has some pet theory either to defend or to establish.

The skin the  
principal agent  
in the absorp-  
tion of the  
poison.

Fontana was under the impression that the skin was the principal agent in the absorption of the poison,—that is to say, the cut edges of the skin. This is, however, erroneous; the poison is absorbed while lying in the areolar tissue, and frequently, as in the bite of the *daboia*, the poison is injected into the muscles. Fontana declares, notwithstanding his former theory, that, in the event of the poison being injected directly into a muscle, it is never fatal.



The experiments he cites to prove this are full of fallacies. Fontana made several experiments on various parts of the body, and came to the mistaken opinion that the conjunctiva does not absorb the poison. Sir J. Fayrer and I have demonstrated, that it is not only absorbed, but, when applied in large quantities, is rapidly fatal. He took a great deal of trouble to prove that the venom of the viper was neutral. Mead first, and Dr. James, Cantor, Laidlay, and Dr. Harlan subsequently, asserted that it was acid: Fontana, Russell, and Schlegel, on the contrary, declared it was neutral. The fact is, as I have found by numerous experiments, that the fresh poison is acid, and that which has been kept for a few hours is sometimes neutral. Dr. Brickell, of Savannah, and Dr. Harlan, of Philadelphia, found rattlesnake - venom invariably acid. Dr. Weir Mitchell's observations on the subject were numerous, and he found that the poison was invariably acid; but he points out the fact that the normal reaction of the snake's mouth is alkaline, so that a difference of observation may be accounted for by the accidental neutralization of the venom when it reached the mouth of the snake.

The conjunctiva does not absorb venom.

Dispute as to the acidity of the venom.

Although the measures taken by Fontana to ascertain the quantity of poison that must be

Quantity of venom shed at one bite.



injected to kill, were clumsy, owing to the want of appliances, the results obtained by him pretty nearly correspond with those obtained by me. His deductions, however, are somewhat wide of the mark. He found that the thousandth part of a grain of viper-venom would kill a sparrow, and, taking this as a basis of calculation, he concluded that not less than twelve grains would kill an ox, and two and-a-half grains a man. As a fact, three grains are fatal to an ox, and one grain to one grain and-a-half would, I believe, be sufficient to kill a man, though six grains are sometimes shed at one bite of a cobra. I do not think that the poison of the larger vipers and that of the Colubrine snakes differ much in strength, quantity for quantity; the difference, if any, would, of course, be in favour of that of the Colubrine snakes. As will be explained subsequently, there is a difference in the physiological action of the two kinds of venom.

While the average amount of poison possessed by a cobra is about two and-a-half to three grains, though it may be either more or less, the average amount possessed by many other snakes is not more than half a grain, sufficient to prove fatal to a child, and to give rise to serious, though, perhaps, not fatal, symptoms



in a man. Here, then, we have one of the reasons of the favourable reputation of so many useless remedies.

It must now be acknowledged that the only fair test of any antidote to snake-poisoning in the lower animals, is the employment of the dried poison in the smallest fatal dose, whereby plenty of time is afforded the remedy to manifest its effects.

The only fair test of an antidote.

A very interesting case is mentioned by Chevers, illustrating the mortal power of the venom of the krait. A man named Etwaree went to Chitrapore, in Purneah, being engaged in making bricks there, and was learning how to charm snakes, from Poonai and Jooman, two men who were afterwards brought to trial on a charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder by causing the deaths, by snake-bite, of Titroo, Menghon, and Jikree. One Sunday, Poonai and Jooman wanted to make the snake bite Etwaree, but he naturally objected. The snake-charmers thereupon pulled his ears and accused him of cowardice, and told him that, even if the snake did bite him, they could, by charms, cure him. They produced a krait about three feet long, and placed it in front of the four men, and made Titroo place his right hand on the ground, and the snake crawl over it. At first the snake did

Three men killed and one poisoned by one krait.



not bite, but when Poonai struck it with a cane, it immediately bit Titroo. After this, in the same manner, the snake was made to bite Menghon and Jikree, and lastly, the survivor Etwaree. Titroo died half an hour before day-break, Menghon and Jikree appeared to be well after Titroo's death, but both died at mid-day. The man Etwaree became seriously ill, but recovered in six days. The prisoners were sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

The following are Fontana's deductions regarding the physiological action of the poison, and they are well worthy of notice :

Fontana's  
views as to the  
physiological  
action of  
venom.

First, he asserts, that the poison has no direct action upon the nerves—that they neither are affected, nor are they the vehicle by which any change is wrought in the animal. On the other hand it is proved that the blood is the medium by which the body is affected. He, however, considered that the changes were on the blood alone, and that death was the result of its spontaneous coagulation. This theory is opposed to facts, as he himself states in the first part of his work. The heart, he says, is the last affected. This is certainly true, for the fact has been clearly demonstrated by more recent investigators.

He modifies  
his theory.

He modifies his theory regarding the effect of the poison on muscular irritability in these words:



"I did not know when I wrote the first part of this work that the venom of the viper has no action on the nerves, and that, when it is introduced into the blood, it kills an animal in a few instants. It is not that in effect the irritability is not diminished in the animal that has been bit, and that it is not even destroyed in a little time, but this is rather an effect than a cause, and is a consequence of the change caused in the blood by the venom rather than an effect of the venom on the muscular fibers."

There is an undoubted change in the blood (if only mechanical) by the presence of the venom, but this change is certainly not spontaneous coagulation. On the contrary, the blood is generally found fluid.\* And although the venom may not act on an exposed sciatic nerve, because it is not capable of absorbing the poison, still it is quite different when the fluid on which this nerve depends for its vitality is radically altered. Moreover, Fontana's experiments on the spinal cord seem to indicate that the poison certainly has some direct action on the nerve-centres, and, from experiments made by Fayrer and Brunton, they were of opinion that, on the one hand, the poison acts through

Effects of  
viper venom  
on the blood.

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\* This subject is dealt with more fully further on.



the blood on the great nerve-centres, peripheries, and even the muscles themselves, leading to paralysis of the muscles of respiration, etc., and consequent death by asphyxia; and on the other hand, through the blood on the heart, causing it to cease to act in systole,\* these different results being dependent on the quantity of poison injected and the manner of its injection.

Fontana on  
the intraven-  
ous injection  
of ammonia.

The treatment that has enjoyed such a reputation in Australia, and which is generally believed to have originated with Dr. Halford, was in great repute in Italy nearly a century ago, as the following extract from a letter† from Fontana to M. Gibelin will show :—

“It is very true that our Italian journals report cures by *ammonia injected into the veins of persons bitten by the vipers*: and it is also true that these cases partake of the marvellous and almost of the miraculous. It appears, moreover, that certain individuals have had great pleasure in assuring the public that a true specific against the poison has been discovered, that which I had sought in vain for many years, and which, with philosophical candour, I had declared the inutility of searching for. I must

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\* There appear to be very good grounds for doubting whether cobra-poison ever acts on the heart in this way.

† *Medical Times and Gazette*, August 3rd, 1873.



confess that it did not occur to me that I should find a remedy in *Medicinâ Infusoria*." Fontana made some experiments and found the treatment unsuccessful.

The subject of snake-poisoning attracted the attention of Dr. Patrick Russell in 1796. His book, which was published by the Court of Directors of the East India Company, contains drawings and descriptions of several snakes, venomous and non-venomous, but principally of the latter. Dr. Russell performed a number of experiments with kraits, cobras, daboias, and the *Trimeresurus virid*, but there is little of importance to notice. He brought the famous Tanjore pill very prominently before the public, but it does not appear that he placed much faith in its efficacy. He does not seem to have been very favorably impressed by the knowledge of the subject possessed by the members of his profession. He says: "It was matter of surprize, as well as of regret, to find so little known on the medical history of serpents in a country where much might have been reasonably expected. Numbers of stories, it is true, were to be met with, of the fatal effects, as well as of singular cures of venomous bites. But such were in general related from memory; the progress of the disease and succession of symptoms, had either not been attended

Dr. Patrick  
Russell's  
experiments.

Dr. Russell  
reads his  
brother pro-  
fessionals a  
lesson.



to or were indistinctly recollected ; the same story told at different times was found to vary in material circumstances, and the marvellous too often found place in the narrative. It is, therefore, to be wished that the medical gentlemen in India would, in future, bestow more attention on this subject than appears to have been done hitherto.\* Besides the Tanjore pill, Dr. Russell recommends either immediate amputation or the ligature.

The mangoose  
loses his  
reputation.

An impression prevails that the mangoose is proof against the poison of the cobra, but Fayrer has shown that this animal succumbs to the bite of a cobra as certainly as does any other animal. The mangoose, if left to itself to attack a snake, will invariably come off the victor, but if pushed on to the snake to make them fight, will probably be fatally bitten, as is recorded in a case by Russell.

A mangoose was made to approach a "katukarekula poda"—Daboia—and was accidentally forced too near when the snake bit it on the shoulder, upon which "it seized the snake by the neck and held fast for fifteen seconds, the snake all the while wreathing round the mangoose's limbs.

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\* Many Medical men do not even now know as much as they ought to as regards snakes. It is within my own knowledge that a poor unfortunate man lost his life, by amputation, for the bite of an innocent snake.



The instant they were separated, the mongoose fell down on its side as if dead." It died in two hours and a quarter, and the snake in eight hours.

I have not seen it recorded that the mongoose gnaws out the fangs of the snake, but it is a fact, and has been witnessed by several gentlemen.\*

A mongoose was let loose in a room with a cobra. The latter was gliding about the room, when the mongoose went cautiously up to it, and slightly touched it with its nose; the snake hissed gently, lifted its head, but still went gliding on. The mongoose again followed as if determined to make the snake lift its head, for the mongoose is far too wise to attack the snake while its head is on the ground. The snake at once turned round, balanced itself to strike, and began hissing; it darted two or three times, the little mongoose just stepping on one side to avoid the blow, its eyes fixed intently on the enemy, its nose pointed and nostrils expanded, and hair bristling, watching for an opportunity to make a rush and seize the snake. This skirmishing went on for some time; the snake at last made a dart, but before it could recover itself was seized by the back of the neck by the mongoose

The Mongoose  
and Cobra—a  
fight.

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\* This has since been confirmed by Wall.



which immediately proceeded to *gnaw out the fangs on both sides*. It then gave the snake two or three shakes and let it go, again returning to the attack whenever the snake lifted its head, and so on until the snake was nearly killed. The reptile remained game to the last; even when its strength was greatly exhausted, and its mouth bleeding profusely, it would strike at the mongoose, but in a wild kind of way, and without any precision of aim. As I have before observed, this was witnessed by several gentlemen, to whom I afterwards showed the wounds caused by the gnawing out of the fangs. This was witnessed twice afterwards.

Russell is in error in stating that all cobra-poison is exactly alike in appearance. The spectacled-cobra, which lives in dry places, has viscid amber-coloured poison, while the keuntiah-cobra, which is generally found in paddy-fields, has a light-coloured, watery poison.

In the year 1799, we find Mr. Boag not only advocating the Abbé Fontana's treatment of snake-poisoning by the administration of nitrate of silver and nitric acid baths, but attempting to establish a theory whereby to account for the efficacy of the treatment. After telling us it would be an endless and unprofitable task to enumerate all the remedies that have from time

Mr. Boag  
advocates  
Fontana's  
treatment.



to time been recommended, he details several which he considers the most worthy of notice. Amongst these he mentions human saliva, which, "as we are informed by Seneca and the elder Pliny," enjoyed considerable reputation as a remedy in viper-bite. He also refers to the snake-root recommended in both India and America. Ammonia, which had been in great repute, had apparently lost ground, as it was then pretty generally acknowledged that it possessed no specific power, its only action being to stimulate the heart and vascular system to a more vigorous action, and, moreover, this stimulation was only temporary. These views thoroughly coincide with those of more recent authorities who have had experience in the matter. Arsenic is condemned as producing very violent results, and, therefore, being liable to cause death. The only cases in which Mr. Boag considered it might be employed were the more desperate ones. Mercury is spoken of as deserving of trial, as "much good might be anticipated from its use," though it should be given in a more convenient form than was then prescribed.

Ammonia had  
lost ground.

Mr. Boag's theory was, that the venom sub-  
tracted the oxygen of the blood, so leading to  
death, and he founds this theory on four argu-  
ments, as he terms them, with some of which,

Mr. Boag's  
theory.



however, it is difficult to concur. These four arguments are :—

*1st.*—"Man, and other warm-blooded animals, exposed to an atmosphere deprived of oxygen, quickly expire. The poison of a serpent, when introduced into the blood, also causes death, but carried into the circulation by a wound, and in very small quantity, its operation is comparatively slow and gradual."

*2nd.*—"The appearances on dissection in both cases are very similar, the blood becomes of a darker colour, and coagulates about the heart and large vessels, the irritability of the fibres is nearly in the same degree destroyed, and the body has a strong tendency, in both instances, to putrescency."

*3rd.*—"Dr. Mead mixed the venom of the viper and healthy blood together out of the body, and he did not perceive that it produced any change in its appearance; this arose from his mixing a small quantity of the venom with a large quantity of the blood, but if two or three drops of venom be mixed with forty or fifty drops of blood, it immediately loses its vermilion colour, becomes black, and incapable of coagulation."

*4th.*—"It is a very remarkable circumstance that the poison of the serpent has most power over those animals whose blood is the warmest,



and the action of whose heart is the most lively ; while, on the contrary, it is not a poison to the snake itself, nor in general to cold-blooded animals. The reason appears to be this ; cold-blooded animals do not require a large quantity of oxygen to preserve them in health, this is evident from the conformation of their heart and respiratory organs, as already mentioned."

Therefore, as I have before pointed out, Mr. Boag concludes that death from snake-bite simply arises from the abstraction of the oxygen from the blood.

The first argument requires no special notice, but the second contains inaccuracies ; the blood may or may not coagulate in cases of snake-poisoning, and it certainly does not generally coagulate about the heart and larger vessels, nor is there usually, in my experience, any particular tendency to rapid putrefaction in snake-poisoning ;\* not that I attach much value to the fact, nor do I believe that *general* decomposition is particularly rapid after death from suffocation.† It is true that blood remains fluid

Mr. Boag's  
theory  
criticised.

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\* I am aware that a few cases have been reported.

† I say *general* decomposition, because in cases of death from hanging, especially if the ligature has remained around the neck, decomposition of the head and neck commences more rapidly than in any other part.



if mixed with a large quantity of snake-poison, but it must be remembered that, in the human body, the relative dilution is not three to fifty, but perhaps two to nine thousand six hundred. The question of the condition of the blood as regards fluidity is not, however, of much importance except from a medico-legal point of view. It is a remarkable fact that while the blood of a dog poisoned by venom coagulates after death, that of a human being remains permanently fluid. This is a point which will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

The fourth argument is most remarkable. Mr. Boag observes that a poisonous snake is protected from the effects of its own poison, by its physical conformation, which enables the animal to live with a very small amount of oxygen. Unfortunately for this argument, however, venomous and non-venomous snakes do not differ anatomically, and yet the venom of the former will kill the latter. Mr. Boag is also in error in stating that the poison is not generally fatal to cold-blooded animals. Although its action is, of course, somewhat slower, it is none the less fatal. I would not be understood to mean that deoxidation of the blood to some extent is not a result of cobra-poisoning; it certainly is, but it is the result of the action of



the venom upon the respiratory centres, &c., in the medulla.

The treatment Mr. Boag recommends is interesting. The principle is the speedy oxygenation of the system, and the means to this end are the following:—

“External treatment,” which may be divided into local and general; first, suction of the wound as recommended by Celsus. This measure should not be omitted, though Mr. Boag does not think it is very successful. Mr. Boag evidently believed with Celsus that this proceeding can be adopted with perfect safety to the operator; but that it is not so, has been proved by Fayrer and others; undoubtedly, the risk is slight, but still it exists. Suction is, moreover, absolutely useless.

The next measures are the ligature and scarification of the wound, which should then be washed with a weak solution of lunar caustic and water, a warm bath acidulated with nitric acid just sufficiently to irritate the skin. This bath should be continued at intervals. And lastly the administration of nitrate of silver in half-grain doses, and “a more highly oxygenated atmosphere might be breathed by means of a pneumatic apparatus adapted for the purpose, as recommended by Dr. Beddoes.”\*

Ligature and  
scarification.

Artificial  
respiration.

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\* Artificial respiration (*vide* Chapter III).



Curiously enough, after recommending the above, Mr. Boag made some experiments, every one unsuccessful. And yet we find him stating that "I am of opinion that the method of cure mentioned in the foregoing essay is most rational and the most likely to succeed in preventing death, as well as the other bad consequences which sometimes follow the bite of serpent that is not mortal." The mere oxygenation of the blood could not possibly save a victim, as the damage done to the nervous system is irreparable.

It is difficult to understand on what grounds Mr. Boag comes to a conclusion so directly opposed to the result of his experiments.

Mr. John Williams advocates ammonia.

In 1801, the ammonia treatment again found an advocate in Mr. John Williams. He evidently was a staunch believer in its efficacy, as he observes: "The following statement of facts relative to the cure of persons bitten by snakes selected from a number of cases which have come within my own knowledge, requires no prefatory introduction as it points out the means of obtaining the greatest self-gratification the human mind is capable of experiencing, that of the preservation of the life of a fellow-creature, and snatching him from the jaws of death, by a method which every person is capable



of availing himself of." Professor Halford could not have written in a more laudatory tone of the system of treatment he has so persistently advocated. As no system of treatment is complete without a theory, Mr. Williams stirs one up from the depths of his imagination, which, though somewhat weak and obscure, is still a theory. He observes that, "as the poison diffuses itself over the body by the returning venous blood, as proved by the effects of a ligature placed between the wound and heart, destroying the irritability and rendering the system paralytic, it is probable that volatile caustic alkali, in resisting the disease of the poison, does not act so much as a specific in destroying its quality, as by counteracting the effect on the system, by stimulating the fibres, and preserving that irritability which it tends to destroy."

Mr. Williams's theory.

In other words, the ammonia does not act chemically upon the poison, but it counteracts its effects physiologically. What the "disease of the poison" is, and how the ammonia counteracts it, Mr. Williams leaves to our imagination.

He then gives seven cases, of which only one terminated fatally.

The first case was only a supposed case of snake-bite. The second was that of "an old

Mr. Williams's cases.



woman of the Brahman caste, who was bitten, between the thumb and finger, by a cobra." She became "speechless and convulsed, with locked jaws, and a profuse discharge of saliva running from the mouth." Mr. Williams gave her two drachms of "volatile caustic alkali spirit, when she evidently got better" and "perfectly recovered in about half an hour. The Brahman of the house would not allow the snake to be killed."\*

The third case is not deserving of notice.

The fourth case is the following:—"In July 1784, the wife of a servant of mine was bitten by a cobra di capello, on the outside of the little toe of her right foot. In a few minutes she became convulsed, particularly about the jaws and throat, with continued gnashing of the teeth. She at first complained of a numbness extending from the wound upwards, but no ligature was applied to the limb. About sixty drops of the volatile caustic alkali spirit were given to her in water, by forcing open her mouth, which was strongly convulsed; in about seven minutes the dose was repeated, when the convulsions left her, and in three more she became sensible and spoke to those who attended her. A few drops of spirit had

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\* This superstition has already been referred to.



also been applied to the wound. The snake was killed and brought to me, which proved to be a cobra di capello." These are not the symptoms of cobra-poisoning; insensibility and convulsions are never present except for a short time before dissolution. The woman may have fainted from fear, or she may have been feigning—not at all an unusual circumstance in supposed cases of snake-bite. The finding of the snake proves nothing.

The other cases are equally wonderful, except the last, which terminated fatally !

The administration of ammonia was again advocated in 1809, by Dr. Macrae, who was himself bitten by a cobra; he took "thirteen spoonsful of the ammonia."

Dr. Macrae again advocates the ammonia treatment.

In 1825, Mr. Breton performed a series of experiments with the cobra, daboia, and bungarus fasciatus, and arrived at the following conclusions:—

*Firstly.*—"Although the effect of the venom of a serpent may be for several hours very evident, an animal is capable, without any remedy whatever, of surviving its action; for the day after being bitten, the dog remained several hours apparently in a dying state, but in the course of the following day recovered perfectly."

*Secondly.*—"After the first or second emission of the poison, it becomes too weak to destroy even a whelp three parts grown."



Mr. Breton's  
experiments.

Here Mr. Breton has mistaken the quantity for the quality ; it is not that the poison is *too weak*, but the quantity *too small*. But we have instances on record in which several dogs have been killed in succession by one cobra, and a case is cited by Dr. Chevers, in which three men died, and one became much affected by the bites of one krait.\*

*Thirdly.*—"An innoxious snake can be killed by the venom of a poisonous snake."

*Fourthly.*—"Rabbits and pigeons are killed in two or three minutes, and full-grown dogs in fifteen or twenty."

*Fifthly.*—"A poisonous snake is unsusceptible of the poison of another snake."

Mr. Breton was evidently a very careful and astute observer.

Dr. Butter  
recommends  
opium as an  
antidote.

Vol. II of the "Medical and Physical Transactions of the Calcutta Society" contains an article "On the treatment of persons bitten by venomous snakes," by Donald Butter, Esq., M.D. The author had such faith in his mode of treatment that he reprinted his paper and circulated it gratis. After referring briefly to the essays by Messrs. Williams and Boag, he says: "As I thought it probable that some of my professional brethren, who have had opportunities of seeing

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\* Referred to at page 85.



such cases, might have been in the habit of employing a more active treatment, I endeavoured, in a letter printed in the Calcutta *John Bull* of the 20th October 1823, to draw their attention to the general advantage which would arise from a publication of the results of their practice." To the letter there appears to have been little response by the medical profession. Dr. Butter recommends the administration of opium, brandy, and sulphuric æther, and this treatment is founded on the hypothesis that the heart and arterial system are principally affected. It will be seen hereafter that this theory is altogether untenable, and that the main action of the venom of the cobra is upon the nervous system and respiratory centres. This plan of treatment appears to have been advocated by Mr. Latta. Dr. Butter, besides recommending extreme caution, also speaks favourably of the use of the ligature, dry-cupping, and suction of the wound. I have tested the efficacy of this treatment on the lower animals, but found it as unsuccessful as Fontana did nearly a hundred years ago. Dr. Butter admits that the species of snake "was ascertained in one or two instances only," but *supposes* they were cobras. The following case, quoted by Dr. Butter, is interesting, but some of the symptoms, so far as they are described, appear to be



more the result of the treatment than the effects of snake-poisoning.

The case is as follows:—

Dr. Batter's  
supposed cases  
of snake-  
poisoning.

“ April 22nd, 1825.—Soobhan Khan, *Sipahee*, 6th Company, Goruckhpore Light Infantry, aged about 18 years, about 55 minutes after midnight, bitten in the left instep and shin by a snake, *supposed* (the italics are mine) from its size to be a cobra di capello, at one o'clock five minutes A.M., and when brought to me, was speechless and insensible, but had the power of moving his legs. Ligature instantly applied, and R. Opii drachm one, with brandy ounce one, and spirit menth. pip. ten minims, administered; pulse hardly perceptible either in the heart or arteries; surface cold, made to walk about between two men. At 1-10 minutes, heat and circulation returning. At 1-15 minutes, syncope. Gave a second dose as above, soon after which circulation again returned, and at 1-20 minutes, he was perfectly well, and described very clearly the manner in which the accident happened. He now walked about unassisted; and at 1-35 minutes, half an hour after he took the first dose, I removed the ligature as I had been in the habit of doing when the patients had completely recovered. At 1-40 minutes, he suddenly fainted; ligature was instantly reapplied, and a third dose, as



above, given, and the wounds well washed with hot water. Circulation still continuing very weak, with foaming at the mouth, occasional syncope, and convulsive twitches of the arms ; at 1-45 minutes, a fourth, and at 2 A.M., a fifth dose, all in the above proportions, were given ; after which he rapidly recovered from all symptoms of collapse, but still complained of giddiness, which I now ascribed to the medicines, as his pulse was full and regular" (evidently the man was becoming intoxicated). "His wounds were again well washed with hot water, and at about 3 A.M., he became slightly delirious" (intoxicated ?), "his imagination being haunted with the idea of a snake coming to attack him." This youth took five hundred minims of tincture of opium. Dr. Butter concludes by stating that he gave the man three ounces of Epsom salts. As far as one can judge from the description, I must admit that this case is as unlike a genuine case of snake-poisoning as any I have ever seen or read. Dr. Butter, after trial, condemns Mr. Williams' treatment, the administration of ammonia, which was said by him never to fail, as being sound in principle, but unsuccessful in practice. While it is true that the natives of India suppose that opium-eaters are more proof against snake-poison than other



people, there can be no doubt, from recent experiments carried on in the most systematic manner, that the drug is useless in cases of snake-poisoning.

Recurrence of  
pain in bitten  
part.

A curious effect is said sometimes to follow the bite of a snake :—" In 1855, Mr. Souberran published the case of a gentleman who, having been bitten by a viper, in the year 1849, asserted that he still experienced *attacks of rather severe pain in the arm bitten*, with sensations of lassitude and malaise, these *symptoms recurring every year in the month of April*, and lasting a month."

Dr. Demeurat relates the following instance of a similar occurrence :—" A woman was bitten by a viper, in the right forearm, on the 28th May, 1824. She suffered at the time from nausea and vomiting, headache and chilliness. The arm also became swollen, and a dark red patch, covered by a large bleb, formed at the spot which was bitten. This affection extended across the forearm, and a large quantity of serosity exuded daily from the furrows between the bullæ. Beneath the raised epidermis was a thick false membrane. After eighteen months this membrane became black and dry, and the woman tore it off in one piece. The skin beneath was red, but soon recovered its healthy

Recurrence of  
peculiar signs  
after viper-  
bite.



appearance. This was in November 1826. The next year, on May the 28th, the eruption returned, and continued till November. These *phenomena repeat themselves each year, commencing about the same day.*" Dr. Demeurat does not say that he himself witnessed the phenomena. ("Year Book of Medicine and Surgery," 1863.)

This annual recurrence of symptoms does not appear to be confined to cases of snake-bite, as <sup>Livingstone's case.</sup> Livingstone ("Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa") mentions a case of the bite of a lion, in which it occurred. Livingstone says, after describing a fight with a lion, in which he took the most prominent part, "a wound from this animal's teeth resembles a gunshot wound; it is generally followed by a great deal of sloughing and discharge, and pains are felt in the part periodically ever afterwards. I had on a tartan jacket on the occasion, and I believe that it wiped off all the virus from the teeth that pierced the flesh, for my two companions in this affray have both suffered from the peculiar pains, while I have escaped with only the inconvenience of a false joint in my limb. The man whose shoulder was wounded, showed me *his wound actually burst forth afresh on the same month of the following year.* This curious point deserves the attention of inquirers."



Snake-stones.

The famous snake-stone has long been in repute in Asia, but it was never credited with any efficacy in cases of viper-bite in Europe. In 1662, some specimens were taken from India by three Franciscan friars, and deposited in the museum of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, where they came under the notice of Redi. It was believed that the stone was found in the head of a snake. Taverini and Kempfer, however, considered it to be an artificial fabrication. Dr. Alexander Stuart stated (1749-50) that it was made of the burnt bones of the small buffalo. Captain Herbert asserts that he obtained one from the people of Jowalins, who said it was found with detritus in the valley of the Satlej. Calculi taken from the stomach and intestines of different animals are sometimes used as snake-stones. There are, no doubt, many kinds, all equally useless.\*

Snake-stones.

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\* Dr. Davy truly says:—"Too often medicines have got into repute as antidotes from being given in slight cases in which recovery would have taken place without medical treatment,—beneficial changes that were due merely to the preservative powers of the constitution. The reputation that many Indian medicines, and especially that snake-stones, have acquired, affords striking proof of the preceding remarks: of three different kinds of these stones which I have examined, one consisted of partially burnt bone, another of chalk, and the third principally of organic matter; this last resembled a bezoar. All of them (excepting the first, possessed of a slight absorbent power)



Dr. Davy, in 1839, published an account of some experiments he performed with some of the poisonous snakes of Ceylon (*"Physiological and Anatomical Researches"*); and in his "conclusions and general remarks" points out that, "the principal seat of the diseased action is the lungs," but he appeared to think that this action is confined to cases of viper snake-bite. He believed that the virus of colubrine-snakes acts primarily and principally on the blood and muscles, tending to coagulate the former and convulse and paralyze the latter. He was erroneously of opinion that the bite of the daboia is generally more dangerous than that of the cobra.

Dr. Davy's  
researches.

In 1874 I wrote:—

"At no period has the subject of snake-poisoning received so much attention as it has during the past eight or ten years. Drs. Fayrer and Shortt, in India, Dr. Weir Mitchell, in America, Dr. Halford, in Australia, and Dr. Brunton—in conjunction with Dr. Fayrer—in England, have all been labouring in the hope of finding that which has baffled the ingenuity of ages, and

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were quite inert, and incapable of having any effect, exclusive of that which they might produce, as superstitious medicines, on the imagination of a patient." The first kind of stone referred to by Dr. Davy was manufactured by the monks of Manilla, who carried on a lucrative trade in them with Indian merchants.



which, if found, would be an inestimable boon to mankind. Although no antidote has been discovered, much good work has lately been done as regards the physiological action of the poison, and if there be in existence a remedy, the more intimately we become acquainted with the *modus operandi* of snake-poison, the more likely are our efforts to be crowned with success.

Fayrer and  
Brunton's  
theory.

"According to Drs. Fayrer and Brunton, who lately read an exhaustive paper on the subject before the Royal Society, the poison may kill in any of four ways:\*

"*Firstly*.—By tetanizing the heart, and so stopping the circulation of the blood.

"*Secondly*.—By paralyzing the muscles of respiration, and so giving rise to asphyxia.

"*Thirdly*.—By a combination of the two former conditions.

"*Fourthly*.—By giving rise to *septicæmia*.

"It is much to be regretted that some experimenters have so unwisely advocated, and in the strongest terms, a certain treatment which has not stood the test of an impartial investigation; and it seems difficult to understand, granting them honesty of purpose and common-

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\* Afterwards modified, as will be learnt subsequently.



sense, how they could have arrived at conclusions so diametrically opposed to facts.

"I am not at liberty to enter more fully into an account of the theories, &c., of the more recent experimenters, as I should be anticipating the report of the Commission appointed by Government, of which I am a member. I hope, however, that this humble attempt to put into a concise form all the available literature of the subject, will be a means of saving future investigators from falling into the very common error of advocating and expounding exploded theories, and perpetuating exposed fallacies."

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### CHAPTER III.

The Researches of Brunton and Fayrer and Weir Mitchell  
— The Indian Snake-Poison Commission — Artificial  
respiration — Experiments with Australian snakes —  
Mr. Pedler's analysis — Cunningham and Lewis's micros-  
copic examination — Chevers on the effects of venom on  
the blood—Dr. A. J. Wall's investigations — Symptoms  
of cobra-poisoning resemble those of glosso-laryngeal  
paralysis — Daboia-poisoning, symptoms of, compared  
with those of cobra-poisoning — Wall on the venom of  
the rattlesnake.

The researches  
of Brunton  
and Fayrer,  
and Weir  
Mitchell.

THE researches are now brought down to the  
time when Fayrer and Brunton were present-  
ing their valuable series of papers, on the physio-  
logical action of snake-venoms, to the Royal  
Society of England. Dr. Weir Mitchell, of Phila-  
delphia, had already finished and published his  
elaborate essay on the venom of the rattlesnake.  
It would be impossible to do justice to those  
researches within the space at my command, but  
I will indicate their main features and results.

Constitutional  
and other  
effects of cobra-  
poisoning and  
daboia-poison-  
ing compared.

Brunton and Fayrer considered there was little  
difference between the constitutional symptoms  
of daboia-poisoning and cobra-poisoning. The  
principal difference was said to be the more exten-



sive local injury inflicted by the bite of the daboia. Sir Joseph Fayrer must have subsequently modified his views in this matter, as will be seen hereafter.

As regards the effects of re-agents, &c., on the Effects of re-agents, &c. action of the venom, Brunton and Fayrer say it is not destroyed, and is scarcely impaired by drying. This had already been conclusively Drying. proved by Weir Mitchell and others. The local action of the venom is, however, altered by the process, the specific inflammation being much less extensive. Dilution has no effect in lessen- Dilution. ing the activity of the venom, except so far as it retards absorption.

They further held that an alcoholic extract Alcohol. possesses similar properties to the poison itself. I have since shewn, and been confirmed by Wall, that that is an error. The poisonous elements of the venom are not soluble in absolute alcohol. Weir Mitchell confirms my view as regards the venom of the rattlesnake.

Brunton and Fayrer held that admixture with Liq. potassæ and liq. ammoniæ. liq. ammoniæ and liq. potassæ did not alter the effects of the poison. Sir Joseph Fayrer subsequently altered his opinion (I think erroneously) as regards the effects of the admixture with liq. potassæ. I performed several experiments to elucidate this point in connection with the permanganate of potash question.



Effects of the  
venom on the  
muscles.

Weir Mitchell states that quivering of the muscles is due to the direct influence of the venom of the crotalus upon the ultimate sarcois elements. No quivering of the kind has been noticed by Brunton, Fayrer, Wall, or myself. He further observes, that muscular irritability is lost sooner than usual in crotalus - poisoning. The same has been observed, with regard to cobra-poisoning, by Brunton and Fayrer. Nevertheless, muscular irritability after death from snake-poisoning does occasionally exist for some time. Dr. Mitchell says that, in every instance, venom

Ultimate  
effects of venom  
on the muscles.

softened muscle in proportion to the length of time during which it remained in contact with it. The wounded muscle became almost diffuent, and assumed a dark colour and somewhat jelly-like appearance. The same change has been noticed by Brunton and Fayrer in some cases of cobra-poisoning. It is in daboia-bite, however, that it is more particularly observed. According to Weir Mitchell, in most of the cases of acute poisoning, the rhythm and force of the heart became affected before the respiration was suspended, and the organ continued to pulsate more or less perfectly for some time after all voluntary and reflex motion had ceased. The constant arterial pressure undergoes a rapid and singular diminution. "It is proper to add that, in some instances of

Effects on  
the heart.



death, in rabbits, for example, artificial respiration failed almost totally to sustain the cardiac power, but even in these the heart remained irritable to direct stimulus, and there was, consequently, no such thorough paralysis of the sarcous elements as is seen in some other poisoning." Fayrer and Brunton point out that, in cobra-poisoning, in what may be called sub-acute cases, the fatal issue is not to be attributed to any failure of the circulatory apparatus, since the heart often continues to beat for some considerable time after all reflex action has ceased. The Indian Snake Commission give many examples of this, and shew conclusively that the action of the poison upon the heart is commensurate with the amount of poison absorbed. Thus, when the animals operated on were bitten, the average time from the bite to the commencement of artificial respiration was forty-two minutes; and from the commencement of artificial respiration to the period of death, ten hours forty-one minutes. When half the quantity of virus ordinarily ejected was hypodermically injected into an animal, the average time from the injection to the commencement of artificial respiration was one hour ten minutes; and from this to death, seventeen hours forty-four minutes. Again, when only half a grain of cobra-poison was hypoder-



mically injected, the time from injection to commencement of artificial respiration was two hours forty-five minutes; and from that period to death, twenty-six hours eighteen minutes. And lastly, when a quarter of a grain was injected, the time from injection to artificial respiration was four hours two minutes; and from the commencement of artificial respiration to death, thirty-seven hours fifty minutes. According to Brunton and Fayrer, cases do occur in which the heart is principally affected,—when an overwhelming dose of poison is injected into the areolar tissue or directly into a vein. The heart then is said to stop in systole. This is, however, very questionable.

Action of  
venom on the  
capillary  
system.

There is either a distinct difference in the action of the venom of the crotalus and that of the cobra, or some error of observation, since the observations of Mitchell, and those of Brunton and Fayrer, exhibit a material discrepancy. While Mitchell states that no increase of pressure followed the introduction of venom into the system, therefore it exerts no marked influence in contracting the capillaries, an experiment made by Fayrer and Brunton shews that the pressure did rise considerably, on the injection of the poison into a vein; and they remark: "The fact that the blood-pressure sank slowly and did not fall below thirty, even after the heart had



almost entirely ceased, shows that the arterioles were much contracted." In Mitchell's experiment the difference fell in three minutes from 16 mm. to 4 mm., representing a diminution of 10 mm. five minutes after the infliction of the bite of the snake.

Weir Mitchell found that the motions of the intestinal canal were in no way affected. This assertion applies equally in cases of cobra-bite. Indeed, Brunton and Fayrer affirm that they are quickened. I have constantly observed this fact in the course of the conduct of my experiments.

Action of  
venom upon  
intestinal  
movement.

Weir Mitchell examined the cilia from the mucous membrane of the throat of a frog; their activity appeared to be undisturbed in both acute and chronic poisoning. Brunton and Fayrer found that their activity was generally, though not invariably, arrested by cobra-poison.

Action of  
venom on  
ciliary move-  
ment.

The poison has no direct influence on the nerves, as was proved by the application of venom to the exposed sciatic nerve.

Action of  
viper-venom  
on the ner-  
vous system.

Dr. Weir Mitchell states that, in crotalus-poisoning, the loss of nervous power commences in the nerve centres, but whether the sensory nerves are or are not affected is difficult to determine. The motor nerves are not affected. In cobra-poisoning, Fayrer and Brunton assert, that the grey matter of the spinal

Action of  
venom upon  
the sensory  
and motor  
nerves, and  
upon the  
nerve centres.



column is paralyzed, but that the white sensory columns remain intact; further, that while the motor nerves are sometimes unaffected, they are often completely paralyzed, or, at least, are so far deadened that they no longer transmit to the muscles (such as those of respiration) the ordinary stimuli from the medulla, though they are capable of transmitting stronger impulses; as exemplified by the convulsions which occur when the medulla is greatly stimulated by the increasing venosity of the blood. Many interesting examples of this will be found in the Indian Snake Commission's Report. Brunton and Fayer believe the sensory nerves to be little, if at all, affected. The sensory ganglia are not affected until the last. (See the chapter dealing with Halford's treatment in snake-poisoning.)

Effects of  
venom upon  
the calorifa-  
cient functions.

Dr. Weir Mitchell invariably noticed a gradual fall of temperature, except when death was very rapid. The experiments made by the Indian Snake Commission show a fall of temperature occasionally, but not invariably.

Effects of  
venom on the  
blood.

Weir Mitchell found that the longer death is delayed the more apt is the blood to become incoagulable. "So diffuent was it in some cases," that he "poured it from glass to glass like water, and kept it thus until it decomposed completely. In other cases the heart contained a few loose and



very weak clots, and in others again, only rare shreds of coagulum were met with." Before I had read Weir Mitchell's excellent monograph, I came to the conclusion—in which the Snake Commission concurred—that the fluidity of the blood is dependent upon, and is in direct proportion to, the amount of venom taken up into the circulation.

Dr. Mitchell, in common with all observers but Dr. Halford, could find no particular abnormality in the blood corpuscles, or in the blood's appearance under the microscope.\* He arrived at the following conclusions:—

"1st.—That, on animals which survive the poisoning for a time, the blood is so altered as to render the fibrin incoagulable.

"2nd.—Experiments, in and out of the body, have given proof that the change is gradual, and that the absence of coagulation is not due to checked formation of fibrin, but to alterations produced by the action of the venom in that fibrin which already exists in the circulating blood.

"3rd.—The influence thus exerted is of a putrefactive nature, and imitates in a few hours

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\* Brunton and Fayrer found the blood-corpuscles crenated in one case, but they believed that it was due to rapid evaporation.



the ordinary results of days of change. It is probably even more rapid within the body, on account of the high temperature of the economy.

“4th.—The altered blood retains its power to absorb gases, and thus to change its own colour.

“5th.—The blood-corpuscles are unaffected in acute poisoning by crotalus venom, and are rarely and doubtfully altered in the most prolonged cases, which result fatally.

“6th.—The contents of the blood-globule of the guineapig can be made to crystallize as is usual after other modes of death.”

Altered relations between the blood and tissues.

In respect to rattlesnake-poisoning, Weir Mitchell informs us that, among the most constant and most curious lesions in the case of secondary poisoning, are the ecchymoses which are found on and in the viscera of the chest and belly; most frequently affecting the intestinal canal, they may, and do occur, in any cavity, and on any organ.

These ecchymoses are not so extensively met with in cobra-poisoning, but they are to be found in viper-poisoning, and in a minor degree in krait-poisoning. Weir Mitchell thus sums up regarding acute cases:—

Causation of death.

“1st.—That the heart becomes enfeebled soon after the bite, which is due to the direct influence of the venom on the organ, and not to the



precedent loss of the respiratory function. The heart, however, notwithstanding this loss of power, continues to beat after respiration has ceased, and its tissues remain for a time irritable.

"2nd.—Artificial respiration lengthens the life of the heart, but does not sustain it so long as when the animal has died by woorara or decapitation.

"3rd.—That in the frog the heart-acts continue after respiration has ceased, and sometimes survive until the sensory nerves and the nerve centres are dead, the motor nerves alone remaining irritable.

"4th.—That in warm-blooded animals respiration ceases, owing to paralysis of the nerve centres.

"5th.—That the sensory nerves, and the centres of nerve power in the medulla spinalis and medulla oblongata, lose their vitality before the efferent or motor nerves become affected.

"6th.—That the muscular system retains its irritability in the cold-blooded animals acutely poisoned, for a considerable time after death."

The cause of the death in chronic or secondary poisoning, Weir Mitchell says, "may, with propriety, then be referred to the incipient putrefactive changes which affect the blood, as well



as to the continued influence of the agencies which first act to depress the heart's action, and destroy nerve function."

The Indian  
Snake-poison  
Commission.

We have now arrived at the time when the Indian Snake-poison Commission (of which Dr. Ewart was President, and Dr. Mackenzie and I Members) issued their report in the latter part of the year. The object of the appointment of the Commission is thus described in the report :—" From experiments made in London with the dried poison of the Naga Tripudians (cobra), Drs. Fayrer and Lauder Brunton were led to infer that artificial respiration, applied to animals or human beings, poisoned by any of the *Thanatophidia of India*, might prove successful in prolonging or saving life.\* Dr. Fayrer states, in a letter, dated 29th November, 1872, to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for India, that, ' since my return to London, I have, in conjunction with Dr. Lauder Brunton, been making further investigations into the subject of snake-poisoning, especially with a view of ascertaining if there be any means of saving life, and though I cannot say that the desirable object of research has been attained, I am satisfied that the results of certain

Object of the  
appointment.

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\* Artificial respiration was first recommended by Dr. Beddoes (*vide* Chapter II). It was tried also by Dr. Weir Mitchell.



experiments are interesting and important, as they point in that direction. I have recorded an opinion, derived from a long and elaborate series of experiments, that none of the so-called antidotes possess the virtues or powers attributed to them; but, in the experiments recently made, it is ascertained beyond a doubt that the life of an animal poisoned by the cobra-virus may be prolonged for many hours by artificial respiration, and it is, therefore, possible that, if respiration be artificially continued for a sufficient length of time, life may be altogether preserved. In experiments performed upon the fowl and rabbit, after the most complete development of the physiological action of the poison, amounting to total paralysis and convulsions, conditions which immediately precede death, the convulsions ceased, and in one case the heart was kept beating vigorously for about nine hours (and probably then failed from imperfect respiration carried on in the cold)—a result never before attained by any means that I am aware of!’” I had kept a dog alive for nearly twenty-four hours by artificial respiration. The results obtained by artificial respiration in animals subject to the action of the curara, wourali poison, were calculated to encourage Dr. Fayrer to hope that similar treatment might possibly succeed in restoring to health



animals almost dead from snake-poisoning. He remarked, "There is apparently a strong analogy between the action of the cobra-virus and that of the curara poison of South America. It has been ascertained that an animal poisoned by this agent may, after apparent death for many hours, be restored, if artificial respiration be carefully and continuously applied for a sufficient length of time, the temperature of the animal being at the same time sustained at blood-heat by artificial warmth. Curara, it is believed, kills by paralyzing the peripheral distribution of the motor nerves, thus inducing asphyxia by involving the muscles of respiration in general paralysis. If, however, the heart's action can be sustained by artificial respiration during a sufficient length of time, to allow of elimination of the poison through the excretory organs, (for whilst the heart acts they continue to perform their functions), the paralyzed muscles regain their power, and life is slowly, but certainly, restored. I am not prepared to assert that the cobra-poison kills in exactly the same way as curara; I am inclined to believe that it does not; but still analogy in the results of experiments support, or, perhaps, rather suggest, the idea that, if artificial respiration be sustained in a case of cobra-poisoning, and life be thus



artificially supported for a sufficient length of time—it might be for days—elimination of the poison may occur, and recovery may result.” Sir Joseph Fayrer was, however, by no means sanguine of the success of the treatment.

This was the procedure adopted by the Commission. After poisoning the animal, a dog, either directly by the bite of a cobra, or by the hypodermic injection of the virus, when convulsions, general paralysis, and cessation of respiration were fully developed, a canula was quickly inserted into the trachea. In the external end of the canula, about a foot of India-rubber tubing was attached; and, into the free extremity of this, the nozzle of the bellows was fitted. The canula, tubing, and bellows, especially constructed for the purpose of avoiding clogging with mucus, were all connected and ready for use before the performance of the operation of tracheotomy was ever attempted. This was a necessary precaution, inasmuch as valuable time would have been lost had the connexions between the different parts of the apparatus been always made after the trachea had been opened. Care was taken to see that the channels, through which the respiration was to be carried on artificially, were clean and patent. To the canula was also attached a supplementary side tube, pro-

Mode of performing artificial respiration.



vided with a stop-cock, to admit of the escape of respired air, whenever it was found it was not being rapidly enough discharged by the side of the tube, through the mouth. The elastic recoil of the lungs and atmospheric pressure were generally sufficient to accomplish the act of expiration. Whenever these were deemed inadequate to empty the lungs, the opening of this stop-cock, and compression of the chest with the hands, were employed to secure efficient expiration, whilst the pumping in of air was in no way interrupted for a single instant.

Effects of artificial respiration.

As regards the effects of artificial respiration on animals bitten by snakes, the Commission remark: "Death from snake-poisoning is preceded by general muscular paralysis, induced by interference with the actions of the spinal cord, medulla oblongata, and it may be the central ganglia of the encephalon, convulsions, unconsciousness, and absolute cessation of respiration. The rhythmic action of the heart continues for about three or four minutes longer. In these experiments the time selected for the commencement of artificial respiration in the manner already indicated was the exact period when the breathing had ceased, and about three or four minutes prior to the stoppage of the beating of the heart. . . . The



average lapse of time between the infliction of the bite and the cessation of the respiratory process, was only *forty-two minutes*, the maximum and minimum having been *one hour and ten minutes*, and *twenty-five minutes* respectively" without artificial respiration. A cobra does, however, sometimes kill in a much shorter time. "The powerful influence of artificial respiration in supporting and prolonging life is well illustrated . . . . Life was thus prolonged on an average *ten hours and forty-one minutes*, the maximum having reached *seventeen hours and six minutes*, and the minimum *three hours and ten minutes*."

The Commission continued the experiments with decreasing doses of cobra-poison hypodermically injected; at last with the following result, when only one-fourth of a grain of the poison was injected. It took *four hours and two minutes* until artificial respiration was resorted to. In four minutes more, in the absence of this system, this animal's heart would have ceased to beat and somatic death been complete. But by its steady application, life was extended to *forty-one hours and fifty-two minutes*.

And the Commission thus sum up the result of the trial of artificial respiration:—"The power of artificial respiration in supporting the respira-



tory process; in maintaining the action of the heart, and the circulation of the blood to all parts of the body; in effecting the arterialization of the blood; in sustaining the life of the secreting and excreting organs, and that of the organic system of nerves; and in, probably, keeping up an imperfect form of nutrition of the tissues to which arterialized blood is supplied in abundance, for periods of time varying, to a great extent, according to the quantity of poison introduced into the system through the absorbent channels of the body, is therefore placed beyond all question.

Artificial respiration combined with the exhibition of drugs, etc.

“But its influence in saving life, even when very small quantities of the poison have found entrance into the juices, is extremely problematical. It occurred to us that there might be hope of preserving life if the method were employed in conjunction with certain drugs. And though that hope was, from our previous experience of the mortal nature of the poison over animal life, very faint, we resolved to try artificial respiration with the exhibition of medicines, and in a few instances with the transfusion of blood from a healthy dog into dogs poisoned with the virus of the cobra.” But the Commission found that the exhibition of drugs in no way improved the chances of prolonging or pre-



serving the lives of the animals experimented upon.

The Commission performed nearly *two hundred* experiments on dogs, and as many of them occupied both day and night, and I personally conducted everyone of them, I am in a position to say that the strain upon the experimenter was sometimes exceedingly great. After being up for three hours, I have remained in the experimenting room watching the dog experimented on for forty - six consecutive hours — without sleep and without leaving the room. This vigilance was absolutely necessary, as a half minute's cessation of the artificial respiration operations, on the part of the men, would have been fatal to the experiment in hand, and would have necessitated the conduct of a fresh experiment. Add to the number of hours, a close room, the peculiar stench of pariah dogs, and plenty of mosquitoes, and you may realize one's discomfort while the experiment lasted, and the state of fatigue afterwards.

As regards the quantity of cobra-poison required to kill, the Commission found that the tenth of a grain killed a dog, weighing 18 lbs., in eleven hours and thirty minutes. One-twentieth of a grain injected beneath the skin of a dog, weighing 26 lbs., produced drowsiness and vomit-

Tediousness  
of the experi-  
ments.

Fatal doses  
of poison.



ing, but the animal recovered. The *thirty-second* part of a grain injected into the peritoneal cavity of a dog, weighing 12 lbs., produced all the symptoms of cobra-poisoning, and eventually killed it in about fifty hours.

These results shew not only how fearfully subtle is cobra - poison, but how a favourable termination, after the manifestation of serious symptoms, may be attributed to the effects of the administration of reputed antidotes.

Experiments  
with Australian  
snakes.

Ammonia.

The Commission obtained some poisonous snakes from Australia — the *Pseudechis porphyriacus*, or black snake; and the *Hoplocephalus curtus*, the tiger snake. Both these snakes somewhat resemble the Indian cobra, but their fangs are smaller, and they probably secrete less poison and are not so deadly. With the poison of these snakes the Commission tested the efficacy of the ammonia treatment advocated by Halford, but, like Fontana, Fayrer, Hilson, and myself, in regard to Indian snake - poisoning, they found it useless. This decision was subsequently agreed with by the Melbourne Medical Society.\*

Mr. Pedler on  
cobra-venom.

The Report contains also a report of the analysis of cobra-poison by Mr. Alexander Pedler,

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\* As belief in this system of treatment has not yet quite died out, and as I am convinced it is most pernicious, I have dealt fully with the subject further on.



F. C. S. As regards Mr. Pedler's analysis the Commission observe :—

“ So far as we are aware, this is the first time that absolutely fresh cobra-poison has been submitted to ultimate analysis.” It will be observed, from a reference to the following tables, that the substance isolated and analyzed by Mr. Pedler is more nearly allied to albumen than that submitted to examination by Dr. Armstrong, F. R. S. The reason of this discrepancy may possibly be found to exist in the fact that the poison investigated by the former gentleman was fresh and pure, whilst that analyzed by the latter was already in a state of decomposition before it was analyzed :

		ARMSTRONG.	PEDLER.	Albumen.
		Crude poison (decompos- ing).	Pure and fresh poison.	
Carbon	...	43.55	52.87	53.4
Nitrogen	...	43.30	17.58	15.8
Hydrogen	...	...	7.51	7.1
Sulphur	...	...	not ascertained	1.8
Oxygen	...	...	Ditto	22.0

“ It is quite impossible,” says Mr. Pedler, “ to draw any deductions as to the nature of the poison. It is more than possible that the poison



is a mixture of albuminous principles with some specific poison." Blyth claims to have isolated a crystalline principle. He says: "The poison has been examined by several chemists, but until of late years with a negative result. The writer was the first to isolate, in 1876, a crystalline principle which appears to be the sole active ingredient; the yellow granules were dissolved in water, the albumen which the venom so copiously contains coagulated by alcohol, and separated by infiltration; the alcohol was then driven off at a gentle heat, the liquid concentrated to a small bulk, and precipitated with basic acetate of lead. The precipitate was separated, washed, and decomposed in the usual way by  $S. H_2$ , and on removing the lead sulphide, crystals having toxic properties were obtained." Gautier declared that he found an alkaloid in cobra-poison resembling a ptomaine. But considerable advances in the chemical analysis of the venoms have lately been made, and will hereafter receive attention. It is said that cobra-poison is the most powerful animal poison in existence, but after my experience with the ptomaine, which is generated in the bowels of persons suffering from cholera,\*

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\* There is a marked resemblance, in some respects, between the symptoms of *cholera-ptomaine* poisoning and cobra-poisoning.



I am inclined to doubt that statement, though, quantity for quantity, it may, of course, be so.

Cunningham and Lewis made a careful microscopic examination of cobra-poison and of the blood of the poisoned animals, but with negative results. Cunningham and Lewis's microscopic examination of venom, etc.

Dr. Wolfenden, late Professor of Physiology at the Charing-Cross Medical School, says, however: "I have for some time been making experiments upon the blood of many animals. I cannot consent to the generally received Wolfenden's experiments.

opinion that cobra-venom exerts no influence upon blood. My investigations, which will shortly be published, have convinced me that cobra-venom decolorises, by driving out the hæmoglobin a large proportion of the discs, and breaks up a large number of the white discs, completely filling the plasma with minute granules. The bacterial forms, which are present in such large numbers in cobra-venom, I do not think have anything to do with the activity of the venom.

When recovery takes place from poisoning with a dose of the poison insufficient to kill, it is not improbable that a condition of blood-poisoning may supervene, secondarily, as in one of the cases I have quoted." Neither Wall nor I have ever witnessed a condition of blood-poisoning after the injection of fresh venom. Recovery, when it does occur, is always



rapid and complete : not so in viper-poisoning.

Effect of venom  
on the blood.

Dr. Chevers's  
view erroneous.

The question of the fluidity or otherwise of the blood in persons poisoned by snake-venom is of some importance, medico-legally. At page 376 of Dr. Norman Chevers's important work on Medico-legal Jurisprudence, will be found the following foot-note :—"The reporter in the *Lancet* says, the blood was altogether dark, alkaline fluid (this was thirty hours after death, in the month of October), and it emitted a peculiar sour and sickly smell, quite different from the odour commonly known to pervade the dead-house.\* This is quite contrary to Indian experience. The blood drawn from an animal which has just died from cobra-poison always coagulates firmly. The blood of animals killed by Russell's viper does not coagulate." Now this statement, coming from so high an authority, is likely to mislead. The conditions under which the blood remains fluid, and under which it coagulates, are thus described by the Indian Snake Commission :—

Circumstances  
under which  
blood remains  
fluid after  
death.

The blood appears to remain fluid after death under the circumstances noted below :—

1st.—When a large quantity of the cobra-poison has been directly injected into the cir-

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\* This is the report of a case in which a man was bitten by a cobra at the Zoological Gardens, London.



culatation, as for example, into an artery or a vein.

*2nd.*—In cases where animals or human beings have been poisoned by the bite of vipers, such as the Russell's viper.

*3rd.*—In all cases of snake-bite, whether from the poisonous colubrine or viperine genera, in the human subject.

The blood undergoes either partial or complete coagulation under the following conditions :—

*1st.*—When a small quantity only of the cobra-poison has been injected into a vein or an artery.

*2nd.*—In cases where the lower animals have been bitten by the cobra.

Why the admixture of a large and quickly fatal injection of the cobra-virus into the circulation of animals should produce comparatively permanent fluidity of the blood, or interfere with its ordinary coagulability soon after removal from the body, or after death, and why the injection of a smaller and more slowly fatal quantity should interpose no obstacle to its speedy coagulation, are questions extremely difficult to account for or explain. We can only state the fact that, in the one case, coagulation occurs speedily; and in the other, this coagulation is retarded or altogether prevented by some cause at present unknown. I gave it as my opinion that the larger



the quantity of the poison absorbed, the nearer to fluidity will the blood be found after death,—that is to say, the fluidity of the blood is entirely dependent upon, and is in direct proportion to, the amount of the poison taken into the circulation. The fact of the blood remaining fluid in the case of man being bitten by a cobra and coagulating in the case of an effective cobra-bite in the lower animals, can probably be accounted for in this way. The poison is, no doubt, absorbed in the human subject in a large quantity before death supervenes, consequently the proportion of poison to blood is greater than in the lower animals. Whether this be the true explanation of the matter, I, of course, cannot positively assert, but, at any rate, it appears to me to be a rational solution of the problem.

Wall's investigations.

In 1883, Dr. Wall published the results of his investigations, which I think were commenced in 1875, and his contribution to the literature is certainly one of the most important ever published, though it must be remembered that, unlike most of his predecessors, he had a mass of important scientific material at hand to assist and direct him in his researches, which he undoubtedly conducted with much ability, care, and scientific precision, as his little work amply testifies. "The inquiry," says Wall, "that natur-



ally presents itself first in considering the subject of snake-poisoning is — How does snake-poison kill? and what are the changes it effects in the animal system? And, as a consequence of this— Is there only one poison, or are there several? Upon the answers to these questions depend both the certain recognition of snake-poisoning when it comes under observation, and the indications that must serve as guides to us in the treatment of it.” And on these lines Dr. Wall conducts

his enquiry. After explaining the effects of cobra-poison on animals of different classes, he shews that the symptoms in man are peculiar, owing to the difference in the organization of his nervous system. He draws special attention to the pain and to the local specific inflammation upon which the pain depends. Intense mental shock in snake-bite may render the victim insensible to pain, at least for a time.

Symptoms of cobra-poisoning in man.

The characteristic local condition he considers to be of the utmost practical importance. Externally there may be scarcely a sign on the skin to mark the spot where the snake inflicted its bite: or possibly, one or two small punctures, or even a scratch may be found, especially if the part bitten be the fingers.\* It may even happen that

The local effects of a snake-bite described.

\* When manipulating a large *Daboia*, sometime since, to extract its poison, I found that on one side two fully



the part is slightly swollen or discoloured. But whatever may be the condition of the external aspect, there will be found a distinct change in the parts beneath. Dr. Wall fully describes the appearances that are found beneath the true skin. Briefly stated, the areolar tissue will be found to resemble red-current jelly in appearance, or if a large quantity of venom has not been injected, there will be only a pinkish effusion. "This local hyperæmia," says Wall, "is the first indication that we obtain that snake-poison has really entered the system." True, but while admitting that it is of value as a diagnostic sign of a poisonous bite, I must observe that it is no certain indication of the injection into the tissues of a fatal dose of poison. Very extensive local mischief has been observed to have occurred in cases which have terminated in recovery. The practical importance of this appearance in the living subject, therefore, seems to be somewhat limited.

Medico-legal  
importance  
of local  
appearances in  
the dead.

I have said in the *living* subject, because in the dead it is really the *only* safe distinguishing

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formed fangs were unsheathed. Now, supposing this snake had effectively bitten a person, we should have found three distinct fang-marks at the bitten part. Not the slightest reliance is to be placed in the appearance of the scratches or punctures, though very much stress has been laid upon them as a means of diagnosing the bite of a venomous snake. (*Vide* p. 4.)



sign which can justify our concluding that death has resulted from snake-poisoning. Now, bearing in mind the fact that deaths under very suspicious circumstances are sometimes reported as from snake-poisoning, it behoves the officer conducting the *post mortem* examination to search diligently and minutely for this characteristic sign. At the same time it must be carefully borne in mind that, should the fangs puncture a vein and the poison be injected directly into it—a highly improbable contingency—the characteristic local appearances would not be observed. That cases of murder are sometimes returned as death from snake-bite, is shewn in the pages of Chevers's "Medical Jurisprudence;" and although a very significant case is within my own knowledge, I cannot believe that they are very common. Dr. Chevers's suggestion that the corpses of persons said to have died from the effects of snake-bite should be occasionally examined by the Civil Surgeon, is deserving of more attention than it has hitherto received.

As regards the characteristic symptoms of cobra-poisoning in man, they are thus described by Wall:—A feeling of intoxication appears to be the first constitutional effect of the poison. It is very generally complained of, but not uni-

Symptoms of  
cobra-poison-  
ing in man.



versally so, as it would require some intelligence on the victim's part to mention it. The next symptom is loss of power in the legs—at first staggering, then inability to support the legs—due to progressive upward paralysis of the spinal-cord and at last complete paraplegia. At this time there is scarcely any loss of power in the arms, which may remain completely under the influence of the will. The next symptoms are very characteristic. The patient loses power of speech, of swallowing, of moving the lips; the tongue becomes motionless and hangs out of the mouth, and the saliva, which is secreted in large quantities, runs down the face, the patient being equally unable to swallow it or eject it. "It is singular," says Dr. Wall, "that the striking resemblance of these symptoms to the disease known as glosso-laryngeal paralysis has not been previously noticed. Now, the preponderance of medical opinion attributes this disease to lesion of certain tracts of the medulla." Dr. Wall confirms the views of his predecessors when he remarks that "it is evident that cobra-poison has a special affinity for acting on the respiratory centre, and those ganglia allied to it in the medulla oblongata which are in connection with the vagus, the spinal accessory, and the hypoglossal nerves, and that it is directly

Resemblance  
of the symp-  
toms of  
cobra-poison-  
ing to those  
of glosso-  
laryngeal  
paralysis.



to this destructive action that we have to attribute death in most cases of cobra-poisoning.

Sir Joseph Fayrer first pointed out this fact, and he was confirmed in his opinion by Brunton and the Indian Commission. The respiration becomes slower and slower until the victim dies suffocated. Wall does not believe that cobra-poison ever kills by tetanizing the heart, as was supposed by Fayrer and Brunton, and I think there are grounds for believing that he is correct in his view. In very rapid cases of poisoning, instead of the gradual extinction of the function of the cerebro-spinal centres, the poison, he says, appears to act almost immediately by stopping the action of the respiratory centre. He fully describes and illustrates by stethometric charts the effects of cobra-poison upon the respiration. Briefly stated they are: slight quickening, with increase of the excursus, followed by rapidly increasing retardation, with a certain amount of lessening of the excursus—the latter being less affected than the former; sudden and abrupt inspiration, followed by an equally sudden expiration, until the respiratory effort is entirely abolished, and after a pause the convulsions of asphyxia terminate life. Cobra-poison exercises little influence upon the circulation and tempera-

Poison does not kill by tetanizing the heart, but sometimes immediately stops the action of the respiratory centre.



ture,\* nor has it any particular effect upon the higher sensorium.† This fact has been noticed over and over again, and is of some importance diagnostically. The pupil of the eye also is unaffected. On secretion, generally, the poison has great effect; nearly all secreting tissues being affected by it, especially lachrymation, and even more so, salivation, marked and constant. The whole alimentary tract pours out mucus. The larynx and trachea become almost occluded by frothy mucus.

Wolfenden cannot accept the generally accepted opinion that the venom of the cobra has no effect on the blood.

I have already pointed out that Dr. Wolfenden cannot accept the generally received opinion that cobra-poison effects no great change in the blood, and on this point Wall says, "that there is no great change in the blood is evident from the fact, that when an animal has survived the same symptoms produced by cobra-poison, it is found to be quite well and to suffer no further inconvenience from blood-poisoning or other causes." It is just possible that when

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\* If Wolfenden is correct in his analysis, it must be found that there is relatively little albumin-venom in cobra-poison, since he states that this element of the poison produces a striking fall of temperature.

† These two facts alone are sufficient to distinguish cobra-poisoning from alcoholic poisoning, in which there is a rapid fall of temperature, and stupor or coma.



extensive sloughing occurs at the bitten part, septicæmia may occur, but this can scarcely be attributed primarily to the cobra-venom, or be regarded as a physiological effect of the venom. Before leaving the subject of cobra-poisoning, I may state that Sir Joseph Fayrer and Dr. Lauder Brunton, in their valuable series of papers on the subject, maintain that though the greater part of the nervous system is affected, yet the terminations of the motor nerves suffer especially, and in a very marked manner. Dr. Wall, on the other hand, is of opinion that there is no need to suppose a special effect of the poison on the peripheries of the motor nerves.

As regards the daboia-poison, Dr. Wall says, Daboia-poison. that the preliminary and local effects of the bite of a *Daboia Russelli* resemble those of the cobra, only that the consequent pain and inflammation are much more acute. The first constitutional symptom of daboia-poisoning is convulsions, which The primary convulsions of daboia-poisoning. may vary in degree from those producing slight muscular twitching, to those which produce almost instant death. These primary convulsions depend upon the amount of poison injected, and the relative size and strength of the animal affected. Birds are most easily affected, and next to them the *Lacertilia*: mammals also are very easily affected by the convulsion-producing properties



of the poison. On the other hand, amphibia only exhibit symptoms of general paralysis. Wall draws attention to a curious fact, *viz.*, that by heating a solution of daboia-poison to 100°C. it loses completely the power of producing primary convulsions, even in birds, which, under other circumstances, it is difficult to poison without their occurrence. This may, perhaps, be accounted for by some alteration in the albumin-venom being affected by heat; though it is true, Dr. Wolfenden says, that albumin-venom is not destroyed by heat (95°5), it may, however, be altered. This is a point which requires elucidation. In daboia-poisoning there are three forms in which death occurs. Firstly, from the primary convulsions. Secondly, from advancing paralysis. Says Dr. Wall, "the respiration and pulse become greatly accelerated, and there is gradual loss of power in all the limbs, vomiting may occur, sanious discharges issue from the rectum and other parts, the pupils are usually widely dilated, and the respiration becomes less and less, and may cease with or without convulsions." These secondary convulsions are simply the expression of carbonic acid poisoning. The third form of death from daboia-poisoning is altogether unlike anything observed in cobra-poisoning. It occurs in those cases in which insufficient poison has been injected to

Three forms of death in daboia-poisoning.

Secondary convulsions.



cause death in the above - mentioned forms. It is, indeed, death from blood - poisoning. The animal has very few nervous symptoms, very likely none at all, but on the second day he appears ill, refuses food, has diarrhœa, his urine contains albumin, and he may linger on in this state for days, dying exhausted, or some acute complication may supervene, causing death rapidly. It may be an œdematous condition of the lungs, or a hæmorrhagic condition of the system generally, that proves fatal. Hæmorrhages may take place from lungs, stomach, rectum, kidneys, and even skin. I once saw a remarkable case of blood - sweating in a cow which I had caused to be bitten by a snake (viper). Sir Joseph Fayrer, in a paper on the nature of snake-poison, which he read recently before the Medical Society of London, of which he is President, says—"In 1868 I described the action of cobra and daboia venom in the case of two horses bitten by these snakes. I also pointed out the peculiar action of daboia - venom in causing early convulsions. In some the convulsions are more marked, and in others death is preceded by a more decided state of lethargy

Fayrer had drawn attention to the primary convulsion of daboia-poisoning in 1868.

. . . . Dr. Wall gives a more complete exposition of the varying effects, and shews them to be greater than I supposed." Dr. Wall



summarises the difference in the action of cobra and daboia venom as follows:—

#### COBRA-POISON.

Cobra-poison-  
ing and daboia-  
poisoning  
contrasted.

1. The regular course is slowly advancing, general paralysis coming on after an interval without symptoms, with especial paralysis of the lips, tongue, larynx and pharynx, and complete destruction of the respiratory function. Death is often attended by convulsions, which depend on asphyxia.

2. Very quickly destroys respiration. After slight acceleration there is slowing, and excursus is lessened.

3. Kills birds and reptiles only after paralysis.

#### DABOIA-POISON.

1. Commences its action by producing violent general convulsions, which often terminate fatally, or may be followed immediately by paralysis and death, or may also be recovered from, paralysis and death following later.

The paralysis is general, and lasts a considerable time after respiration is extinguished. No special paralysis of lips, tongue, larynx, and pharynx.

2. At first quickens the respiration very much more than cobra-poison does, and the lessening of the excursus and the retardation of the respiratory movements do not occur so soon.

3. Invariably kills birds and reptiles at once in convulsions.



## COBRA-POISON.

4. Doubtful if it affects the pupils. Salivation constant.

5. Effect on the blood slight. After recovery from nervous symptoms, no symptoms of blood-poisoning observed.

## DABOIA-POISON.

4. Pupil always widely dilated. Salivation very rarely met with.

5. Effects on the blood very great. Sanious discharges the rule. Albumuria is constant. After recovery from the nervous symptoms, the patient has to go through a period of blood-poisoning, perhaps not less dangerous than the primary symptoms.

Dr. Wall says as regards the rattlesnake-bite—"In its main features the crotalus resembles the Indian viper in its effects, the chief difference being that the primary convulsions are very much less frequently seen." Crotalus poison is decidedly less dangerous than either that of the Indian cobra or that of the Australian hoplocephalus, and probably even than that of the daboiia.

Wall's opinion as to the venom of the rattlesnake.



## CHAPTER IV.

Lacerda's investigations—Advocates the use of Permanganate of Potash—My experiments and conclusions on the use of Permanganate of Potash in snake-poisoning—Sir Joseph Fayrer's opinion—Liq. Potassæ in snake-bite—What can be done in snake-bite—Weir Mitchell and Reichart's recent researches into the physiological chemistry of venoms — Wolfenden's investigations into the chemistry of snake-venoms — The intra-venous injection of ammonia in snake-poisoning : the evidence in its favour critically examined — The treatment condemned by the Victoria Medical Society.

Lacerda.

WE are told by an American Reviewer (Mr. Robert Fletcher) that, "Dr. J. B. de Lacerda, Director of the Physiological Laboratory of the National Museum of Rio Janeiro, has been, during the last ten years, experimenting with the venom of Brazilian snakes, especially with that of bothrops jararacassu, a serpent which closely resembles its congener, the North American crotalus, in the intensity of the action of its venom. During that time, he has made several communications to the French Academy of Sciences." In 1872 Lacerda announced that he had discovered "figured ferments in the venom of serpents. He placed a drop of rattlesnake-venom under the microscope, and saw the

Lacerda discovers figured ferments in the venom.



production of spores take place. The spores increased by scission and by internal nuclei. This has not been confirmed by further experiments." On this subject, however, Dr. de Lacerda writes to Sir Joseph Fayrer, as President of the Medical Society: "I beg leave to protest against an opinion attributed to me by some of your colleagues, but which I have never sustained. I refer to the opinion that attributes to Bacteria the effects of the poison. I have weighty reasons for considering such an hypothesis is entirely false. I recognized, indeed, by means of repeated and careful observations, that the venom contains micrococcus in great numbers, and I made a communication on this subject some three years ago to the Academy of Sciences of Paris. These corpuscles, however, exist in the venom in an accidental manner, as also in the human saliva, and play no important part in the effects of the poison.\* This last acts as a chemical agent, producing a rapid alteration in the molecular composition of the albumenia, which enters into the formation of almost all animal tissues. On the blood, given certain conditions, its effects are very rapid, almost instantaneous; the same happens with

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\* Wolfenden says: "The bacterial forms, which are present in such large numbers in cobra-venom, I do not think have anything to do with its activity."



the nervous and other elements, whose functions are disturbed immediately that the venom comes in contact with them. Now, such immediate action can never be attributed to bacteria. You see, therefore, that this unsustainable theory cannot be invoked in endeavouring to explain the neutralising effects of permanganate of potash."

Effects of  
snake-poison  
upon the blood,  
according to  
Lacerda.

As regards the effect of the poison on the blood, Lacerda is said to have found that—"The blood of a poisoned animal presented the following phenomena: the red corpuscles began by presenting little shining points, which increased until the globule broke down, and was replaced by numerous ovoid corpuscles, very brilliant, and possessed of oscillatory movements.\* The blood obtained from animals which had died from serpent venom, when injected into others hypodermically, invariably produced death in a few hours."

Lacerda re-  
commends the  
permanganate  
of potash in  
snake-bite.

"But," says Mr. Fletcher, "the most interesting of Lacerda's discoveries was reported to the French Academy, of Sciences, in September 1881. After proving the inefficiency of various supposed antidotes, such as perchloride of iron, borax, tannin, and other substances, he found that the permanganate of potassium produced very remarkable results. He obtained his supply of

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\* *Vide* Wolfenden's observations on the same subject.



poison by forcing the *bothrops* (the more deadly variety) to bite cotton-wool, and the venom which poured out upon it was dissolved in eight to ten grammes of distilled water. A syringe full of this solution was injected into the cellular tissue of the thigh or groin of a dog. In from one to two minutes after, the same quantity of a filtered one-*per cent.* solution of permanganate of potassium was ejected. The dogs, examined the next day, exhibited no evidence of injury except a trifling local irritation at the point of injection; nevertheless, this same solution of venom, injected into the tissues without the counterpoison, produced great swelling, abscesses, and extensive loss of substance."

But to quote again from Lacerda's letter to Sir Joseph Fayrer:—

"Passing now to the essential point of the discussion that took place in the Medical Society, I will give, in a few words, how I comprehend, and how I judge, that the efficacious effect of permanganate of potash should be comprehended. You yourself, by experiments made in 1869, recognized that permanganate of potash, mixed with the venom, took from it its noxious properties. Certain conditions of the experiments led you, however, to deny the efficacy of this chemical agent in the cases in which the venom

Lacerda's  
letter to Sir  
Joseph Fayrer.



had been inoculated in the tissues. As you know, however, I have demonstrated by numerous experiments and innumerable clinical facts, that the neutralisation takes place even in the midst of the tissues, which makes this substance a chemical antidote of great value. The permanganate of potash acts upon the venom, destroying it in two ways: first, as a powerful oxidising agent; second, by the potash, that forms the base of the salt, passing a current of nascent oxygen through a concentrated solution of the venom, which loses entirely its noxious properties. This experiment, which I have repeated many times, gave me always the same result. Let us suppose, now then, an individual is bitten. If injections are made in the place of the bite from five to ten minutes after the inoculation of the venom, this is promptly neutralized *in situ*, and the individual runs no further danger. A great number of facts have been observed like this in Brazil. If aid is given late—hours after the bite, when the tumefaction of the wounded part is very pronounced, and the phenomena that indicate the entrance of the venom into the circulation have already declared themselves—injections, repeated in various parts of the wounded members, parting from the wounds made by the fangs of the reptile, still give very good results. Nor is it



difficult to explain the good results in this case. The venom, as I have said, acts first locally, and only enters the general circulation after the lapse of a certain time, and by portions. The permanganate of potash, meeting in the tissues with the venom, which is little by little diffusing itself, neutralises it in the various points where it has been diffused, and thus stops the source of supply. The entrance of new and successive portions of the venom into the general circulation being thus impeded, the organism takes charge of the elimination of what has already been introduced, and which was insufficient to compromise the life of the individual."

My attention having been drawn to the subject by a notice in the *Englishman*, I performed nearly one hundred experiments with a view to settling the matter as regards cobra-poison, and the conclusions I arrived at are noted below. It is to be remarked that the poison experimented with by Lacerda was that of the *bothrops*, a snake not nearly so venomous as the *cobra*. My conclusions were :—

My attention is drawn to the subject by an article in the *Englishman*.

I. That, in dogs no appreciable symptoms of cobra-poisoning followed the hypodermic or intravenous injection of a watery solution of from two to seven centigrammes of cobra-poison when previously mixed with from one to three decigrammes of permanganate

The conclusions drawn from my experiments.



of potash, though, under ordinary circumstances, such quantities hypodermically injected are more than sufficient to produce fatal results.

II. That, when similar quantities of a watery solution of cobra - poison were hypodermically injected into dogs, and were followed, either immediately or after an interval of four minutes (the longest interval I have yet sufficiently tested), by the hypodermic injection into the same part of a watery solution of permanganate of potash (one to six decigrammes), no appreciable symptoms of cobra-poisoning resulted.

III. That, when glycerine was used, instead of water, to dissolve the dried cobra-poison, the permanganate of potash appeared to have no power over the virulence of the virus.

IV. That, after the development of symptoms of cobra - poisoning, the injection of permanganate of potash, whether hypodermic or intravenous, or both, failed to exercise any influence upon the symptoms.

V. That, permanganate of potash possesses no prophylactic properties, since death followed the hypodermic injection of three and a half centigrammes of cobra-poison in watery solution, in the case of a dog, which had been hypodermically injected a few hours previously with eight decigrammes of the agent in solution.

VI. That, it would appear to be absolutely necessary that the permanganate to be efficacious should come into actual contact with the cobra-poison.



VII. That, although no symptoms of cobra-poisoning followed the injection of cobra-poison and permanganate of potash, sloughing of the part injected sometimes followed.

VIII. That, up to the present time it has never been experimentally shewn that any agent has either the power to neutralise the cobra-poison lying in the tissues, or to prevent death when four minutes had elapsed from the time of injection of the poison to that of treatment.

IX. That, if permanganate of potash has such power to destroy so subtle a poison as that of the cobra, it is probable that the hypodermic injection of the agent, in the bite of a rabid animal, would destroy the virus which causes that terrible disease—Hydrophobia.\*

And I have certainly seen no reason to modify or alter my opinions. Sir Joseph Fayrer's opinion as to the power of the permanganate may be gathered from the following extract from his address to the Medical Society of London:—"In a pamphlet (*Experiments on permanganate of potash, and its use in snake-poisoning*), dated 1882, Richards says:—"A solution of five *per cent.* of permanganate of potash is able to neutralise the poison," and recommends that this

Sir Joseph  
Fayrer's opin-  
ion of the  
power of the  
permanganate  
of potash.

\* This would, of course, depend greatly upon whether the virility of hydrophobia-virus was due to a chemical, or an organism. I am very much afraid that Pasteur has raised hopes which will not be realized by his method.



‘should be injected into the bitten part after a ligature has been applied; it is less likely to cause sloughing of the tissues than any other agent which could neutralise the venom.’ In his letter, dated July 22nd, 1882, he says, ‘It is, in my experience, the best local application we possess. It is not a physiological antidote, but a chemical one, and is utterly powerless to effect any influence on the lethal action of snake-poison’ (meaning constitutional action). He is of opinion ‘that whenever opportunity offers, the injection of permanganate of potash should be resorted to, assuming that a ligature has been applied (where it can be applied at all) within five minutes from the bite.’ In the average run of cases, the permanganate will certainly destroy the poison lying beyond the ligatured part, if it come in contact with it; but as Wall pointed out, the difficulty of insuring its contact with the poison is so great as to render it practically unreliable. I agree with Richards that, so far as it goes, it is a good local application, and as such ought to be used, or in its absence, tannic acid or liquor potassæ might be resorted to with the same object; but as a constitutional remedy, as a physiological antidote, it is powerless, like all others that have been tried and failed to do good. Dr. Lacerda himself, although he attributes the highest value to it



as a chemical antidote, both as a powerful oxidising agent, and by the action of the potash, says, 'as to the idea of finding a physiological antidote for snake-poisoning, I entirely agree with you that it is a Utopia.' Although I found that liquor potassæ practically answered the same purpose as permanganate of potash, it did not decompose the venom, but merely destroyed the tissues in which the venom was lying, thereby preventing its absorption; and it was subsequently discharged with the slough. This was proved by the fact that when the venom and liq. potassæ were mixed and injected subcutaneously, no constitutional effect followed; but if the same mixture was diluted with water and injected into a vein, or into the peritoneal cavity of an animal, symptoms of cobra-poisoning were soon manifest, and the animal died.

My conclusions  
as to the power  
of liquor  
potassæ.

Now, as to what really can be done in snake-bite, I am afraid very little; the first and most important indication is, to prevent the absorption of the venom into the general circulation. The ligature, excision, and application or injection of a solution of permanganate of potash—*strength 5 per cent.*—are the means to that end.\* If the poison gains access to the general

What can be  
done in snake-  
bite.

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\* I have recently had an opportunity of seeing the Wyeth Compressed Permanganate of Potash Tablets, pre-



system, then positively nothing can be done. It is usual to recommend artificial respiration, and the exhibition of stimulants in moderation; but I fear they are really of very little use.\* Immediate amputation of the part would, of course, possibly save life, as might the ligature, &c., as before recommended. It is somewhat humiliating to have to confess that practically, so far as the *treatment of snake-poisoning* is concerned, we are nearly as helpless as our forefathers were two centuries ago. Unfortunately, our helplessness is not confined to the cure of snake-poisoning, for there are several diseases in existence which baffle the skill and knowledge of the wisest and most learned of our profession. It is, however, some satisfaction for those who have spent the best part of their lives in conducting these disheartening investigations, to think that their work may, in some measure, serve as landmarks for the guidance, not only of future enquirers

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pared by Messrs. Burroughs, Wellcome and Co., and consider them a very excellent and particularly handy form. They are quite reliable. Four of the one-grain tablets added to a dram and a half of clear water will effectually neutralise snake-venom when brought in contact with it.

\* Stimulants given to excess can do only harm—(*vide* observations regarding treatment by the intravenous injection of ammonia.)



engaged in the particular field which has been their special study, but of those who may be called upon to investigate the nature of any of the other animal poisons, which is at present shrouded in profound mystery. We come now to the subject of the most recent researches into the physiological chemistry of the venoms.

In April, 1883, Drs. S. Weir Mitchell and Edward T. Reichart, of Philadelphia, published a preliminary report on the chemistry of the venom of serpents, which, as they observe, represented only a part of an elaborate study of the poisons of all their own genera of serpents. They expressed a hope that their study might include that of a number of foreign genera. "Our researches," they observe, "have of late been rewarded by so remarkable a discovery in toxicology, that it has been thought well to announce it here rather than to await their completion. We have, therefore, selected from our notes such material as seems to us of interest from its novelty."

Weir Mitchell and Reichart's recent researches into the physiological chemistry of venoms.

They remark, that in drying the venoms of the *rattlesnake* and *moccasin*, there is a loss of nearly seventy-five *per cent*. This estimate agrees with the loss as regards cobra-venom. They point out, as a singular fact, that the venoms abovementioned could be subjected to the boiling temperature of water (except the

Effects of drying the venoms.



Effects of  
boiling.

venom of the *Crotalus adamanteus*) without a complete destruction of their poisonous power; but with a noticeable alteration of their physiological properties. In the case of the *Crotalus adamanteus* or *diamond-back rattlesnake*, the toxicity of the venom is destroyed at a temperature below 80° C. (176° F.) It will be recollected that Wall found that the convulsion-producing properties of daboia-venom were destroyed at a temperature of 100° C., though the venom still retained its poisonous power. As regards the intensity of the venoms, Drs. Weir Mitchell and Reichart express an opinion which corresponds with that I have already given. They say, "beyond a doubt, cobra-venom is the most intense in its poisonous power, the venom of the copperhead next, then the moccasin and rattlesnake." The most important part of their paper is that in which they describe the chemical analysis of the venoms. They succeeded in isolating three proteids, *viz.* :—

Venom-Peptide

„ Globulin

„ Albumin.

The first two they say are poisonous, and the last innocent. According to them, the venom-peptide is a "putrefacient," and the venom-globulin a much more fatal poison, which



probably attacks the respiratory centres, and destroys the power of the blood to clot.

In the September number of the *Indian Medical Gazette* will be found an important paper, which I had the privilege to communicate, from the pen of Dr. R. Norris - Wolfenden, late lecturer on physiology at the Charing - Cross Hospital, London.

Wolfenden's  
investigation  
into the  
chemistry of  
snake-poison.

After paying a well-merited compliment to Dr. Wall, Dr. Wolfenden says, "Weir Mitchell and Reichart, in America, have, for some time past, been engaged in investigating this subject (of the chemistry of snake - poisons), and they have examined the venom of a number of snakes, chiefly American. They are now completing their investigations, which will shortly be published by the Smithsonian Institute. One or two papers have appeared in America, already from their pen. Though I have been trying for a considerable time to get these papers, I have hitherto been unsuccessful, and I am consequently in ignorance of the scope and character of their investigations. I think it right to say this before mentioning my own experiments, because it gives to my work that independent character that it properly possesses. It is only since I began my investigations into these animal poisons, that I have become acquainted with Weir Mitchell and



Reichart's work, through a short contribution made to the *Lancet* of last year, in which the former gentleman stated some results of their joint work. This had resulted in the separation from snake-venoms of three proteid poisons,—the one like a globulin, attacking respiratory centres, and preventing coagulum; a second resembling albumin, and being probably innocuous; a third like peptone, and being a "putrefactive poison." With some of these results I agree, but not with all. Dr. Wolfenden sums up the results of his investigations, but he remarks that they must not yet be regarded as complete. He says there are two poisonous elements in cobra-venom, *viz.*—

1. Cobra globulin-venom,
2. Cobra albumin-venom,

and that they probably exist in different proportions in different secretions. What other albumins are present are not of the importance these two are. The globulin-venom poisons the respiratory centre, producing no paralysis of muscle; the cobra albumin-venom does not affect the respiratory centre, but produces marked and progressive motor paralysis. Wolfenden points out further, that globulin - venom is slower in its action than the albumin - venom, and a longer period often elapses after the injection, before symptoms supervene and terminate life. The globulin



is very deadly, and when once the symptoms have supervened, asphyxia rapidly ends the existence of the animal. There is a rather extraordinary difference of opinion between Mitchell and Reichart on the one hand, and Wolfenden on the other. Perhaps, an idea of the difference will be best conveyed by a statement such as this :

Proteids.		Weir Mitchell and Reichart.	Wolfenden.	Different results arrived at by Weir Mitchell and Reichart on the one hand, and Wolfenden on the other.
Cobra- poison	Peptone	Poisonous: putre- facient.	None present.	
	Globulin	Attacks respira- tory centre, and destroys power of coagulation of blood.	Attacks respira- tory centre. Very powerful.	
	Albumin	Innocent ...	Less powerful. Pro- duces motor para- lysis.	

It appears that Reichart and Mitchell's "peptone" was precipitated by acetic acid, and in one case their "globulin" was dissolved by boiling, but it is a characteristic of the former that it is not precipitated by acids, and of the latter, that it is insoluble in boiling water (*vide* Foster's Physiology).

It is only bare justice to Drs. Weir Mitchell and Reichart, whose valuable work has extended



over some years, to state that the researches which they have yet published were considered by them only preliminary, and that some of their statements might have to be modified or even, perhaps, withdrawn. *Original* researches are, of course, liable to error in some particulars, and if error there be, Dr. Mitchell will, I am sure, be the first to acknowledge it.

In noticing these researches, the editor of the *Indian Medical Gazette* remarks: "To trust to dialysis alone, in the attempt to separate the different proteids of snake - poison, is calculated to give most unsatisfactory results. Even a crystalline salt, which is readily dialysable, requires a period of several days for complete extraction by dialysis. It would be practically impossible to altogether extract a peptone, if, indeed, such is really present, in this way. Besides, in dialysing albuminous fluids, decomposition must occur, and not only may an active proteid thus lose its activity, but poisonous decomposition products, which did not exist in the original venom, may be formed in this way, and being readily dialysable, they will contaminate the crystalloid proteids. The products which Dr. Mitchell experimented with were obtained in this objectionable manner." Wolfenden adopted a recognized mode of precise chemical analysis, so



that his proteids were presumably of a fairly pure nature. Dr. Wolfenden has not yet accounted for the specific inflammation which occurs locally, on the injection of snake-venom — especially daboia-venom. Does the venom-globulin act also as a “putrefactive agent,” and, if so, how? The editor of the *Indian Medical Gazette* winds up his excellent article thus — “The important recent additions to our knowledge of snake-venom, and the increasing perfection of experimental methods, render the attainment of solid results much more easy and probable at the present time than hitherto. The time has now undoubtedly arrived for the institution of a fresh commission to re-investigate a subject of such admittedly vital importance.” I doubt, however, whether a commission is the best machinery for the working out of these questions. If one man, who is thoroughly conversant with all the recent methods of analysis, took up the subject, the results would be more satisfactory. And no better one in India could be found for the purpose than the *Editor of the Indian Medical Gazette*, Dr. Waddell. An investigator here has the advantage of being able to obtain a very large quantity of fresh cobra-venom, without which no analysis, so far as cobra-venom is concerned, can be considered absolutely satisfactory; but at

Dr. Waddell suggests the appointment of a commission.



the same time, investigations should, of course, be continued by that able physiologist, Dr. Wolfenden, who has done so much in the study of animal poisons, and Drs. Weir Mitchell and Reichart, who have already spent so much time, labour, and money in snake-poison investigations, and who are the pioneers of these recent researches. I am confident that I only endorse the views of all his English fellow-workers, when I say that no one has thrown so much light on the subject of snake-poisoning, as that eminent physician and accomplished gentleman — Weir Mitchell.

Dr. R. Norris - Wolfenden has been conducting further researches into the chemical nature of cobra-venom, in the University College, London, and has demonstrated beyond doubt, I think, the proteid nature of the venom. So far he is in accord with Weir Mitchell and Reichart; but he still holds that if peptone be present, it is only in traces and purely accidental, and is certainly not a noxious element of the venom.

He entirely disposes of the supposition that the venom owes its properties either to an alkaloid, as suggested by Gautier, or to a non-proteid body, as held by Blyth. He made examinations of cobra-venom by the Stass Otto method—the most reliable yet known—but failed



to find the slightest trace of an alkaloid either fixed or volatile. And in this particular, he confirms the conclusions of Professor Wolcott Gibbs, who made an investigation in this connexion at the request of Weir Mitchell.

On dialysing cobra-venom, and treating the dialysates after Blyth's method,\* Wolfenden found no trace of a "cobric acid" leaving crystals such as that gentleman has described, though it is true that the dialysates are usually faintly acid, but of a non-toxic nature.

Apart from the antecedent improbabilities of the power of the venom being due to the presence of micro-organisms, as shewn by the rapidity of the poisoning, the phenomena of heat action and chemical action, Wolfenden found that there is nothing in cobra-venom which will grow under conditions favourable for bacteria.

He to some extent modifies his former conclusions — for which, however, finality was not claimed—as to the toxic elements of the venom. He now points out that there are three, *viz* :—

1. Globulin.
2. Serum Albumin.
3. Acid Albumin.

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\* *Vide* page 132.



And one non-toxic proteid in some specimens, *viz* :—Peptone.\*

As regards the physiological action of the toxic proteids, he is of opinion that the serum-albumin kills by an ascending paralysis without that implication of the respiratory system, so characteristic of the globulin, and—as he now says—in a lesser degree of the acid albumin.

It will be observed that these researches have reference to cobra-venom—an analysis of viper-venom being still wanting.

Now, if Wolfenden is correct in his deductions as to the destructive physiological action of these proteids, we ought to find that the main factors in the production of the phenomena of viper-poisoning are the albumins. Until we have before us an account of the analysis of viper-venom, a few points of considerable importance must still remain in obscurity. For example, what occasions the primary convulsions of daboia-poisoning? What is the cause of the difference in the intensity of the local effects of cobra and daboia venoms? How is the subsequent blood-poisoning in the case of daboia-bite accounted for, when it is almost, if not quite, absent in cobra-poisoning?

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\* *Vide* page 163. I have certainly found peptone in cobra-poison.



I do not for a moment wish it to be understood that I underestimate the value of these important researches into the chemical nature of snake-venoms, which must, of course, from the difficulties of the enquiry and the comparatively inadequate supply of the venoms, be slowly progressive, but I am constrained to admit there are yet some very material questions which remain unanswered. Some of the more important are these:—Globulins and the albumins are innocuous; how then do the venom-globulins and venom-albumins differ from them? Whence do the latter obtain their subtle toxic properties? There must be a *plus* to the proteids. What is its nature? Unless, indeed, a mere change in the position of the molecules is sufficient to account for it.

There are several good workers in the field — Wolfenden, Warden, Waddell, besides Weir Mitchell and Reichart, the originators of the “new departure,” and it may be confidently hoped that in the near future this recondite subject will be satisfactorily elucidated. But then comes the all-important question — Where shall we find the antidote? Wolfenden says, we must look for that amongst the compounds which will oxidise the venom proteids alone. Potassium permanganate fails to counteract the lethal effects of the venom, even when injected into the cir-



culatory system, because it oxidises not only those substances, but the proteids of the blood.

Dr. Wolfenden is engaged in analysing snakes' blood, and has obtained for that purpose a number of harmless snakes from Italy. It has been asserted that there is no serum-albumin in snake's blood, but Wolfenden has found serum-albumin in small proportion and globulin in much larger proportion. I am glad to hear that he intends working out the histology of the poison-glands. The result of his labours, and of those of Weir Mitchell and Reichart, is awaited with considerable interest.

It is to be hoped that some competent physiological chemist will take up the subject in Australia, in reference to the poisons of the snakes to be found in that colony.

The intravenous injection of ammonia in snake-poisoning.

I have already referred briefly to the subject of the intravenous injection of ammonia in snake-bite, but as the treatment is still to be found recommended in the pages of some of our standard works, I will deal more fully with the question, and shew on what slender grounds its reputation was based and maintained. We have seen that, although originality of the procedure was claimed by Dr. Halford, of Melbourne, as a fact, it had been tried and condemned by Fontana. The grounds on which Dr. Halford

Halford's experiments.



was led to recommend the treatment were six experiments on the lower animals; and the confirmatory evidence of its success was to be found later on in a number of cases which were published in the Australian newspapers. In order to arrive at a just conclusion as to the merits of the advocated treatment, it is necessary to examine and estimate the value of these experiments and cases. As to the experiments:—

Experiments  
critically  
examined.

Experiment 1.—A dog, not weighed, was inoculated in several places with rattlesnake-poison, sent from America. Neither the age nor the quantity of poison inoculated, nor the mode of inoculation resorted to, is mentioned. Twenty-four hours after the inoculation of the poison, the dog was motionless, “the heart’s action could only occasionally be felt; then it was of the feeblest; and the general opinion was that the dog was dying.” Ten minims of ammonia were injected. Half an hour afterwards ten minims more were injected. “From this time he gradually recovered, taking a little food in two or three hours.” There is no doubt that this animal was poisoned, but certainly not necessarily fatally so, as Dr. Halford most unwarrantably concludes. I cannot demonstrate this more forcibly than by quoting a case described by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell—a much more serious one.



Dr. Mitchell's  
case of snake-  
poisoning  
ending in  
recovery.

Note that in Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's case the symptoms of poisoning were very grave and rapidly manifest. Says Dr. Mitchell:—"The next case, and the last of this kind, I have placed alone; because it has especial value as showing how exceedingly grave may be the signs of poisoning, and yet how rapidly and complete may be the rally and escape. Experiment.—A small brown terrier was struck twice on the fore-leg and shoulder, by a large snake which I held in the loop as usual. Within ten minutes the dog vomited, urinated, and passed solid fæces. All this time he whined a good deal, and finally, at the fifteenth minute, lay down on his side, breathing in jerks and twitching in almost every muscle. No fremitus could be seen at the wound, owing, perhaps, to the swelling, which was great, and might easily have concealed it from view. An hour after being bitten, the dog had a slight convulsion and vomited again. Meanwhile, I could scarcely feel the heart beat, and the respirations were long and laboured. On leaving the animal late in the evening, and about seven hours after he was hurt, he was lying on the floor, scarcely breathing and nearly pulseless. He had passed liquid and very dark stools and some water." His sensorium, even at this period, seemed to be unaffected.



He was found perfectly well the next morning, except, of course, of the wounds caused by the bites. This experiment will be found described at page 71 of Dr. Weir Mitchell's "Essay on Snake-poison," which Dr. Halford informs us he had "studied with the greatest pleasure and profit," and yet he can assure us, by way of remark to his experiment above-mentioned, that "it seems clear that the ammonia obviated the tendency to death." Experiment 2.—A dog was bitten by a tiger-snake — vomiting, purging, and staggering occurred throughout the day. The next morning the dog was found "lying down, apparently at the point of death, totally paralysed, but sensible." Then three more, and again five minims of ammonia were injected, but still the animal did not immediately get up and walk — as we shall presently see was the result in Dr. Halford's "cases" — it merely "seemed improved, and the breathing fuller." And it even remained in the same state the whole of the next day and the day after that, although ten more minims of ammonia were injected. It did not immediately recover, and was not reported well until eight days after the bite. There are several worse cases on record in which recovery occurred, and we find, after the description of this experiment, the word

Dr. Halford's  
conclusions  
unwarranted.



"recovery," which is not quite synonymous with "cured." Experiment 3.—A small dog was inoculated with the contents—quantity not ascertained—of one poison-gland of a tiger-snake; twenty-five minutes after, vomiting and staggering came on; ten minims of ammonia were injected; but again, strangely enough, the influence of the poison did not seem to be "quite overcome," until seventy minutes afterwards when the vomiting ceased immediately." "It, moreover, ate a meal five hours and twenty minutes after it had been inoculated." The fourth and fifth experiments are similar, but the sixth terminated fatally from a *bite*. The Indian Commission record a case in which a dog was bitten by an Australian tiger-snake; it was a great deal salivated, and vomited, but it recovered. There are a number of cases on record shewing how seriously affected from snake-poison the animal may become, and yet recover without being submitted to any treatment. I have seen an animal in convulsions over night, and apparently quite well in the morning. There is an absolute want of precision in the conduct of Dr. Halford's experiments. In no instance was the quantity of poison which was injected ascertained. That *some* poison was injected is clear, but it is

Some of the  
fallacies  
exposed.



equally clear that the quantity was very small, sufficient to produce symptoms of poisoning, which lasted over days (in some instances), but not enough to cause death. It is also absolutely certain that the ammonia did not in any way cut short the attack (so to speak) of snake-poisoning, as Dr. Halford and his friends insisted it does in the case of human beings so seriously affected as to be in a state of *profound coma* from snake-poisoning. Is not Dr. Mitchell's case, in which the dog recovered after a bite, without treatment, of a much more serious character than any of the above-mentioned five cases? Great importance having been attached to Professor Halford's cases, I ventured in the columns of a Melbourne paper to analyse them, and I think I proved that symptoms of alcoholism were mistaken for those of snake-poisoning. One of Dr. Halford's champions wrote thus:—"I will not suppose for one moment that a large proportion of our rural surgeons are such a set of incapables as our Indian friends imply—unable to distinguish between drunkenness and snake-bite." Now, there is really nothing very remarkable or incapable in their "rural surgeon" having confounded the two, for while real cases of snake-poisoning are comparatively exceedingly rare in Australia, there are many cases of supposed

Symptoms  
of drunken-  
ness and of  
snake-poison  
confounded.



Mistaken  
ideas as to the  
effect of  
alcohol.

snake-poisoning, which are immediately converted into cases of alcoholism by the pernicious practice of administering an unlimited quantity of alcohol, under the mistaken idea that excessive stimulation is the remedy. This gentleman went on to point out to the members of the Melbourne Medical Society, that whereas there are "profound coma" and dilatation of the pupils in snake-poisoning, "there are giddiness, helplessness, heavy sleep, *pupils contracted*, in alcoholism." It is here observed that, he diagnoses the one from the other by the *profound coma* and *dilatation of the pupil* on the one hand, and the *heavy sleep* and *contraction of the pupil* on the other. Let us see what Dr. R. S. Taylor says on the subject of *alcoholism*. "There is *confusion of thought*, with inability to stand or walk, a tottering gait and giddiness followed by *stupor* and *coma* (italics mine) . . . the *pupils are dilated and fixed*. Diluted alcohol commonly produces a stage of excitement before stupor, while, in the action of concentrated alcohol, there may be *profound coma* in a few minutes." We will now examine Dr. Halford's cases — of real and supposed poisoning — and contrast them with cases of cobra - poisoning and alcoholism. For this purpose, I place the analyses in juxtaposition.



SYMPTOMS OF SNAKE-POISON-  
ING IN DR. HALFORD'S  
FATAL CASES.

No. 18.—Very drowsy, but easily aroused, and able to answer questions very sensibly; . . . quite sensible, now and again talking voluntarily to his mother. Died.

No. 24.—The reporter says:—"When I first saw him he had no drowsiness, and could walk about and talk naturally." Subsequently his jaws were fixed, and he could not articulate properly, . . . pupils intensely dilated, and conjunctivæ insensible to touch. Hearing, however, appeared perfect. Died.

No. 41.—"He appeared stupid, and had partial paralysis of the tongue and eyes, but no loss of sensation." When the reporter last saw him, he answered rationally. Five hours afterwards he was dead.

SYMPTOMS OF SUPPOSED Dr. Halford's  
SNAKE-POISONING, IN WHICH cases.

ALCOHOL HAD BEEN ADMINISTERED: DR. HALFORD'S CASES.

Case No. 1.—"Stage of stupor . . . could not rouse him . . . Pulse 56; . . . progressed well with the exception of violent vomiting for twelve hours afterwards." Recovery.  
Real cases of snake-poisoning compared with cases of alcoholism supposed to be those of snake-poisoning.

No. 2.—"Sluggish dilated pupils" . . . "symptoms of coma." Recovery.

No. 5.—"Complete state of stupor, from which I could with difficulty only partially arouse him." Recovery.

No. 6.—"The patient was comatose; pupils dilated; head sunk on chest; pulse low and weak." Recovery.

No. 7.—"The boy was in a state of stupor." Recovery.



SYMPTOMS OF COBRA-  
POISONING FROM CASES  
QUOTED BY INDIAN SNAKE-  
POISON COMMISSION.\*

Case 1.—“He was unable to answer questions (owing to paralysis of the tongue), but appeared to be quite conscious.” Died.

Case 2.—“The pupils were slightly dilated, and they contracted slowly when a candle was brought near them. He was unable to speak, but appeared to be quite conscious, and waved his hand in the native fashion to indicate his dissent when told that the injection of ammonia was about to be repeated.

. . . . .  
The sense of hearing remained intact almost to the last. Vision did not seem to be impaired; but from his losing the power of speech so soon, it was impossible to determinate this point.” Died.

No. 11.—“She fell down and became unconscious.” Recovery.

No. 16.—She was in a comatose state, the pupils were dilated and insensible to light; the pulse was scarcely to be felt at the wrist.” Recovery.

No. 22.—“I found him perfectly insensible. Pupils dilated.” Recovery.

No. 23. — “She was lethargic and insensible.” Recovery.

No. 26. — “Perfectly comatose, and pupils contracted,” and, adds the reporter, “in two hours the comatose symptoms were so great that I was rather alarmed; at the same time it was asleep, which any medical man who did not know of the ‘bite’ would have said to be drunken.” Recovery. How significant these remarks are!

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\* Very ably reported by Dr. Hilson.



Case 3.—Nothing definite stated, but one may infer that he was sensible, as he had first complained of smarting about the bitten part, and half-an-hour afterwards was continually “putting the right hand to his mouth,” no doubt owing to the feeling of suffocation, and to remove the frothy mucus which filled the mouth. Died.

Case 4. — From my snake-bite report, reported by Dr. Odevaine, 13th Regt. B. N. I. : “He was unable to walk or articulate, though his mental faculties were clear.” Died.

Case 5.—From Dr. S. Weir Mitchell’s cases of rattlesnake-bite, “convulsions: mind generally clear up to death.”

No. 27. — “Suddenly dropped from a chair into the arms of a bye-stander, completely comatose.” Recovery.

No. 35.—“Patient insensible ; eyes bloodshot, suffused with tears ; the pupils somewhat dilated.” Recovery.

SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOLIC POISONING, AFTER DRS. TAYLOR AND TANNER.—In general, the symptoms produced by alcohol come on in the course of a few minutes. There is confusion of thought, a tottering gait and giddiness, followed by *stupor* and *coma* ; should the patient recover from this stage, vomiting supervenes.



The insensibility produced by alcohol may not come on until a certain period, and then suddenly. Dr. Christison met with an instance in which a person fell suddenly into a deep stupor (*vide* Nos. 11 and 27 in the above column): "Pupils *dilated* and fixed. . . . There is sometimes *profound coma* (Dr. Taylor). This is what Blyth says upon the subject:—"Symptoms.—In the case of rapid poisoning by a large dose of alcohol, which alone concerns us as the preliminary and too familiar excitement of the drunkard, may be hardly observable; but the second stage, that of depression, rapidly sets in; the unhappy victim sinks down to the ground helpless, the face pale, the eyes injected and staring, *the pupils dilated, acting sluggishly* to light, and the skin remarkably cold."

Blyth on  
alcoholism.

The inevit-  
able conclu-  
sion after  
comparison.

Compare these symptoms with those given by the gentlemen who undertook to champion Dr. Halford's cause. Also with those of the cases of supposed snake-poisoning in which alcohol—sometimes in enormous doses—had been administered, and you must inevitably arrive at the conclusion that cases of drunkenness were being treated, and not cases of snake-poisoning. It is invariably stated in the fatal cases that the higher sensorium has remained unaffected, while in the cases of recovery, *stupor* and *coma* were



never absent. I endeavoured, as forcibly as possible, to bring home to those gentlemen who were advocating this line of treatment, that the dangers were really introduced by themselves—the real elements of danger were brandy and the syringe. That my efforts were to some extent crowned with success will be gathered from the following extracts from leading articles contained in the Melbourne *Daily Telegraph*, and from the fact that the Melbourne papers, which I have had an opportunity of perusing, through the kindness and courtesy of Dr. Lloyd of that city, are absolutely silent now on the wonderful cures effected by Dr. Halford's method of treatment, though there are still some who refuse to be convinced of the utter worthlessness, not to say positive danger, of such a line of treatment. In my opinion every person who resorts to it should be punishable for mal-praxis.

“The Medical Society of Victoria is to be congratulated upon the decision it took on Wednesday evening, to subject the ammonia treatment of snake-bites to a conclusive test, thus rejecting the advice given by the journals who ‘write up’ Professor Halford, to treat the challenge of the Indian Commission with contempt. This, the favourite mode of dealing with subjects by people who are completely upset, is out of place here,

The “Daily Telegraph” of Melbourne on the subject.



and our medical men have taken the one course open to them, to vindicate their *bona fides*. It is also right, as the Medical Society has determined, that the experiment should be conducted by an independent body, and not by Professor Halford ; and this, as Dr. M'Crea says, without any disrespect being implied towards that gentleman. . . . . As to the funds with which the Medical Society propose to supply themselves, we certainly think they might be contributed by the State. The Assembly voted £500 this year to Professor Halford to enable him to continue his researches, and if that item is allowed to lapse, it can be re-voted to the more National Committee."

And subsequently :—

" 'Trifling with human life' is the dictum of Dr. M'Crea on the ammonia treatment in snake-bite. The conclusion is one that we stated to the profession five years ago, and it is satisfactory at last to find that truth is prevailing. The members of the medical profession in Victoria are so deeply committed to the ammonia treatment, that it is not to be expected that all of them could go round at once, but the public will notice that the men who have tried the experiments for themselves are one by one changing sides. Dr. Girdlestone has arrived at the truth, so has Dr. M'Crea. Dr. Webb's name has to be mentioned, and so has that of Dr. Blair. It may seem dogmatic to speak of the anti - ammonia cause as the truth,



but, on the other hand, it is ridiculous to suppose that all human experience is to be set aside in favour of Professor Halford, and we challenge that gentleman now, as before, to show one set of experiments, apart from his own, in which the verdict has not been that ammonia hastens death. . . . Dr. M'Crea and Dr. Girdlestone, and, indeed, all experimenters, appear to see clearly enough now the point which has been so long insisted upon, that it is the quantity of the poison dose upon which everything depends. If anything short of a fatal dose is given, the patient recovers, and he recovers with far more certainty if he is let alone than if he is drenched with ammonia. . . . The results obtained by the Medical Society of Victoria are strongly corroborative of this result, and we must be excused for repeating what some of them are. Two small dogs were poisoned with half a grain of virus, and were then afforded such chance of existence as the ammonia treatment gives. The one, weighing 17 lbs., lived two hours and forty minutes: the other, weighing  $20\frac{1}{2}$  lbs., lived three hours and fifty-three minutes; the average of the two being three hours and seventeen minutes. A still smaller animal, weighing only 10 lbs., received the same half-grain dose of poison, and, considering his size, this victim should have died in a still shorter time than the others, but he was left alone, and he absolutely lived five hours and forty-six minutes, or more than twice as long as the dog that most nearly resembled him in size, and



who received the benefit of the antidote. Again, witness the two dogs into which one grain was injected—one, weighing 54 lbs., died under the ammonia treatment in twelve minutes; his smaller brother, weighing 41 lbs., who was left alone, lived two hours and thirty minutes, or ten times as long as the dog under the antidote. With the dogs who were bitten by snakes, and who were respectively subjected to the ammonia treatment and left alone, the results obtained are equally emphatic. Four such victims were treated by ammonia injection, and lived from two hours and eighteen minutes (the longest period) to nineteen minutes (the shortest), the average being one hour and twenty-seven minutes. Eight dogs were bitten and left to struggle against the poison, and lived from sixty-six hours and forty-eight minutes (the longest time) to fifty-two minutes (the shortest), the average being twelve hours and twenty-seven minutes, or nine times as long as their fellow-sufferers who were taken in hand by the experimenters for cure. In the face of these facts, it is not possible to deny the accuracy of the statement made by Fontana in the eighteenth century, and echoed by Mr. Vincent Richards in the nineteenth, that to inject ammonia is simply to do one's best to make sure of death."

And yet, as I have said, we still find this method of treatment receiving the countenance of some writers of standard works.

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# INDEX.

	PAGE.
ALCOHOLISM, Cobra-poisoning contrasted with ... ..	177—180
AMMONIA, Author on ... ..	170—181
"    Fayrer on ... ..	... 130
"    first recommended by Jussieu ... ..	... 81
"    Fontana on ... ..	82—88
"    Halford on... ..	... 170
"    Hilson on ... ..	130—178
"    Indian Snake Commission on ... ..	... 130
"    M. Sage on, in 1777 ... ..	... 81
"    Medical Society of Victoria on ... ..	... 181
"    Macrae on ... ..	... 101
"    Williams on ... ..	... 98
AMPHISBÆNA ... ..	... 22
ANALYSIS OF VENOMS, Armstrong on ... ..	... 131
"    Blyth on ... ..	... 132
"    Pedler on ... ..	... 130
"    Weir Mitchell and Reichart on ... ..	... 159
"    Wolfenden on ... ..	... 161
ANTIDOTE, the only fair test of an ... ..	... 85
ANTIDOTES TO SNAKE-VENOM, Alcohol ... ..	... 176
"    "    Ammonia. <i>Vide</i> AMMONIA.	
"    "    Arsenic ... ..	... 44
"    "    Confect Raleigh ... ..	... 65
"    "    Guaco ... ..	... 43
"    "    Mercury ... ..	... 93
"    "    Nitrate of Silver ... ..	... 97
"    "    Oil ... ..	64—73
"    "    Opium ... ..	... 102
"    "    Potassæ Liq. ... ..	... 153
"    "    Potassium Permanganate ... ..	150—157
"    "    Saliva ... ..	... 97
"    "    Snake-stone ... ..	... 108



	PAGE.
ANTIDOTES TO SNAKE-VENOM, Spirit and crushed Cobra ...	65
"                    "            Tanjore Pill ...	89
"                    "            Theriacque ...	43
"                    "            Various ...	45
"                    "            Viper-fat ...	64
ARSENIC, as a remedy ...	44
ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION, Beddoes on ...	97
"                    "            Effects of ...	126
"                    "            Fayrer on ...	122—124
"                    "            Indian Commission on ...	124
"                    "            Mitchell on ...	121
"                    "            Mode of performing...	125
ATTACK, How Snakes ...	13
AUSTRALIAN SNAKES, Experiments with ...	130
BITE OF SNAKE, Cause of ineffectual ...	28
"                    Complex act ...	24
"                    Described ...	26
BLOOD, Action of venom on ...	87, 95, 118, 133, 134, 135, 142, 147, 150
BOAG'S Theories ...	93
BRETON'S Experiments ...	101
BUNGARUS CÆRULEUS ...	4
"                    Lycodon sometimes mistaken for...	4
BUNGARUS FASCIATUS ...	5
CALLOPHIS ...	9
CALORIFACIENT FUNCTIONS, Action of venom on ...	118—141
CAPILLARY SYSTEM, Action of venom on ...	116
CHARMING OF SNAKES ...	36
CHEVERS on the action of venom on the blood ...	134
CILIARY MOVEMENT, Action of venom on ...	117
CIRCULATION, Effects of Cobra-poison on ...	114
COBRA, Description of the ...	2
"            Extreme length of ...	3
"            Habits of ...	12
COBRA-POISONING, Symptoms of ...	137—139
"                    "            Resemble glosso-laryngeal paralysis	140
"                    "            The symptoms of Daboia-poisoning	
compared with ...	146



	PAGE.
CONFECT RALEGH, an antidote	65
CONJUNCTIVA, said not to absorb poison...	83
COW-MILKING SNAKE	33, 34
CROTALIDÆ ...	9
DABOIA RUSSELLI	5
"    Lives long without food or water	62
DABOIA-POISONING and Cobra-poisoning contrasted	146
"    Primary convulsions in	143, 145, 147
"    Secondary convulsions in	144
"    Three forms of death in	144
DABOIA-VENOM, Symptoms of poisoning by	143—146
"    Wall on	143
DAILY TELEGRAPH OF MELBOURNE on Ammonia	181
DAVY'S RESEARCHES	109
DE BUFFON	79
DESTRUCTION OF SNAKES, Superstition against	35
DRINK? Do Snakes	14
DRUNKENNESS, mistaken for Snake-poisoning	175
ECHIS CARINATA	9
ELEPHANTIASIS, Flesh of Viper recommended as a remedy	65
"    Rattlesnake-bite, a cure	67
EWART, J., appointed President of Indian Snake-Poison Commission	122
EXECUTION by Snake-bite	52
FASCINATION, Snakes supposed to possess the power of	16
FAYRER AND BRUNTON'S Researches	110—122
FAYRER'S Thanatophidia of India	2
FEEDING OF SNAKES	13
FER-DE LANCE	49
FERMENTS, discovered in Venom by Lacerda	148
FONTANA, Researches of	73
GERM-THEORY OF DISEASE, foreshadowed	79
GOKURRAH, Spectacled	3
GOLDEN TREE-SNAKE	14
GUACO, an antidote	43
HALFORD'S Experiments	170
HALYS	9
HAMADRYAD	3



	PAGE.
HARMLESS-FANGED SNAKE ... ..	4
HEART, Effects of venom on—according to Brunton and Fayrer ...	115
"    "    "    Indian Snake Commission ...	115
"    "    "    Weir Mitchell ...	114
HIGHER SENSORIUM, Effects of Cobra-poison ... ..	142
HOLY-MEN of the Soonderbunds ... ..	40
HOMICIDE by Snake-bite ... ..	51—85
"    "    Law regarding ... ..	52
HORN-SNAKE ... ..	10
HYDROPHIDÆ ... ..	6
INDIAN SNAKE-POISON COMMISSION ... ..	122
INTESTINAL MOVEMENTS, Action of venom on ... ..	117
KEUNTIAH ... ..	3
KRAIT. <i>Vide</i> BUNGARUS CÆRULEUS.	
LACERDA'S Experiments ... ..	148
LIGATURE in Snake-bite ... ..	97
LIVINGSTONE on Tiger-bite ... ..	107
LOCAL effects of Snake-poison ... ..	137
Important medico-legally ... ..	138
LYCODON, Aulicus ... ..	4
MACKENZIE, COULL, appointed Member of Snake-Poison Com- mission ... ..	122
MANGOOSE and Cobra fight ... ..	91
"    supposed to be proof against Snake-poison ... ..	90
MANIPULATION of Snakes ... ..	37
MARSI ... ..	57
MICROSCOPE EXAMINATION OF POISON, by Cunningham and Lewis	133
"    "    "    De Buffon ... ..	79
"    "    "    Fontana ... ..	80
"    "    "    Lacerda ... ..	149
"    "    "    Mead ... ..	62
MILK of woman bitten poisoned her child ... ..	34
MILLONI'S theory of heat-producing rays of light ... ..	78
MEAD, RICHARD ... ..	60
MERCURY, an antidote ... ..	93
METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS said to influence the severity of symptoms of Snake-poisoning ... ..	61



	PAGE.
MUSCLES, Effect of venom on ... ..	114
"                    Ultimate ... ..	114
MUSCULAR IRRITABILITY, Fontana on ... ..	80
MUSIC, Snake supposed to be charmed by ... ..	39
NERVE CENTRES, Action of venom on ... ..	117—141
NERVES, Action of venom on ... ..	117
NERVOUS SYSTEM, Action of venom on ... ..	117
NICHOLSON on Snakes ... ..	37
NITRATE OF SILVER, an antidote ... ..	97
NON-VENOMOUS SNAKES, the emblem of health ... ..	59
ODOUR of Snakes ... ..	21
OIL as an antidote ... ..	64
OPHIOPHAGUS ... ..	3
OPIUM as an antidote ... ..	102
PANSEURS of St. Lucia ... ..	41
PARASURAMEN, Legend of ... ..	58
PHYSIOLOGICAL ACTION OF VENOM, Fontana on ... ..	86
PIT-VIPERS. <i>Vide</i> CROTALIDÆ.	
PLATURUS ... ..	6
POISON-GLAND, Discovery of ... ..	74
POTASSÆ LIQ., Author on ... ..	157
"          Brunton on ... ..	113
"          Fayrer on ... ..	113
POTASSIUM PERMANGANATE, Author on ... ..	153
"          "          Fayrer on ... ..	155
"          "          Lacerda on ... ..	150
"          "          Wall on ... ..	156
PROPAGATION of Snakes ... ..	20
PSYLLI ... ..	57
RAJ-SAMP. <i>Vide</i> BUNGARUS FASCIATUS.	
RATTLESNAKE-BITE, a cure for Elephantiasis ... ..	67
"          Habits of ... ..	11
"          Rattle of ... ..	10
RATTLESNAKE-POISONING, Causes of death in ... ..	120
RECURRENCE of pain, &c., in bitten parts ... ..	106
REDI, FRANCESCO ... ..	55
RUSSELL, Experiments by ... ..	89

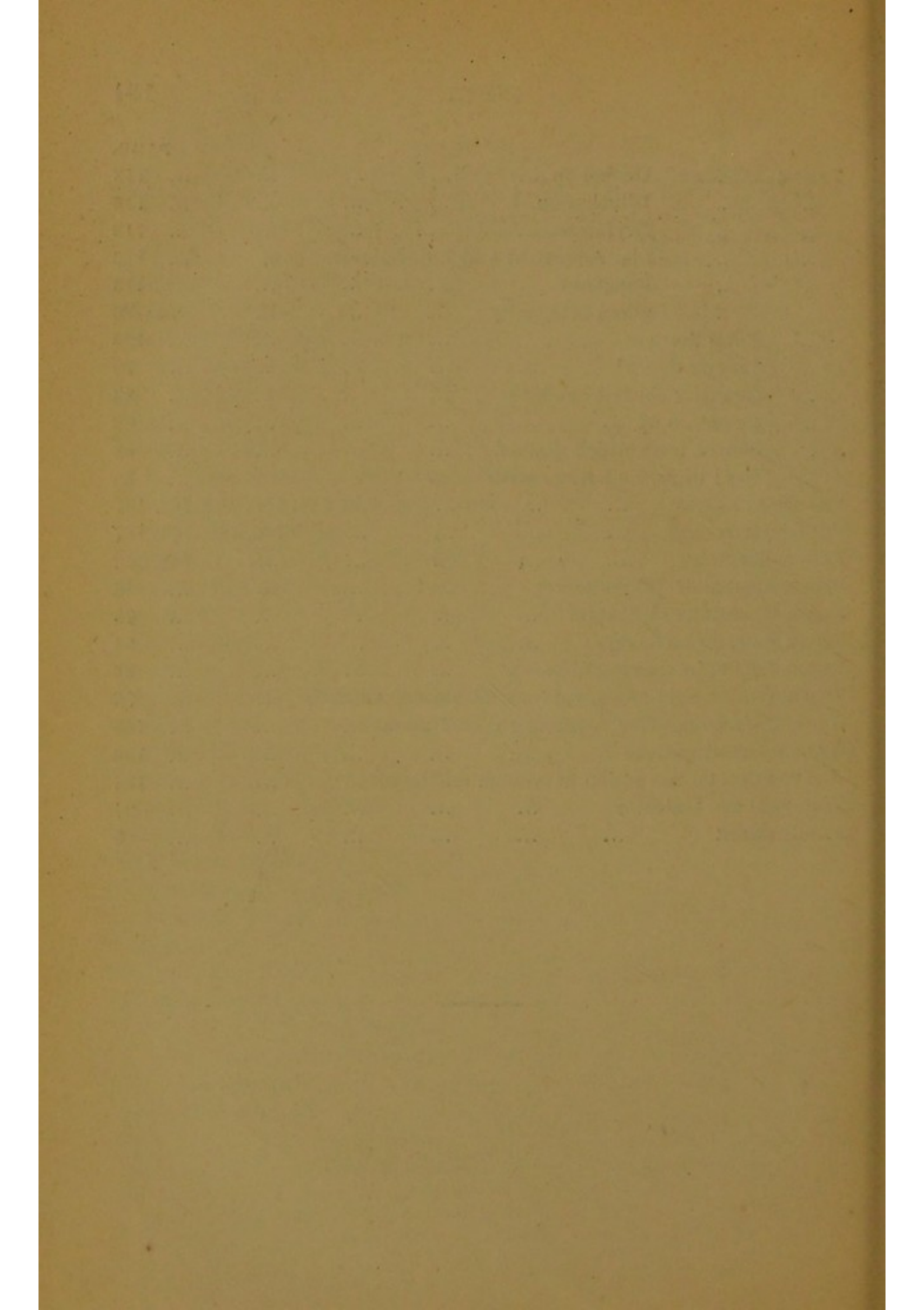


	PAGE.
SALIVA, a remedy in Viper-bite	93
SALIVATION in Cobra-poisoning	141, 142, 147
„ scarcely ever present in Daboia-poisoning	147
SCHLEGEL on the effects of Snake-poison taken internally...	76
SEA-SNAKES. <i>Vide</i> HYDROPHIDÆ.	
SEA-SNAKE, Bite of	7
SHIA CHUNDER. <i>Vide</i> DABOIA.	
SHORTT, Researches of	105
SKIN, Sloughing of	15
SNAKE, a marvellous	19
SNAKES as food	66
„ most commonly met with in India	2
„ probably can poison each other	12
„ The sheltering of	5
SNAKE-BITE? What can be done in	157
SNAKE-CHARMERS	49
SNAKE-CHARMING	36
SNAKE-STONES	108
SNAKES' BLOOD, Analysis of	170
SPIRIT AND CRUSHED COBRA, an antidote	65
SPONTANEOUS COAGULATION of the blood-theory	78
SUCTION in Snake-bite	97
SUNKERCHOR. <i>Vide</i> OPHIOPHAGUS.	
TANJORE PILL, an antidote	89
TERRIBLE SNAKE	21
THERIAQUE, an antidote	43
TIC. POLONGA. <i>Vide</i> DABOIA.	
TRAINING of Snakes	36
TRIMERESURI	9
TWO-HEADED SNAKE	22—34
VENOM, a cure for Ague	68
„ „ Elephantiasis	67
„ „ Hydrophobia	68
„ Analysis of. <i>Vide</i> ANALYSIS.	
„ Collection of	29
„ „ Our method	32
„ „ Weir Mitchell's	30



					PAGE.
VENOM, Effects of Alcohol on ...	...	...	...	...	113
"    "    Dilution on ...	...	...	...	...	113
"    "    Drying on ...	...	...	...	...	113
"    "    Liq. Ammoniæ and Liq. Potassæ	...	...	...	...	113
"    "    Reagents	...	...	...	...	113
"    "    taken internally	...	...	...	...	76—78
Fatal doses of ...	...	...	...	...	129
Inoculation of ...	...	...	...	...	70
Quantity shed at one bite	...	...	...	...	83
Re-action of ...	...	...	...	...	83
Source from which derived	...	...	...	...	63
Used to poison arrows with	...	...	...	...	60
VENOM-ALBUMIN ...	...	...	142, 144, 160, 162, 163, 167	...	
VENOM-GLOBULIN ...	...	...	160, 162, 163, 167	...	
VENOM-PEPTONE ...	...	...	160, 163	...	
VIPER, symbol of Divine power	...	...	...	...	56
VIPER-CATCHERS of Europe ...	...	...	...	...	75
VIPER FAT, an antidote ...	...	...	...	...	64
VIPER JELLY, in wasting diseases	...	...	...	...	64
VIPER VENOM, said not to poison cold-blooded animals	...	...	...	...	76
WADDELL'S Suggestion regarding Commission ...	...	...	...	...	165
WALL'S Investigations ...	...	...	...	...	136
WOLFENDEN on the action of venom on the blood	...	...	...	...	133
XENOPELITIS, Unicolor ...	...	...	...	...	24
XENURELAPS ...	...	...	...	...	9







## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

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THIS little work of 180 pages meets a distinct want in regard to the important subject of snake-poison. . . . No systematic account of observations upon snake-poison hitherto existed. The results of different observers are scattered through numerous journals, frequently inaccessible to those desirous of information on the subject, and, as a consequence, investigators, ignorant of what had been accomplished, have sometimes travelled unconsciously over ground already fully explored. The publication of the work now under review at once removes this difficulty by supplying a careful summary of all the solid results hitherto achieved in regard to snake-poison, so that future investigators will be spared useless labour, and be able at once to devote their attention to fresh ground, and much unnecessary sacrifice of animal life will thus be avoided. The Author, a well-known and ardent worker in this field of research, is specially well qualified for the task he has undertaken of presenting in a connected form the isolated results of previous observers, and we have to congratulate him on the admirable manner in which he has accomplished this object, and so contributed directly to the further advance of this difficult subject, which he has already done so much to elucidate by hard practical work that is all the more praiseworthy from its having been conducted in the spare intervals of a busy official life. The arrangement of the work is excellent, and the value of the historical record much enhanced by the judicious criticism of an experienced authority.—*Indian Medical Gazette*.

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There are few men more capable than Dr. Vincent Richards of discoursing well and wisely upon the poisonous snakes of India. An acute and patient observer, he has for many years past conducted systematic experiments with the object of ascertaining the effects of snake-poison upon the organism of the inferior mammalia; and his present book summarizes his own observations and those of his predecessors in this somewhat recondite line of research. Dr. Richards' work is of distinct value as a contribution to the literature of this branch of research, which is by no



## *Opinions of the Press.*

means voluminous. It may be added that the writer has an admirable gift of clear, forcible expression, which will help to popularise his book among readers of all classes. Dr. Richards has done a timely service in bringing the light of science to bear on a subject which is easily turned to the purposes of the quack and impostor.—*Englishman*.

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The book contains a valuable store of information, dealing with all branches of the subject. . . . Dr. Richards' book is written in a popular style, and is likely to prove as attractive to the general reader as to the specialist in snakes.—*Indian Daily News*.

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As might be expected of one who has devoted so much time and labour to study and original investigation of snake-poisons, the Author shows an extensive acquaintance with his subject, and has arranged his matter in a very readable form. Although the work is professedly addressed chiefly to investigators as furnishing them in a handy form with the landmarks of the ground already worked over, yet a considerable portion of the contents will be found of as much interest to the intelligent general reader. Indeed there are evidences in the selection and arrangement of his details which lead to the conclusion, that the Author has intentionally avoided aiming over the heads of ordinary, non-technical readers. . . . These are, however, flaws of a minor nature, and, though worth the trouble of removal, are but a feather weight when balanced against the many excellences of the treatise, which we can confidently recommend to our readers as an able and accurate exposition of the subject; a work of much value to the serious student and medical jurist, and one which will not fail to sustain the interest of the general reader.—*Indian Review*.

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This work, as its title announces, is intended as a brief critical survey of the most important results hitherto obtained in the pathology and therapeutics of snake-bite, for which review the Author's long experience and special advantages as Member of the Indian Snake Commission peculiarly fit him. In Dr. Richards' own words: "much, of course, is not original, but rather a *réchauffage* of the materials which practical experience has enabled me to gather, collate, and estimate the value of," and this collation and valuation has been done with acumen and diligence. There is hardly an important fact in the history of



## Opinions of the Press.

snake-bite which has not its due notice in this volume.  
The book cannot fail to be a valuable handbook and guide to investigators in this branch of toxicology.—*Pioneer*.

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To Mofussil Missionaries and all Medical Missionaries in India, and indeed in all tropical countries, this must be a valuable as well as an interesting volume,—alike for the large amount of positive scientific knowledge, and for the exposure of fallacies, errors and superstitions it contains.  
This knowledge Dr. Richards supplies in a succinct, intelligent, and readable manner as regards the subject he has taken up. And the information supplied is specially valuable in connection with a subject necessitating experiments upon the living as it prevents an unnecessary and reckless waste of animal life.  
We recommend the volume as a valuable contribution to this interesting subject.—*Indian Evangelical Review*.

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Dr. Richards has done his utmost to arrange past facts and present deductions before his readers—scientific and otherwise—in a compact and intelligible form.  
Those who wish to see how the evidence runs in favour of the various treatments would do well to consult Dr. Richards' book.—*Civil and Military Gazette*.

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For further information as to the scientific aspects of the subject of snake-poison, we commend our readers to the excellently written and interesting account given by Dr. Richards.—*Madras Mail* (Second notice).

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The more recent and important researches into the nature of snake-poisons are summarized in Mr. Vincent Richards' *The Landmarks of Snake-Poison Literature*. As a member of the late Indian Commission, Mr. Richards is an authority on the question of antidotes, and the chapters of his little book devoted to this important branch of the subject are full of interest.—*Saturday Review*.

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Mr. Vincent Richards' book is a *Veritable multum in parvo*. In less than two hundred pages, he has condensed information which it must have taken him years to accumulate and much labour to acquire.—*The Spectator*.



## *Opinions of the Press.*

"The Landmarks of Snake-Poison Literature" collects together a large number of facts concerning Snake-poisons, and reviews the more important researches into their nature. To those who wish in the compass of 180 pages to become acquainted with the anecdotes, fallacies, opinions, original researches, mode of treatment, and, in fact, every phase of snake-poisoning, we heartily commend this little book; it is written in a cheerful vein, albeit it is occasionally warlike and severe in its method of dealing with opposite views. It is far better in the interests of everybody and everything, that the truth should be plainly told . . . Halford's advocacy of ammonia in the treatment of snake-bite is conclusively shewn to be a fallacy.—*The Lancet*.

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Dr. Richards' volume is a welcome and valuable contribution to snake literature, and as interesting as replete with knowledge of the problem of which it treats. The Author has evidently studied the subject thoroughly, and his researches is laid before the reader in a style as simple, but expressive, as the unassuming modesty which characterises the work . . . We commend Dr. Richards' book to the notice of the medical faculty, and the non-professional reader will find it as instructive as interesting.—*Melbourne Daily Telegraph*.

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