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Australian Snake-Lore.

The Australian snake, it may be said at the outset, is not given to obtruding himself upon mankind; rather he is retiring by nature; and if the wayfarer has the unnatural desire to meet one unawares, he is far more likely to be disappointed than not. The Australian snake has to be looked for, and he is a wise person who has other things to look for in Australia than snakes.

It is true that this reptilian trait has also its peculiar dangers, for a hidden snake is a most unpleasant discovery as a rule. One has always to have snakes at mind when in the bush—that is, virgin, undeveloped land; and one has almost to be as careful when living near undeveloped land, even though the path outside the house is paved and the street lighted by electricity. The writer knows people in Australia who have found snakes in their beds and on their doorsteps, although the reptiles are not very commonly found at such close quarters, at any rate in towns.

A contributor who described in the daily press of Australia the privations and joys of going to take up new land stated that, before turning in, a careful inspection of the bedding was made for snakes, centipedes, and scorpions. Even with this precaution, when it became necessary to move the boxes, a snake was found now and again coiled under them in close proximity to the beds.

The most common Australian venomous reptiles are the Tiger Snake, the Black Snake, the Brown Snake, and the Death-Adder. There are also Whip Snakes, Carpet Snakes, Diamond Snakes, etc.

The carpet snake is non-venomous, but can inflict a wound which may fester and refuse to heal for some time, particularly if the snake has an unhealthy mouth, called a "canted" mouth.

Every summer several deaths from snake-bite are reported in the newspapers, but the number thus recorded is, of course, a mere fraction of the actual fatalities. Perhaps carelessness is responsible for the tragedy in some cases, and foolhardiness in others, but most of the deaths are pure accidents. This writer remembers an inquest being held on a miner who was discovered huddled up and dead in the yard of a Newcastle (N.S.W.) public-house. One witness in his evidence said that he had seen the deceased and another miner drinking together, and the latter produced a venomous snake, which he held securely and showed to his companion. The witness stated that the deceased, who was under the influence of drink, appeared to be irritating the snake. The inference, of course, was obvious. Exasperated and always ready to strike, the reptile had overpowered any restraint by its keeper, and the victim got too near for safety. The fatal bite (made always with lightning-like rapidity) was probably inflicted without the deceased being aware of it in his liquor-muddled state.

Fortunately such foolhardy and fatal actions are not common. Adults and children alike in Australia have generally a wholesome respect for, and caution towards, snakes. Even so, it is a mystery, when one remembers that in snake parts the danger is always present, that comparatively speaking, but few fatalities from snake-bite occur. In a suburb of Sydney called Botany a little child recently went into the garden after dark, trod upon a death-adder unknown to her parents, and was dead in a very short time. Not long ago a young child's cries in the daytime brought his mother to his room, in time to see a black snake disappearing from the bed. The poor little victim, feeling the reptile crawling over him, had tried to get rid of it, and was in consequence bitten in several places and quickly succumbed. One would think from these two cases that it is almost impossible to avoid unpleasant encounters with snakes in Australia, and yet many Sydney natives have never seen one.

Then, too, it is possible to get lost in the bush and be found after many days of wandering, as is the case with numbers of adults and children—which is nothing short of wonderful, for, apart from exhaustion, thirst, hunger, and terror, in such circumstances, there is always the dreaded "strike" of the snake more or less on the mind. That this is a very real and ever-present peril to the "bush" wanderer may be abundantly proved by the numerous skeletons of victims of all ages found accidentally or after search in the bush. No one, of course, can positively state the cause of death, but any one with knowledge of the loathsome danger the snake presents in its native haunts will never rule snake-bite out of the question as cause of death in such cases. Treading on a snake is, naturally the easiest and in the country the most general way of getting bitten, and can happen on a dark night in towns if "undeveloped" land is near; the qualification, of course, explains why suburban residents are so seldom victims. In one of the oldest parts of Sydney, however, snakes are found in abundance. The district in question is the Central Park, much of which is natural country. Here, while sitting on a seat, the visitor

may have the somewhat uncanny experience of seeing a venomous snake crawl out from between his legs; and here the writer one evening came up to a motor-party which had just put a tiger snake to a violent end by deliberately running over it as it was crossing the asphalted and well-lighted path.

As a rule, the consequence of treading on a snake is to be bitten, but if the offender is particularly nimble he may escape the usual penalty by a lightning-like jump as he realises instantaneously the nature of his tread.

A native of Sydney related to the writer that his father's favourite way of killing a snake was to jump on its head, after which snake-killing would seem easy. So it is up to a point in question one day, for the snake got him, with fatal results. A like fate generally befalls any individual who systematically dabbles with snakes either for sport or for a living. The writer on one occasion visited the historic spot where the French navigator La Perouse landed, a few miles out of Sydney, which locality now bears the name of the explorer. It happened to be a snake-charmer's day, and there were two parties at work. The first party consisted of "Professor" Fox's family, who seemed to enjoy being encircled with black and brown snakes, all apparently half-enslaved. One young girl in particular had them coiled over neck and arms and legs. The object of the performance was of course, firstly, for gain, and secondly, to exhibit the mastery gained over the fearsome and loathsome creatures. As soon as one was put to the ground and began to move, the little ring of spectators unhesitatingly backed and disintegrated until the performer adroitly gathered up the reptile. It was noticeable that the snake-charmer darted like lightning upon the reptile when finished with, seizing it just at the back of the head and putting it into the proper receptacle. The second party consisted of the performer and his apparent business manager. This latter individual, who would have arrested attention almost everywhere, chiefly by virtue of a very capacious mouth, was trying to effect good sales of a snake antidote, which he persisted in describing as "this 'ere anecdote'." The performer, who was a young man, would pull out one or two snakes from his box, always very quickly, and then the business manager would close to the head. Putting one on the ground, he would stroke the other and walk about showing it to the spectators, describing meanwhile its habits and the virtues of the antidote. His companion was selling, and drawing attention to the fact that he had proved the efficacy of the antidote in his own case. Sometimes he would describe how and when a particular reptile was caught. By way of change he produced now and again a non-venomous tree python snake. At last he coiled a tiger snake (a most venomous variety) into a plat and lay prone for a few seconds with his head on it. Nothing happened in this case, but while putting one of the deadly kind away he evidently thought the snake had bitten him, to judge from the anxious way in which he examined his hand.

The crowning act of the whole senseless performance was the "milking" of a snake. The business manager held a spoon, over which was stretched a piece of thin india-rubber, just in front of the snake, which, held securely by the other man, was irritated sufficiently to make it bite the spoon (when irritated a snake will strike at almost everything). The venom flowed through the two hollow fangs, which, of course, pierced the india-rubber, into the bowl of the spoon, and the spoonful of clear water-like poison was taken round for the crowd to inspect. The "professor" remarked on the number of people the spoonful of venom could fatally dispose of, either at once or at any time after crystallisation, into which condition he stated the venom would shortly change.

It might be as well here to refer again to "Professor" Fox, mentioned before. He was one of Australia's well-known snake experts, and seemed to have a mysterious power over reptiles. He was absolutely fearless regarding snakes, and would go into the bush and pick them up and bag them in very unconcerned fashion. He had a specific of his own invention which he claimed was an infallible cure for snake-bite, having many times applied it to himself when bitten. His claims were well received on the whole, and the Government of Australia were half disposed officially to recognize his specific. It was about this time that, in order to test the remedy, the Indian Government always on the lookout for a real antidote, invited him to India to make good his claims as regarded Indian snakes. He met with fair success on animals; but one day, in some Zoological Gardens, he was standing near a collection of kraats (very venomous reptiles) and was bitten, perhaps through want of caution. He applied his specific, and apparently thought no more of the matter, but not long after, at luncheon, became suddenly ill, and realized at once the end was near. Although, of course, help was immediately forth-

coming, the virulence of the poison soon did its work.

Quite a discussion then arose in the Sydney press as to his claim for the discovery of an antidote. Many asserted that his undoubted escapes after being bitten were due to the precaution taken by Indian snake-charmers to acquire immunity from snake-bite—namely, through repeated inoculation of snake poison, gradually increased in quantity, though at first minute. There is no reason to believe that snake-charmers invariably render their stock-in-trade harmless by breaking or removing the poison fangs, for it is by no means unusual in Australia at least, for snake-purveyors to be fatally bitten during a performance. Whether Fox did or did not acquire immunity, so far as his Australian life was concerned, in the above-mentioned manner will never be known; at any rate his specific, if an antidote at all, was a limited and local one, judging by his end.

The venom found in Australian snakes is of a most deadly nature, although perhaps a little less quick in its action than, say, Indian cobra venom. On one occasion a man was walking through bush country, when he was bitten right through one of his boots (which was probably defective), and soon afterwards died. Another man took the pair of boots and wore them, and shortly afterwards also died from poisoning, every symptom pointing to snake-bite, but snake-bite he certainly had not suffered. The mystery was cleared up eventually. When the first victim was bitten, some of the poison lodged in the boot; the second man happened to have in his foot a slight wound, and the poison found its way into his system by that means when the boot was put on.

The district of Gympie, in Victoria, much of which is low and marshy, teems with snakes, and when it is necessary to go on foot through any part of this country the traveller encases his legs in long and strong boots. Against these the reptiles strike in vain, although, as may be expected, the experience of being struck is somewhat uncanny. No precaution, however, is infallible, and it is usual to notice in the press at the beginning of the warm weather, and on all country railway-stations, warnings as to how to avoid snakes, and advice as to what to do if bitten. If a snake is met, the Australian advice is to see that it is the last meeting for the snake, and the rule is to kill without delay. This is easily effected if done in the proper way, which is to approach the reptile at right angles and with a stick break its back. Nothing more need be done, as the snake is helpless; but it is said invariably to linger until sunset, when it dies.

If it were not for bush-fires snakes might easily become a dangerous pest, but fortunately immense numbers perish in every bush-fire that rages, and during some summers such fires are very common. In this way does Nature assist man in his continual fight for existence on virgin land—Chamber's Journal.

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TO-DAY'S MESSAGES.

CECIL IN NEW YORK.

NEW YORK, March 26.
Lord Robert Cecil, arriving here yesterday on S.S. Matsville, said he would like to see United States enter the League of Nations, but is equally as anxious to see Germany enter, and felt they would be allowed to do so if application is made in the proper way.

DRASTIC REGULATIONS.

LONDON, March 26.

New Kirchen, near Treves, reports an attack under cover of darkness and a severe assault upon the local commandant of occupation forces, Captain Deschamps, by a gang of men. In consequence of this the Government issued a proclamation, forbidding more than two people to be on the street together, and has ordered all places of amusement closed at eight in the evening.

GERMAN RESISTANCE CONTINUES.

DUSSELDORF, March 26.

In contrast to the recently reported tendency of workers here to let down in their resistance to occupation forces, there is a noticeable distinct movement in the opposite direction. During night the walls were covered with posters, urging resistance, and forbidden newspapers are smuggled from unoccupied territory. The number of arrests and expulsions is increasing.

NOT MANY GAINS.

PARIS, March 26.

Premier Poincare, appearing before the Finance Committee of the Chamber of Deputies on Tuesday, in referring to Ruhr, said he had great hope Germany would yield by end of May. M. Poincare is said not to have consulted from the Committee, that to date the economic result from the viewpoint of realization of guarantees has been of slight importance. Only prolonged and stable occupation would permit, owing to ill will of German government, a realization of the program for the operation of occupied districts so as to regulate problems of reparations.

TWO YEARS HENCE.

LONDON, March 26.

It was announced in the House of Commons, yesterday, that the next Imperial Press Conference is likely to be held in Australia, in 1925.

TYPHOID EPIDEMIC.

COCHIHUATE, OHT., March 25.

One eighth of the population of this town is stricken with typhoid fever from drinking impure water. Only three deaths have resulted so far. Doctors and nurses are being reinforced.

BRITISH SHIP FIRED ON.

HONG KONG, March 26.

The British steamer Kwei Lin was fired at from the shore of Canton River, two miles from Canton, but reached here, yesterday, undamaged.

AN UNFORTUNATE STRIKE.

LONDON, March 26.

Spread of the Agricultural strike in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire is causing anxiety, lest it extend to winter areas and become general. The sudden appearance of spring, after a long period of rain presents a golden opportunity for farmers, which they are obliged let go-by. It is reported that workers on King George's farms refused to obey the strike order, but some of those on farms rented from the estate have quit. Leaders of the men insist that all must strike, even though wages and hours are satisfactory. Complete good feeling exists between farmers and employees.

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