

The Tarantula.

(Detroit Tribune.)

One of the most remarkable of all the strange developments of life in the far West is the tarantula industry in Southern California.

During the last of July, August and September the tarantulas take their annual outing and hold high carnival, for then the environments of their underground homes are dry and parched, and they can crawl delightedly through a wealth of adobe dirt and over meadows, where crouch weary groups of sagebrush, cactus and wild grasses, all oppressed by heat and gray with thirst.

They live almost exclusively in rough, uncultivated areas and seldom intrude their uncanny presence in city or town. In dredging out their subterranean domestic establishments they show a partiality for adobe soil, which is black and easily manipulated. There may be intelligent method in their selection of a home, for the soil in color corresponds with their dusky hue, and they can proceed about with less fear of being observed by their enemies.

During the tarantula season small boys in cotton shirts and jumpers dot the foot hills, and dry fields like punctuation marks, intent upon capturing these dangerous bugs. The trade paraphernalia of these intrepid youths consists of tin cans and glass jars with covers, a pail of water and two long slender sticks that can be used as pinchers, with which to handle the spiders.

Some of the boys are more elaborately equipped for the business, being supplied with long steel pinchers, and a box specially made for the purpose, containing small partitions and tightly fitting cover.

Two tarantulas are never put into the same receptacle, for when in captivity they seem to have an inveterate antipathy for each other and fight with most ferocious abandon, biting, scratching and mutilating one another until both contestants die in the fray.

Sometimes the barbaric instincts of the taxidermist influence him to put half a dozen spiders on a table and watch them fight. A terrific battle ensues, for the wrath of the participants is great, and the weapons formidable. In preparing for the attack they stand almost upright on their four hind legs, open like their fangs, and until the mandibles protrude in a straight line from the face, then with all the muscular force of which they are capable they launch themselves forward, sinking the poison-laden mandibles into the flesh of the enemy.

Every movement expresses antagonism, violent, terrific, and finally all six are clutched together, forming a compact ball. Thinking the proceedings have progressed far enough, the taxidermist takes the ball in his pinchers, and precipitates all six spiders into the turpentine-gasoline combination, where they dissolve partnership with one another and with life.

When one tarantula bites another the one bitten acts like a human being under the influence of liquor, a thing absolutely drunk. This is the first result. This comes a numbness or paralytic condition which often lasts for a week, during which the spider lives, but is unable to move. At the end of this time he usually dies.

Tarantulas sometimes lose a leg in their encounters, and it is given out as an absolute rule by a man who has controlled the poverty trade in Pasadena for years, that a new leg will sprout out from the old stump, and the spider be made as good as new.

Though the tarantulas are fierce amongst themselves, they can be tamed, and when in captivity will take flies from the mouth of a drunk water from a leaf. Though they may be amiable, they don't thrive under such treatment and soon die.

In India these spiders are regarded with the greatest reverence and consideration, and become so tamed that when children die a string about them they will follow their leader as readily as a dog will follow an American child.

The artist who guides the tarantula through the process of taxidermy evidently knows no heed of the old Kentish proverb: "If you wish to live, let a spider run alive." For an average of 5,000 bugs a year pass out into the vast unknown world of gasoline and turpentine, into which this man thrusts them.

Upon being suddenly thrown into this ill-smelling bath, the tarantula's

astonishment and indignation is great, his sentiments being expressed by lively movements of his hairy body and demonic gleams that scintillate from his eight tiny eyes. With a final flourish, in which his legs reach out pleadingly toward an unsympathetic world, he gives a despairing shudder and succumbs.

In spite of this extensive trade in voracious gods, no one is known to have been bitten, both boys and men taking the greatest precautions. In South America this spider is much dreaded, the species in Mexico being almost equally bad.

During the middle ages, the tarantula was known as the "mad spider," because of the symptoms following its bite, the spider being held responsible for the dancing mania which over-spread Europe at that time. The bite of the tarantula threw the sufferer into the deepest melancholy, which changed into a seuer, while his body became livid and cold. Sometimes the victims became blind. For music they had an increased sensibility, and no other way so could rouse them from their lethargy. It seemed to permeate their system and wake the almost sleeping heart, and they would jump to their feet and dance with maniacal abandon until utterly exhausted. At last, after a perspiration dripping from every pore, a general relaxation took place, and the patient dropped to earth overcome by fatigue, but cured.

A popular theory was that the poison was distributed through the system by dancing, and worked its way out through the skin. Bright colors always indicated the ravages of the dancers, each victim having a preference.

Squeezed.

The word "squeezed" has a commercial meaning. When a large operator in stocks has been outmaneuvered and beaten by a larger operator, the former is said to be squeezed. For a long time the United States of America, a country situated between Mexico and Canada, has been endeavoring to squeeze the latter. Not to go too far into the history, they tried the squeezing process on us when they withdrew from the Reciprocity Treaty some fifteen years ago. They have tried it several times since by means of high tariffs. No doubt there was a good reason for their actions, judged by modern business standards, but it certainly was not the kind of fairness that is desired by the people of Canada. Canada has steadily refused to be squeezed, and the more the trade of the continent to which we belong was denied us by our neighbors the more we sought for a place in the commerce of the world.

Gradually, however, light is permeating the regions of darkest America and a few journalistic voices in the United States are calling for a new policy toward the Land of the Maple. The squeezing policy is not generally approved. A number of the best newspapers in New York, Washington and Canada are pleading for a new policy—reciprocity on fair terms. They point out that Canada is the third best customer of the United States, and that the Canadian market is worth more than all the South American markets combined. This is a more sensible view.

Just as a suggestion, I desire to intimate that this would be an excellent time for Sir Wilfrid Laurier to decide that the Joint High Commission be abandoned. There is nothing to be gained by keeping it alive. Let it die and give it a respectable funeral. Such a course of conduct on our part would do much to help along the education of the United States people concerning the amount of stability and independence possessed by the six million people of this northern land. The Maritime Provinces are not anxious for reciprocity so long as the United States government does not put an export duty on tourists. Nor does British Columbia desire reciprocity. The merchants of Vancouver and Victoria have difficult work to hold their own with the sellers of goods in Seattle, Tacoma and San Francisco. Reciprocity would hurt Vancouver and Victoria. The injury would be getting along nicely because the United States does not put an export duty on settlers like tourists; they pay no tax when they leave the country. And the Northwest wants reciprocity. Quebec is a poor province without reciprocity, and it is questionable if in the long run it would be beneficial to these provinces.—September Canadian Magazine.

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