

INTRODUCES A FAIR DUELLIST 25

and his cousin, the diamond snake, are fairly awkward reptiles to tackle when roused and disposed to show fight. Although not venomous, they have a good set of biting teeth, and once those teeth grip the flesh, the long powerful body writhes round the victim, and squeezes the breath out of him with a pressure of mighty strength.

As we rode up, the snake was making ready to strike. The head lay absolutely motionless, but behind it the neck was slowly curving into loop after loop until the loose flat coils represented enough "slack" to enable the head, when shot out, to reach to its object, while yet the lower coils remained firm, held by the grip the end of the tail had on the fallen tree. The blue forked tongue flicked in and out between the lips as the head commenced to sway to and fro gently and rhythmically. The lighter-coloured scales along the neck began to glisten, and the dark mottled pattern on the body, not unlike a Brussels carpet worked out in blotches ranging from dirty yellow to purple-brown, became more vivid as the sweat of anger oozed through the skin.

The girl heard us approach, but did not take her eyes off her enemy.

"Keep back, dogs, keep back!" she said; then, raising her voice, "Keep back on those horses. Can't you see you'll scare him!"

Scare him! Scare that cold merciless fiend making ready at the moment to strike at her, and grip her to death with those terrible writhing coils! I reined in my horse, fascinated by the spectacle, not able