

INSIDE FACTS ABOUT THE ART OF SNAKE CHARMING.

Expert Tells How It Is Done by Fakirs and by Others.

By Raymond L. Ditmars, Curator of Reptiles New York Zoological Society.

Possibly the reader can recall the performance as we all have seen it on the circus field, associated with brightly palmed wagons and a sea of waving canvas, given by the "snake charmers." From mysterious boxes come yards of serpents, writhing and coiling in ever graceful undulations. The scaly bodies glitter and scintillate and intermingle with the flash and the tinsel raiment of their mistress. She is presently embraced within richly tinted folds. The movements of the serpents are slow and deliberate, with the exception of the quivering forked tongues. Throughout the performance there is an intimation of complete mastery over the reptiles. The serpents are hoarse and gurgling. Technically described as "harmless snakes," they possess no poison fangs but are provided with great crushing powers and long, recurved teeth which tear great furrows when run into execution. Yet these formidable creatures exhibit no signs of hostility while being vigorously handled.

There are two ways of handling snakes to meet the requirements of the modern show. One is to tame the big fellows until they display the requisite amount of docility to render them safe in the hands of the performer. The other is to handle the smaller, untamed species, sometimes poisonous, with such swiftness, dexterity and audacity as to astonish and confuse the reptiles. Strangely to say, this method is not frequently accompanied by accidents, though employed upon really dangerous serpents.

The taming of a big boa or a python is an expensive process. Among the members of the snake charming fraternity a reptile that has gone through the mill is described as a snake "broken to handle." The snake usually arrives from Africa by way of European ports and should not exceed eight or twelve feet in length. Over this length a serpent is too heavy to be conveniently handled. Twelve-foot specimens are generally described as about fifteen feet in length. They cost about \$50. These big constrictors are always gloomy and sullen upon reaching their destination. The first care is to give them water, about which most of them have gone for weeks. After the snake has been put in a tub of water, where it may be drinking for a half hour, it is allowed to rest for some days until it has eaten food in the shape of a rabbit or a chicken. Then the work of "breaking in" begins.

"BREAKING" A BOA.

Struggling and hissing, it is dragged from its case by the neck and liberated, when it usually coils and strikes viciously at the object of annoyance. The prospective performer walks about it repeatedly, holding the snake as close as possible without coming within range of the recurved teeth, and in every way possible endeavors to get the reptile accustomed to his maneuvers. Under ordinary circumstances the snake gradually becomes indifferent and the trainer in turn grows bolder, coming close enough to stroke the reptile's body or gently rears it up. Brightly colored cloths are dragged across the serpent's back and fluttered about its head, and at length it becomes familiar enough with these advances to receive them without an exhibition of nervous hostility. Then begins the task of "breaking the snake." At first this is limited to a hand being placed under the head and raising the forward portion of the body. The snake usually reacts by a violent movement, but must be slow and deliberate, and if the creature evinces any symptoms of nervousness it must be some time before it is allowed to proceed. Patience and persistency will bring success.

The intimacy between the snake and the trainer grows stronger as the snake's body is gradually lifted bodily and twisted about the neck and shoulders of the "snake charmer." An ordinary circus snake is usually broken in within two weeks' time and shows no sign of bad temper upon being lifted from the trainer's hands. The snake is usually broken in by the persevering trainer, where it gently tightens its coils and keeps from falling. This is the big snake "broken in."

Only certain species of the larger snakes are used for "snake charming" exhibitions, these being selected because of their reputation for being so tame and docile. The serpents most frequently employed are the African rock python, the Indian cobra and the South American anaconda. These two good natured species are among the most popular of the larger snakes. Another snake occasionally used is the Indian python, which is a more aggressive animal. The most beautiful among the pythons and the anacondas are the royal and reticulated pythons, which are found in the Malay Peninsula and the larger islands of the Archipelago. This reptile is held in high repute on account of its medicinal properties. The cobra is the favorite, and surprisingly large numbers of this species are captured annually and shipped to Europe. The cobra is a snake of the "poisonous" class, but it is the cobra that is the subject of "snake charming" exhibitions. It is the cobra that is the subject of "snake charming" exhibitions.

A HINDOO ENTERTAINMENT.

The silent gather about a solemn Hindoo, whose still, tanned face has attracted their attention. He begins a refrain upon two round, flat baskets, which he holds in his hands. The snake is held and crooning, suggesting something strange to follow. With a bamboo stick he presently removes the covers of his baskets and several striking apparitions rise into view from a mass of tangled bodies. These are specimens of the deadly cobra, and their hoods spread widely. While the reptiles stare with a glassy monotony at the Hindoo, the spectacle of their extended necks seem to cast ghastly glances upon those assembled to witness the performance. The cobra's hood is a striking feature of the appearance of the snake, and it is this hood that is the object of the cobra's attack. The cobra's hood is a striking feature of the appearance of the snake, and it is this hood that is the object of the cobra's attack. The cobra's hood is a striking feature of the appearance of the snake, and it is this hood that is the object of the cobra's attack.

HOW IT IS DONE.

The greatest requisite of the snake charmer is nerve, and this must be backed with a thorough knowledge of the snakes. Well does the Hindoo know that if his cobra become accustomed to teasing, they will "dance." The cobra's natural attitude of defence is a rearing posture with "hood" spread widely. From this position it follows with swaying motions every action of its aggressor. The Hindoo's swaying body and the cobra's rearing posture are the essential elements of the performance. The cobra's natural attitude of defence is a rearing posture with "hood" spread widely. From this position it follows with swaying motions every action of its aggressor. The Hindoo's swaying body and the cobra's rearing posture are the essential elements of the performance.

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A TAME COPPERHEAD SNAKE. Some performers handle poisonous snakes that are actually in possession of the poison conducting fangs.

explosion of angry hisses demonstrated the nature of the contents—a collection of lively cobras. Another basket contained an inconspicuous pair, consisting of a ten-foot, slender-bodied king cobra and a beautifully marked Russell's viper, the latter only four feet long, although its bloated body, rising and falling continuously as it hissed at the intruder, was twice the diameter of that of the cobra.

An examination of this collection of reptiles showed all but two specimens had been deprived of their fangs. Those with fangs had undoubtedly been used as dancing snakes, requiring no handling. The king cobra, fangless, showed not the least desire to bite or to feed. It was nourished in a compulsory manner by forcing beaten eggs down its throat with a large syringe. In two months' time its fangs, which had become aggressively sively yellow and green, had turned to a dark brown. An examination of the various harmless snakes, it is a notoriously cannibalistic creature. So vigorously did the Hindoo's operation of depriving the Russell's viper of its fangs, that the snake died after a few weeks from a suppurated condition of the mouth. The head was skeletonized to note how far the operation of producing its harmless condition had carried with the horns springing from the part of the maxillary bones had been cut away, preventing all possibility of the renewal of the fangs.

HOW SNAKES ARE "FIXED."

The Arab fakirs are even more wary of exhibiting poisonous snakes in possession of their fangs

than are the Hindoos. It is rare to find a wandering fakir with a single specimen in his collection that has not been "fixed." The snakes used by the latter class of "charmers" are the Egyptian cobra, the horned viper and the common sand viper. The fakir makes much ado about the deadliness of his specimens, all of which usually have such sore mouths that they could not be tempted to bite.

The arrival at the New York Zoological Park's reptile house of a number of Egyptian horned vipers, together with several of the common horned vipers of the deserts, demonstrated the extreme cunning of the Arab snake charmer in up-to-date faking methods. The horned vipers are odd looking, having an erect, spinelike horn over each eye. Both of the species mentioned are of the same pallid coloration, to match the desert soil. When the vipers were installed in the reptile house specimens of the rarer and more valuable horned species were separated from the other species, occupying an adjoining case. Upon looking over the former lot the writer was surprised to find the specimens with the horns springing from a position behind the eye instead of directly above it, while the scapulation of such examples looked suspiciously like the common viper. A closer inspection demonstrated an interesting condition.

The clever Arab who had once owned these snakes had evidently desired more of the horned specimens and had pushed a couple of quills of the desert hedgehog up from the roof of the mouth

and through the top of the head immediately anterior to the brain cavity. When these individuals were closely inspected it was not surprising to find their mouths in a state of great inflammation. The quills were withdrawn, the snake's mouth washed with an antiseptic solution and they were soon none the worse for their prolonged torture.

SOME BOLD PERFORMERS.

Here in the United States we may occasionally see exhibitions of snake charming that more closely approach the true meaning of the term than the orientational displays of the Hindoo and the Arab. The nearest approach to actual snake charming observed by the writer was the audacious act of John Rowell, more familiarly known as "Rattlesnake Jack," who performed in various dime museums with a collection of rattlesnakes ranging in size from a seven-foot "diamond back" of the South to the vicious little prairie rattler.

When the writer first met this extraordinary man he was performing in a New York museum with a number of rattlesnakes. During the exhibition he turned loose upon a platform, fenced in by a grating, a collection of apparently vicious specimens that at once threw their coils in fighting coils, and harshly sounding their rattles. Waiting only a moment, until the snakes had somewhat calmed down, the writer stepped forward, and, without liberation from dark boxes, the man quietly walked among them, picking up the calmer specimens and twisting their coils about his neck. The demeanor on the snakes' part was rather of surprise than anger, though a few of the specimens were really tame.

Thinking these reptiles must surely be deprived of their fangs, the writer made himself acquainted with "Rattlesnake Jack" and ventured a query. He was informed that all of the snakes had their fangs. Reaching for a big diamond rattlesnake that lay rattling a sonorous tune a few feet away, Rowell gave the creature a slap with his hand, when it immediately uncouiled. Grasping it by the tail, he swung the heavy body dexterously in a manner that enabled him to grasp the neck. With the snake practically helpless, he pried open its jaws and displayed a pair of fangs.

In a resulting friendship the writer learned that Rowell's method of involving enormous sums of money in the same collection of rattlesnakes was obtained in an hour's time by grasping the snake by the neck and inducing it to bite through a piece of chain-link tied over a tumbler, enough venom to kill fully a hundred men. Rowell was finally bitten by a big Texas rattlesnake and died a few hours later in a Boston hospital.

The writer considers Rowell's act to have been one of the bravest he has ever witnessed, involving considerably more audacity and danger than entering a den of lions.

Another remarkable performer with poisonous snakes is a man named Ralston, who has exhibited his collection of poisonous snakes for a number of years in this country. Ralston's methods are different from Rowell's. He has a sympathetic knowledge of enormous quantities of snakes and a newly acquired specimen until it is as tame as a pet. He handles his rattlesnakes, copperheads and moccasins with a complete nonchalance. Yet there is something strange, quite beyond the ordinary, in Ralston's work. Though snakes are not accredited with a degree of intelligence, the serpents appear to know the man's very touch. In handling a fair-sized rattlesnake, which remained perfectly quiet, the writer attempted to pick up the snake by the middle of the body, it swung its head instantly at the contact of his fingers, and at the instant the rattlesnake was so close that it was thought wise to discontinue the experiment.

A year ago Ralston sold a number of his tame snakes to the Zoological Park. The former owner



A HINDOO SNAKE CHARMER'S OUTFIT. The snakes in the basket are cobras. Crawling from the basket is a tin poga (a viper).

gave a little exhibition in the curator's office, purposely making the rattlers to show their good nature, while he actually put his finger into the mouth of a copperhead snake. Strangely enough, these very snakes turned out to be unduly vicious, striking at the central hand piece of chain-link cleaned the cobra. With Rowell's bravery and Ralston's subtle influence over his dangerous pets we observe the closest approach to actual snake charming.

ofal evanged, he made the best Parliamentary joke of the year. Mr. Birrell is not a master of invective and irony as the brilliant Irishman is, but he is a literary artist whose natural vivacity is mellowed and sweetened by humor. He delights in paradoxes; he is a bright and sparkling wit which leaves no sting behind it, and his quaintest conceits have a bookish quality as though he may have tried them on the benighted ghosts haunting his library. At the bar he has conveyed the impression that his brain, rather than his heart, is enmeshed in the subtleties of the law, and in the Commons he often has the dazed and disconcerted air of a man who is bored by politics. He is happiest among his books in his Chelsea library, where literature is his recreation, and he is most companionable at a table where he is surrounded with men of letters. A golfer like Mr. Balfour and a biographer and philosopher like Mr. Morley, he is also a book hunter as Mr. Gladstone was—probably the only man in Parliament who is ever seen prowling among bookstalls from sheer love of the game.

A NEW GOVERNOR, OF HIGH IDEALS.

Mr. Hughes Takes Oath of Office This Week at Albany.

By James B. Morrow.

The speech had been comprehensive and hearty. Black had been black. Likewise yellow had been yellow. There were no anecdotes, but the bearded face of the orator was often full of laughter as he nervously walked the platform and pleaded his case. Undoubtedly he had been effective and attractive. "And now," the chairman of the meeting said, when the speech was ended, "our candidate for Governor will be glad to meet every person in this great audience." Something more seemed to be necessary. "I am sure," he added, "that you will find him better at handshaking than at public speaking." A day or two later another chairman announced that Mr. Hughes would "mingle with the audience and show that he is human." Such was the quality of the humor of a very grave and energetic campaigner. Before the office hunted him down and seized him, Charles Evans Hughes agreed to talk with me for publication. He has kept his word, and only because it was his word. Interesting and important before, he is more so now.

sometimes they are not. We shall be untroubled as a nation only when the administrators of the government are mindful of their responsibility to all the people and are not subservient to other influences.

"The people know pretty well what they want. They will excuse errors of judgment, but if selfish interests obstruct the getting of the things they need and demand, and continue in that obstruction, there may be serious perils ahead. There is a state of mind called righteousness indignation. Very well. There is safety up to that point, and accompanying it there may be reform and other governmental blessings. Beyond a proper indignation, however, there may be a violence of feeling which will do no good to any one. It is wise to lead the people and recognize their just demands. Some men, of course, are never satisfied. They trade on dissatisfaction. I am not speaking of them, but of the great majority of Americans, who are virtuous, patriotic and rational. They demand a fair chance for themselves and every other citizen. They believe in democratic institutions. Furthermore, they are determined that no particular interest shall rule this country. If our public men, our lawmakers



CHARLES EVANS HUGHES. The newly elected Governor of the State of New York, who will take the oath of office this week.

and administrators keep close to the fundamental principles of our Republic we shall have nothing to fear.

PEOPLE WANT THE RIGHT THING.

"Again I was impressed by the discovery that the people want the right thing, and that they were thoughtful and reasonable. You see, I was new to the stump and looked for more partisan feeling and less regard for the intellectual and moral requirements of the occasion. There were brass bands enough and cheers, too, but the potential influences of the campaign were those of reason and conscience and not lung power."

AMBITION, NOT GREED.

"I never thought much about it. In fact, I purposely put it out of my mind. At the beginning I concluded that the election would be close. No matter what I heard later—and, of course, much that was encouraging was brought to me—I did not change my opinion. I was nominated without personal effort on my part, because I was thought to represent a sentiment which had become important in the state. I wanted those who had been earnest in my support to feel that their case had been tried, and then, if, after doing all we could, we were defeated, I was willing to accept the result without complaint and go on with the practice of my profession. So I had no worry in regard to the matter. At the same time, I did not minimize the honor which attaches to the highest office in the greatest of American states."

ADVICE FOR YOUNG LAWYERS.

"Oh, Governor Black has given an extravagant illustration. All I know about bookkeeping has been learned since I came to the bar. One is likely to be thrown into more or less mental disorder when a lot of books and trial balances are put down in front of him. The first inclination is to call for help, for an expert to read out the truth from the mass of hieroglyphics. But accounts are not so complicated as they seem. The facts you want are there. All that remains to be done is to search for them."

THE BREAD OF TO-MORROW.

There are signs that New York is coming to a halcyon age when bread will be as cheap, as good and as abundant as in the far-famed restaurants of Paris. Places exist here and there at which the real French, Italian and Venetian bread can be had, but anything like the network of bakeries which supplies the chief city of France is as yet undeveloped. In the evolution of the system gas ovens will play a prominent role.

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ENGLISH PEACEMAKER.

Augustine Birrell In and Out of Parliament.

London, December 19. A man of many resources has been in charge of the Education bill over which the Houses of Parliament have been wrangling for a year. Mr. Augustine Birrell has had the unenviable task of establishing a system of education which would satisfy the consciences of all religious bodies; and while his methods have been condemned by extremists and the results of his labors have been disappointing to them, he himself emerges from the protracted struggle without an enemy in either house. This is perhaps a greater achievement than the passage of a compromise measure, and it is due to a combination of brilliant gifts and sterling qualities. Mr. Forster succeeded in forcing the original Education bill through Parliament by appealing to the Opposition for support, and there was irreconcilable resentment on the part of the Nonconformists, who never forgave him, although they were subsequently loyal to Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Birrell has not caused estrangement of the Free Churchmen, whose grievances he undertook to remove; and while his bill has been bitterly assailed by High Churchmen and Roman Catholics, he has been credited with making an earnest effort to effect a reasonable settlement of the burning question of religious instruction. An adroit tactician, willing to give and take, he has been too wary to be manoeuvred out of his position as the leader of Nonconformity.

LIFE IN TEXAS.

Tom Johnson, the fourteen-year-old son of John Johnson, who lives near Gates Valley, Atascosa County, went out hunting one day recently and lost his way in a 100,000-acre pasture. He wandered around in the pasture for three days before a searching party found him. He was without food and water during all that time. He was thirty-five miles from home when found.

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