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Literary Selections.

THE VENOM OF SERPENTS.

BY J. GILMAN, M. D.

There is much in the history and habits of the reptile tribes, however repulsive they may be in appearance, that is very interesting. During a sojourn of two or three months in the interior of Arkansas, which appears to me to be the paradise of reptiles, I paid more attention to that branch of natural history called ophiology. I found four distinct varieties of rattlesnakes (*Crotalus*), of which the *Crotalus kirtlandi* are most numerous. The former is the largest serpent in North America. The family of moccasin snakes (*Coluber*) is also quite numerous, there being not less than ten varieties, most of which are quite venomous as the rattlesnake.

By dissecting great numbers of different species I learned that the anatomical structure of the poisonous apparatus is similar in all the different varieties of venomous serpents. It consists of a strong framework of bone, with its appropriate muscles in the upper part of the head, resembling, and being, in fact, a pair of jaws; but externally to the jaws proper, and much stronger. To these is attached by a ginglymoid articulation, one or more movable fangs on each side, just at the verge of the mouth, capable of being raised at pleasure. These fangs are very hard, and sharp, and crooked, like the claws of a cat, with a hollow from the base to near the point. I have occasionally seen a thin slit of bone divide this hollow, making two. At their base is found a small sac, containing two or three drops of venom of which resembles thin honey. The sac is so connected with the cavity of the fang during its erection, that a slight upward pressure forces the venom into the fang at its base, and makes its exit at a small slit or opening near the point, with considerable force; thus it is carried to the bottom of any wound made by the fang.

Unless the fangs are erected for battle, they lie concealed in the upper part of the mouth, sunk between the external and internal jaw bones, somewhat like a penknife blade shut up in its handle, where they are covered by a fold of membrane, which encloses them like a sheath; this is the *rostrum dentis*. There can be no doubt but that these fangs are frequently broken off or shed, as the head grows broader to make room for new ones nearer the verge of the mouth; for within the vagina dentis of a very large *Crotalus horridus*, I found no less than five fangs on each side, in all stages of formation—the smallest in a half pulpy or cartilaginous state, the next something harder, the third still more perfect, and so on to the main, well-set, perfect fang. Each of these teeth had a well-defined cavity like the main one. Three fangs on each side were frequently found in copper heads, vipers, and others.

The process of robbing serpents of their venom is easily accomplished by the aid of chloroform, a few drops of which stupefies them. If, while they are under its influence, they are carefully seized by the neck and the vagina dentis held out of the way by an assistant with a pair of forceps, and the fang be erected and gently pressed upward, the venom will be seen from the fang and dropping from its point. It may then be absorbed by a bit of sponge, or caught in a vial, or on the point of a lancet. After robbing several serpents in this manner, they were found, after two days, to be as highly charged as ever with venom of equal intensity with that first taken.

During the process of robbing several species of serpents, I inoculated several small but vigorous and perfectly healthy vegetables with the point of a lancet well charged with venom. The next day they were withered and dead, looking as though they had been scorched with lightning. In attempting to preserve a few drops of venom, for future experiments, in a small vial with two or three parts of alcohol, it was found in a short time to have lost its venomous properties. But after mixing the venom with aqua ammonia, or spirits of turpentine, or oil of peppermint, or of cinnamon, or of cloves, or with nitric or sulphuric acid, it still seemed to act with undiminished energy. It is best preserved however, for future use, by trituration with refined sugar or sugar of milk.

A very fine, large cotton-mouth snake, being captured by putting a shoe-string around him, became excessively ferocious, striking at even the crack of a small riding whip. Finding himself a prisoner without hope of escape, he turned his deadly weapon on his own body, striking repeatedly his well-charged fangs deeply into his flesh. Notwithstanding this he was

put into a small basket and carried forward. In one hour after he was found dead, and no account of irritation could excite the least indication of life. Four hours after, while removing the skin for preservation, the blood oozed slowly from the vessels in a dissolved state. No violence was done to his snakeship, except what he did to himself.

Another moccasin, shot by a pistol about two inches back of the head, and skinned immediately, gave decided evidence of vitality four hours after being flayed, by wringing the body whenever it was irritated by a scalpel.

A large rattlesnake, beheaded instantly with a hoe, would, an hour and a half after, strike at anything that pinched its tail. Of several persons who were testing their firmness of nerve, trying to hold the hand steady while the serpent struck at it, not one could be found whose hand would not recoil in spite of his resolution, and one man, a great bully, by-the-by, was struck on the neck with considerable violence by the headless trunk of the serpent, and staggered back, fainted, and fell from terror. Mr. Stewart, of Mississippi, tells me he witnessed a similar scene once. An old hunter shot a rattlesnake's head off, and after reloading his gun and standing some time, he stooped to pull off the rattles, and the bloody but headless trunk of the snake struck him in the temple, and he fainted and fell down with terror.

Seven venomous serpents belonging to five different species, were made to fraternize and dwell amicably in one den. A beautiful pair of long-bodied, speckled snakes, known as king-snakes, and found to be fangless, and consequently without venom, were duly installed as members of the family. Some uneasiness was perceived among the older members, but no attempt was made to destroy the intruders, though they might have been killed instantly. The next morning four of the venomous serpents were found to have been destroyed by the king-snakes, and one was still within their coil, and the two remaining ones would make no effort at self-defence. A large rattlesnake seemed stupid and indifferent to its fate. He could not be made to threaten or give warning even with his rattles. The smallest king-snake was afterward inoculated with the poison of one of the serpents he had destroyed, and died immediately afterward—thus evincing that they must have exercised some power besides physical force to overcome their fellow-creatures.

In short, the results of a great number of experiments performed with the venom of a great variety of serpents, seem to lead to the following conclusions:

1. That the venom of all serpents acts as a poison in a similar manner.
2. That the venom of some varieties is far more active than that of others.
3. That a variety of the collaber, known as the cotton-mouth, is the most venomous serpent in Arkansas.
4. That the venom of serpents destroys all forms of organized life, vegetable as well as animal.
5. That alcohol, if brought in contact with the venom, is, to a certain extent, an antidote.
6. That serpents do possess the power of fascinating small animals, and that this power is identical with mesmerism.
7. That the blood of small animals destroyed by the venom of serpents, bears a close resemblance to that of animals destroyed by lightning or hydrocyanic acid; it loses its power of coagulation, and can not be long kept from coagulation.

Heat expands things, and therefore in hot weather the days are lengthened. Moral heat sometimes expand the mind, but they lend not to the lengthening of thy days.

Cool things are used to cure fever, yet the over-coolness of a friend's act will throw thee into a heat.

We know nothing, and yet it is knowing something to know that thou knowest nothing.

If thy heart is in the Highlands it is not here.

A stitch in time saves nine. If therefore thou feelest one in thy side, be thankful, O friend.

An insane person may lie to thee, and yet be innocent, and thou mayest lie to him and be praiseworthy. Now all persons are somewhat insane, but do thou beware of lying as a general rule.

O, how good was Nature, that placid great rivers near great towns!

COLLISION WITH AN ICEBERG.

The statement of the young sailor Nye, the only survivor of the crew of the ship *John Rutledge*, is terribly interesting. The lad is a native of New Bedford, nineteen years of age, of olive complexion, thin and of wiry make, with black hair and eyes, and rather tall. He had just entered upon the career of a sailor. His exposure in a boat for nine days, almost without water or food, is one of those romances of the sea which gives such a horror to shipwrecks. The *Rutledge* struck an iceberg near the banks of Newfoundland. She was laden with iron, glass and crockery, and bound to New York. We copy the *Tribune's* narrative. The selfishness of Mrs. Atkinson in seizing upon all the water in the little boat did not save her life:

"Of the thirteen persons in the last boat, there were four women, one little girl, five male passengers. Mr. Nye, a Scotch sailor, and a boat-swain, an Irishman, whose wife resides in New York. For the subsistence of these people there was but one gallon of water, and six or eight pounds of bread. The mate had placed a compass in the boat, but his wife, Mrs. Atkinson, in leaping from the ship, had broken it. Cast thus helplessly upon the open sea, among the fogs and mists of the Bank of Newfoundland, and surrounded by drifts and icebergs, their prospects could hardly have been more gloomy.

Soon after the boat broke adrift, night came on; and how it passed can be imagined. As soon as Mrs. Atkinson entered the boat she seized the vessel containing the water, and being a large, robust woman, fought off all who attempted to drink from it. Nye got only two or three sallows; the rest was drank by herself and the boatswain. What disposition was made of the bread does not appear. The probability is, that there was no organization among this little party, but every one looked out for himself—

Having no compass or sign by which to steer, they did not exert themselves, other than to keep the boat before the sea. The sailors were warmly clothed, as was also Mrs. Atkinson; but the passengers for the most part were scantily attired and suffered keenly from the cold. Day after day dawned only to raise their hopes of success, which the long and dreary nights turned to the bitterness of despair. Thus time passed until the third day, when one of the little band, a man whose clothes were quite too thin to shield him from the bleak weather, sank under the combined effects of cold and hunger, and his body was committed to the deep. Then a woman died in the arms of her husband and little daughter, and her corpse was also silently committed to the deep.

The fourth day came, and with it the same angry sea, the same leaden sky; no ray of hope anywhere visible. The cold was so intense that it almost froze the marrow; and not a drop of water could be obtained, while only a small quantity of food remained. Human nature could not bear up much longer against this exposure and privation, when just as they were about to give up all hopes, the wind lulled, and lo! a brig bore in sight. She was not very far off, and they pulled for her with might and main. Signals were also made. For some time they seemed to gain upon her, but she did not see them, and the wind freshening, she was soon out of sight. With her went all hope. A burning thirst fell upon all of them, and heedless of young Nye's earnest appeals they fell to drinking salt water. This only increased their thirst, and they drank eagerly and repeatedly of the fatal fluid. What followed is the old story of delirium and death. One by one they grew mad and madder; besought each other to kill them; then they dreamed sitting at sumptuous feasts, and spoke of the rare dainties which mocked their grasp; and the delicious beverages which they in vain essayed to quaff. At length, worn out by the intensity of their physical and mental sufferings, they grew more subdued; and their haggard features became rigid, their wild eyes assumed a glassy look, and their shrunken forms seemed gradually to subside—the next lurch of the boat tumbled them off the seats dead!

Such were the sights which young Nye witnessed daily. As they died he threw their bodies into the sea, as long as his strength lasted. He says that, although his thirst was of the most agonizing character, he not only warned his fellow sufferers against drinking salt water, but showed them how he obtained relief by rinsing his mouth occasionally. They were hopeless and desperate, and would not listen to him. The boatswain grew delirious, and died within twelve hours after drink-

ing it. In his delirium he was most violent. He attempted to throw the oars overboard, and did succeed in throwing over the bucket with which they bailed out the boat. Nye did his best to quiet him from drinking more sea water; but he struck him a severe blow upon the chin, inflicting a wound which has not yet healed up. Mrs. Atkinson was also very violent, and being of a strong constitution it was a long time before she expired. Our informant's recollection of events which occurred about this time is very indistinct. But from what we could gather, on the sixth day there were only himself, a small woman wrapped in two blankets, and the little girl, alive in the boat. Before the sun set the child died, and on the day following, the woman breathed her last. He had strength to throw the body of the child overboard, but that of the woman, together with the bodies of three others, were so coiled up under the thwart that he was unable to extricate them.

Feeling a strong sense of drowsiness creeping over him, he fastened a red shirt and a shirt to an oar, and boisted it to attract any passing vessel, he coiled himself up in the stern of the boat and dozed away the hours. Occasionally he would rouse himself, and bale out the boat and then lie down again. He did not sleep, but the time passed in a kind of waking vision. Occasionally he felt light-headed—and began to dream of being at home in New Bedford with his family. Fearing that he, too, might be delirious, he fought against these influences, and kept himself awake by various means. At first the sight of his ghastly companions caused him much distress, and his mind became oppressed with gloomy forebodings. He resolved to shake these feelings off and hope for help even to the last, thinking it better to go to the next world with all his senses about him than to die a raving maniac. Thus resolved, he bore up bravely, and to the end.

On the 28th of February a ship bore in sight of the lonely boy. He says that he saw her before those on board discovered him, and he was sure from the first that they would pick him up. That vessel was the packet ship *Germania*, Capt. Wood, from Havre, bound to New York. When Capt. Wood descried the solitary boat, he ordered one of his own quarterboats to be lowered, and sent an officer to see what it contained. As they approached him poor Nye groaned, "For Jesus Christ's sake, take me out of this boat." They did take him out, with womanly tenderness, and with the boat and his fearful load in tow, rowed back to the ship. The young sailor was quickly transferred to the comfortable cabin of the *Germania*, and his late companions, already far gone in decomposition, were thrown into the sea. The boat was half full of water, and the bodies washing about in it had covered the seats and sides with blood. It is a wooden life boat, about twenty-five feet long. After being thoroughly cleaned, it was hoisted on board and brought into port.

Under any other treatment than that which he received on board the *Germania*, young Nye would not have lived to see his home again. But Capt. Wood and his lady took him into the cabin and nursed him with paternal tenderness. His feet were soddened with salt water, and so badly frost bitten up to his knees that they feared mortification would ensue. Fortunately there were several cows on board, and Mrs. Wood made poultices of bread and milk, and applied them to his legs with such success that all danger of mortification is passed. He was fed in infinitesimal quantities at first, until his stomach became accustomed to the change; but now he can eat quite heartily. His mind is still somewhat bewildered at times, more especially when speaking of scenes through which he has so recently passed; but he has an almost infantile fondness for those who wait upon him, and can scarcely bear them for a moment to be out of his sight."

Humbolt, who is now past eighty years of age, is said to be as busy as he ever was in his younger days, completing his "Cosmos."

MERE BEAUTY BUT A SHADOW.—The rose of Florida, the most beautiful of flowers, emits no fragrance; the birds of Paradise, the most beautiful of birds, give no song; the cypress of Greece, the finest of trees, yields no fruit.

Mathew Lansing used to say:—"If you wish to have a shoe made of durable material, you should make the upper leather of the mouth of an old toper, for that never lets in water."

THE PHOLADES.

Of all animals of the shelly tribe, the pholades are the most wonderful. These animals are found in different places;—sometimes clothed in their proper shell, at the bottom of the water,—sometimes concealed in lumps of marly earth,—and sometimes lodged, shell and all, in a body of the hardest marble. In their proper shell they assume different figures—but in general they somewhat resemble a mussel, except that their shell is found actually composed of five or more pieces, the small valves serving to close up the openings left by the irregular meeting of the two principal shells. But this penetration into rocks and their residences (here, make up the most wonderful part part of their history.

This animal, when divested of its shell resembles a roundish soft pudding, with no instrument that seems in the least fitted for boring into stone, or even penetrating the softest substance. It is furnished with two teeth, indeed—but these are placed in such a situation as to be incapable of touching the hollow surface of its stony dwelling. It also has two covers to its shell that open and shut at either end—but these are totally unserviceable to it as a miner. The instrument with which it performs all its operations, and buries itself in the hardest rocks, is only a broad fleshy substance, somewhat resembling a tongue, that is seen issuing from the bottom of its shell. With this soft, yielding instrument it perforates the most solid marbles—and having while yet little and young, made its way, by a very narrow entrance, into the stone, it then begins to grow bigger, and thus to enlarge its apartment.

When it has buried its body in a stone, it then continues for life at its ease—the sea-water that enters at the little aperture supplying it with luxurious plenty. The animal has taken too great a quantity of water, it is seen to spit it out of its hole with some violence. Upon this seemingly thin diet, it quickly grows larger, and soon finds itself under a necessity of enlarging its shell. The motion of the pholades is slow beyond conception—its progress keeps pace with the growth of its body, and in proportion as it becomes larger, it makes its way further into the rock. When it has got a certain way in, it turns from its former direction, and hollows downward, till at last, when its habitation is completed the whole apartment resembles the bowl of a tobacco pipe—the hole in the shank being that by which the animal entered.

But they are not supplied only with their rocky habitation—they have also a shell to protect them—but this shell grows upon them in the body of the rock, and seems a very unnecessary addition to that defence which they have procured themselves by art. These shells take different forms, and are often composed of different numbers of valves—sometimes six, sometimes but three—sometimes the shell resembles a tube with holes at either end, one for the mouth and the other for voiding the excrements.

This animal is found in great numbers at Anconin, in Italy; it is found along the shores of Normandy; and Poitiers, in France; it is found also, upon some of the coasts of Scotland—and in general is considered a very great delicacy at the tables of the luxurious.

SILAS WRIGHT.

A friend who was an old acquaintance of the late Hon. Silas Wright, related to us an anecdote of that distinguished man which he received from his own lips, and as we have never seen it in print, although it may have been, we give it to our readers: Mr. Wright left home at an early age to "seek his fortune," having, by way of earthly possessions a fine horse, saddle and bridle, a pair of saddlebags, a small stock of clothing, and five hundred dollars in money, which was in bills and was deposited in his saddle bags. He took a western course and in traveling one day he overtook a man with a wagon emigrating. There was nothing particularly attractive at first view in the person or equipage, but upon a closer inspection, Mr. Wright discovered the daughter of the emigrant, a most beautiful young lady, refined and intelligent. They journeyed onward towards Geneva, chatting easily together, when suddenly the old gentleman recollected that he wanted to get his money changed at the Geneva Bank, and to enable him to reach that place before the close of bank hours, he proposed that young Wright should take his seat beside the beautiful daughter and allow him to mount Wright's horse and hasten forward. Ardent and half smitten by the charms of the young

lady, Silas gladly accepted the proposition, and leaping from his horse allowed the old gentleman to mount and make off with all his earthly possessions, money included, without a thought.

Rapidly the hours of Thalaba went by, while these two young and gifted beings pursued their course, quite leisurely towards their journey's destination.

On arriving at Geneva, Mr. Wright drove up to the principal tavern, left his lady, but then for the first time a shade of anxiety crossed his mind for the safety of his fine horse and his money. He sent to all the public houses, but could hear of no such man as described; he beat up the quarters of the cashier of the bank, and learned to his additional concern, that such a man had called at the bank and endeavored to get some money changed, which he declined doing, as the notes he presented were counterfeit!—Our future statesman then came to the conclusion that he had made a crooked start in life. About fifty dollars worth of old furniture, a dilapidated wagon and a span of worn out old horses, for a new wardrobe, fine horse and five hundred dollars! Aye! then there was the pretty daughter—but her, he could not keep as personal property without her own consent, and without money he hardly wanted a wife. He was at his wit's end, and had just concluded to make the best of a bad bargain, when the old man made his appearance, with horse and money all safe. It turned out that the money which the cashier had thought to be counterfeit was not so, and the mistake had given the old man the trouble to go some distance to find an old acquaintance who might vouch for his respectability in case of trouble, and this occasioned his mysterious absence. In the sequel, the beautiful daughter became afterward the wife of the future statesman. —*Detroit Advertiser.*

PHILOSOPHY OF A FROG.

We saw yesterday, says the *Petersburg Democrat*, on Boltingbrook street a lump of solid transparent ice, about ten inches thick and wide, in the heart of which was a large frog nicely frozen up and looking quite pleasant with a beamy eye. The ice was found on the marsh behind the gas works, and when melted down, the frog very good humorously shook himself, and jumped about quite lively. We heard a railroad operative describing the philosophy of the thing to a friend of his, as follows:

"Ye see," says Mikey, "the poor creature's instinct told it the air was going to be cold and that frost was going to power down red hot, so in it jumps into the water to get out of the dampness and wraps itself up in a foot square of the liquid to keep the frostout, as whiskey wasn't convenient; which is the correct clothing for any intelligent baste—barrin a Know Nothing—to dress his intaylor with. And ye know that water is transparent, for it runs into ye at one end and out ov ye at the other, and never gets into yer head at all; and so, it began to snow with a fever heat, and the cold pintrated of the frog through a foot thick of dry wather, so he shook his feathers to keep up the circulation of his blood, which the Haythins call icheer, till by dint of kicken, with his hands and toes—for devil a leg has a frog or any other natural bipid in Americay—he soon got a comfortable warm congelation of ice round him, and there he squatted as happy and cosy as if he was on Miles' soft feather bed which was made out of hard pocky-pine quills; and looking for all the world like a bame in a sinner's eye, or like a new ambyr tye picture, which is the representation of no mortal conceivable thing any way you can take it. So you see the ice conglomerated round about the frog, for he hit on that plan like an Egyptian mummy to preserve himself in *secula seculorum*, as the praist says, till conjynial times should come, when pop goes the weazel, and he'd come out in a blazin perspiration!"

"And was it the frog did all them things by himself?" demanded Tady.
"Twas the frog's own natural philosophy," answered Mikey.
"The frog?" said the incredulous Tady.

A traveler, journeying wisely, may learn much. Yet much may also be learned by him who stays at home.

Women obey willingly where they are commanded kindly.

Consult your friend on all things, especially on those which respect yourself. His counsel may then be useful, where your own self-love might impair your judgment.

THE ROAR OF THE LION.

"One of the most striking things connected with the lion is his voice, which is extremely grand, and peculiarly striking. It consists at times of a low, deep moaning, repeated five or six times, ending in faintly audible sighs; at other times he startles the forest with loud, deep-toned, solemn roars, repeated five or six times in quick succession, each increasing in loudness to the third or fourth, when his voice dies away in five or six low, muffled sounds, very much resembling distant thunder.

At times, and not unfrequently, a troop may be heard roaring in concert—one assuming the lead, and two, three, or four, more regularly taking up their parts, like persons singing a catch. Like our Scottish stags at the rutting season, they roar loudest in cold, frosty nights; but on no occasions are their voices to be heard in such perfection, or so intensely powerful, as when two or three strange troops of lions approach a fountain to drink at the same time. When this occurs, every member of each troop sounds a bold roar of defiance at the opposite parties; and when one roars, all roar together, and each seems to vie with his comrades in the intensity and power of his voice. The power and grandeur of these nocturnal forest concerts is inconceivably striking and pleasing to the hunter's ear. The effect, I may remark, is greatly enhanced when the hearer happens to be situated in the depths of the forest, at the dead hour of midnight, unaccompanied by any attendant, and ensconced within twenty yards of the fountain which the surrounding troops of lions are approaching. Such has been my situation scores of times; and though I am allowed to have a tolerably good taste for music, I consider the catches with which I was then regaled as the sweetest and most natural I ever heard.

"As a general rule, lions roar during the night; their sighing moans commencing as the shades of evening envelope the forest, and continuing at intervals throughout the night. In distant and secluded regions, however, I have constantly heard them roaring loudly as late as nine and ten o'clock on a bright and sunny morning. In hazy and rainy weather they are to be heard at every hour in the day, but their roar is subdued. It often happens that when two strange male lions meet at a fountain, a terrific combat ensues, which not unfrequently ends in the death of one of them."

NON SUITING A CREDITOR.

There was a lawyer on Cape Cod, a long time ago, the only one in those "diggins" then, and, for ought I know at present. He was a man well to do in the world, and, what was somewhat surprising, in a limb of the law,averse to incur litigation. One day a client came to him in a violent rage:

"Look a here, Square," said he, "that are blasted shoemaker down to the Pigeon Grove has gone and sued me for the money for a pair of boots I owe him."

"Did the boots suit you?"

"Oh yes."

"Why, then, you owe him the money honestly?"

"Course."

"Well, why don't you pay him?"

"Why, cause the blasted snob went and sued me, and I want to keep him out of his money if I kin."

"It will cost you something."

"I don't care for that. How much do you want to go on with?"

"Oh, ten dollars will do."

"Is that all? Well here's an X, so go ahead," and the client went off very well satisfied with the beginning.

Our lawyer next called on the shoemaker, and asked what he meant by instituting legal proceedings against M.

"Well," said the lawyer, "he's always been a good customer to you; I think you acted too hastily. There's a trifle to pay on account of your proceedings, but I think you had better take those five dollars and call it square."

"Certainly, Square, if you say so, and glad to take it," was the answer.

So the lawyer forked over the V and kept the other. In a few days his client came along and asked him how he got on with his case.

"Capitally," cried the lawyer, "we've non suited him! He'll never trouble you."

"Jerusalem! that's great! I'd rather give fifty dollars than had him get the money for them boots!"

Life is a dream, and death an awakening.