

COLLECTING SNAKE VENOM

A Regular Industry In Australia and Asia.

MOST DANGEROUS WORK

This Poison Commands Most Fabulous Price—World's Annual Production Less Than One Pound—Demand for it is Steadily Growing and Value Increases Correspondingly.

The fact that there exists among manufacturing chemists, or, at any rate, a section of them, a steady demand for snake venom, has long been known to the scientific world, but the purpose for which it is required has not been made public. Hitherto the supply has been obtained chiefly from Asia, but it has always been more or less uncertain in quantity and character. Recently, however, Australia has appeared as a competitor in the market, but to what extent cannot be readily ascertained, for snake venom, like radium, is measured by grains and commands an almost fabulous price, somewhere between \$5,500 and \$6,000 per pound. It is doubtful whether the world's annual production reaches that quantity, but a value of from 20s. to 25s. per grain will amply repay the collector. Possibly with further developments in medical science the demand will increase and lead to a corresponding rise in price, the supply necessarily remaining limited.

The headquarters of the Australian supply are situated in Sydney, where the industry became established by a skilful naturalist, whose name, although unfamiliar to the general public, is one well known in scientific circles. He obtains the venom from four varieties of snake—the death adder, the brown adder, the black adder and the tiger, or brown banded adder. Each of these has to be caught uninjured, a task demanding considerable knowledge of the ways of snake life and no little skill in the work of capture. Snakes are plentiful in the wilder parts of the Commonwealth and constitute one of the dangers of bush traveling. They are less frequently met with in the vicinity of largely populated places, but a saucer of milk will sometimes reveal their previously unsuspected existence. Occasionally a bush fire will send numbers of them a-wagging with wonderful rapidity in all directions, when they become more dangerous than ever to meet. The tiger snake is the most useful to the poison collector, as it not only carries the largest amount of venom, but this, when extracted, is equal in killing power to that of the cobra. It is one of the least common of Australian snakes, and its deadly character is so widely known that when bitten by one a collector has no hesitation in chopping off the injured limb, death being the only alternative.

The manner in which the snake poison or serum is obtained possesses several features of interest. One method, both delicate and dangerous, is to extract in perfect form the venomous bag, tying the valve tightly, so as to prevent the escape of the poison. It is then placed in preserving fluid for export. Another method, that invented by the collector, is simple and effective. It consists of a small apparatus held by a handle in one hand. In this a broad band of india rubber passes across a glass plate, a small space separating the two. The apparatus is placed opposite the head of the snake, the neck being held firmly by the other hand of the operator. On the reptile opening its jaws the end of the apparatus is inserted, when the snake immediately fixes its poison fangs in the india rubber, leaving the marks of a couple of tiny dots where they penetrate the material. The poison discharged into the india rubber band sinks on the glass plate below, where it is carefully collected. When the snake removes its fangs from the apparatus it is placed in a cage, and the glass plate replaced by another, in readiness for the next snake.

The snakes are caught by men who have become exceedingly expert in the work, the chief supply being obtained from portions of the coast south of Sydney, and who claim that plentiful doses of undiluted whisky constitute an infallible cure for snake bite. The price of a snake ranges from a couple of shillings upward, some bringing as much as seven or eight shillings, and there are places in Sydney where students of natural history can obtain almost any kind required. The general method of catching a snake is by pressing a baton some five feet in length and four or five inches in width, down on the neck, until a hold of the back of the head can be obtained with the fingers. If a forked stick be employed there is a risk of the snake breaking its poison fangs while biting the wood. Of course great care has to be exercised in handling the venom, but up to the present no accident has ever been reported.

A Stern Rebuke.

Eddie—I drove a nail in the teacher's chair this mornin'. Gee, you ought to see him jump!

Tommy—I bet he won't set down for a spell.

Eddie—No, an' I won't neither!—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

THE SIBERIAN RAILWAY.

Road Poorly Constructed—Much Damage to Freight.

A correspondent writes from Moscow. The unsatisfactory manner in which the management of the Siberian and particularly the Manchurian railways discharge their obligations to the Russian trading community is the subject of bitter complaint. Trainload after trainload of goods dispatched from the Far East to Moscow has been blocked in transit at various points on the railway lines since their official "opening to traffic." A leading Russian importer of Chinese tea informs me that not only considerable inconvenience, but serious loss, has been caused to importers by the annoying breakdowns on the railways during the last six months, which my informant roundly declares are due in the main either to faulty construction of the line and its viaducts or to lack of rational traffic organization. Several large cargoes of Chinese tea dispatched from the Pacific Coast for Moscow three months back only reached their destination a couple of weeks ago. The handling of the freight by the railway employees is most careless, damaged casings and packings being lamentably frequent. Collisions on the Siberian and Manchurian lines have, he adds, been so frequent that one might almost imagine the railway paid a premium to its drivers and pointsmen for reducing its rolling stock. The rolling stock itself he declares to be totally inadequate. Side by side with a Moscow-Port Arthur train de luxe, which compares to advantage with anything of the sort either in Europe, locomotives, and covered vans, and the general haphazard goods organization, stand out in a contrast which he describes as "truly Russian."

Many portions of the line through Siberia are stated to have been laid with a want of technical supervision, which is almost criminal. Some of the very bridges and viaducts which have given serious trouble under a by no means heavy traffic were built under the "supervision" of a contractor who, prior to their completion, found it expedient hurriedly to quit Russian territory for good, after making hundreds of thousands of rubles out of his contract by dishonest means. Nor, adds my informant, was this an isolated case. It has repeatedly been declared that a strict Government inquiry was to be held in St. Petersburg for the purpose of examining into various cases of official dishonesty and mismanagement in connection with the construction of the Transsiberian trunk line.

My informant declares that, in spite of the apparent advantage afforded by the specially differentiated duty on tea imported into European Russia through Odessa and Batum from Shanghai and Hong Kong by Volunteer Fleet steamer, the lamentable friction, the damage in transit, and the delays in connection with tea and other cargoes carried over the Manchurian and Siberian railways had far to induce Russian importers for some time to come to give the new land route a wide berth. No such delays are experienced with cargoes brought by sea, which are delivered in good condition at Odessa quays in from twenty-four to twenty-eight days from Chinese ports of shipment. After the recent arbitrary appropriation by the Russian authorities for military transport purposes of a considerable portion of the rolling stock on the Siberian and Manchurian lines, and the temporary complete breakdown on the Manchurian system, the quantity of goods blacked at various points along the Transsiberian line reached close on five million pounds.

He is convinced that the line has a great future before it, but he is no less convinced that it will never succeed in competing successfully for many of the best cargoes with well-equipped steamer fleets plying through the Suez Canal. Moreover, he thinks it quite possible that the Siberian system may yet have to face the competition of a rival line in Asia. Something, he declares, has been heard in certain quarters in Russia of a project for the linking up of India with the plains of the Yang-tze by means of an "all-red" line of rails. The possible extension of this railway at some future date until it becomes a competitive Transsiberian trunk line extending from the Pacific to Arabia, and practically linking up with the gigantic Cape Town to Cairo trunk line through Africa, has also been taken into account in the same quarters. In passing, I may be allowed to add that I have heard this project debated with interest in other circles in Russia besides those of commerce.—London Times Correspondence.

Japan's Naval Programme.

A notable naval event which slipped by without notice was the launching in Japan of the 3,000-ton cruiser Ottawa. Her completion will signalize the fulfillment of Japan's scheme of naval construction devised at the end of the Chinese war, which has raised the island empire into one of the great naval powers of the world. Most of the fleet was built in England, but Germany and the United States contributed certain ships, and Japan herself has built some. Henceforth, Japan will probably be able to handle all of her own naval construction.

REDUCING NOISE IN CITIES.

Vibrations from Trains Deadened, and Musical Telephones.

One of the best office buildings in Berlin is that of a certain electrical firm. Whenever the telephone "rings" in that building it doesn't ring, it sings a musical note.

This result is due to a Yankee. When the building was being completed a young telephone engineer from America, who was associated with the firm, was asked to install the telephone service. It was obviously appropriate that it should illustrate the best telephone practice, and to his mind this demanded the avoidance of the noise and nervous wear ordinarily produced by the telephone bell. He therefore substituted for this disquieting instrument a device which gives forth a soft musical note.

In some of the offices the innovation was welcomed, in others it was declined on the ground that this quiet sound would certainly not be heard. After a little time, however, it was found that the ear accustomed itself to notice the soft and agreeable sound with just as much precision as was secured by a harsh and startling sound. The result of a few months' experience was, therefore, that every rattling bell or buzzer was discarded for the "singing note," and the enhanced composure thus realized in the building was very material.

In the same city, when an elevated electric railway was recently being built, not only were all the plans of the company carefully scrutinized in advance by the municipal authorities, and those for the stations radically changed in the interest of street beauty, but special devices were also employed to deaden the vibration from trains.

The lesson from Berlin is, therefore, that, despite the vaunted "demands of modern life in cities," noise can be reduced by attention, even in the case of these two pre-eminent offenders, the telephone bell and the elevated railway.—Chicago Record-Herald.

War Record of a Dog.

Unusual interest centered in a case heard in the Dublin police court in which the leading figure was a bulldog that formerly belonged to Gen. Philip Botha and went through a good portion of the South African war.

Ernest Warrington, canteen manager for the contractors, was summoned for cruelty to the animal, which has been stationed for some time past with the Royal Irish rifles at Richmond barracks.

The bulldog, which now belongs to Color Sergt. Edwards, Royal Irish rifles, was accommodated with a seat in the witness box, from which point he seemed to take a languid interest in the proceedings. He was dressed in a coat with green facings, and wore several South African medals clasps.

The animal's record is an eventful one. During the Boer war he was captured by the 2d Royal Irish rifles, mounted infantry, from Commandant Philip Botha's farm in the Doornberg, in September, 1900.

From that time until the end of the war he trekked with the rifles' mounted force from Griqualand in the west to Basutoland in the east, and he still bears the scar of a wound received in action. Later he was with Gen. French's column in Cape Colony.

For his service the bulldog now wears the queen's South African medal with three clasps, and the king's South African medal with two clasps.—London Telegraph.

Queer Japan.

Japan is a queer country it is a land of contradictions and inversions. We prefer sweet fruit, they sour; they make sausages of paper; we weep at misfortunes, they laugh; we think white teeth beautiful, Japanese ladies varnish their teeth black; they put on the roof of a house first, and build the walls up afterward; their carpenters draw the pane toward them; their horses' shoes are of straw; their tailors, in stitching, point the needle from them; in their locks their key turns from left to right. Old men in Japan fly kites and spin tops, while children look on; Japanese writers use painting brushes, not pens, and write from bottom to top, and from right to left; in Japan there are no lawyers, and Japanese doctors never make any charges, or send in any bills; our mourning garments are black, theirs white; and they mount a horse on the off side.—Ex.

Chinese Trees in London.

The *Allanto*, or *Allanthus glandulosa*, of which some 250 specimens are about to be planted in Kingsway and Aldwych, is a Chinese plant which is very hardy in England, and will probably be able to survive even the smoky atmosphere of London. It is largely used as food for the allanthus, or Cynthia silkworm, and is as ornamental as it is useful. It is a stately tree, with a straight trunk and magnificent foliage, the leaves being often more than three feet in length. The Russian government has planted a number near Odessa, and it appears to be the best tree for growth on the steppes. In France it is used as a timber tree, thriving on chalky soils. Probably no better choice could have been made for beautifying two of the finest streets in London, or the world.—London Chronicle.

WHERE SLAVERY STILL EXISTS.

Moroccan Government Approves Traffic, and Sales Are Frequent.

In his article on "The Slave Market at Marrakesh," in "Harper's Magazine" for January, S. L. Bensusan gives a vivid picture of this terrible traffic which goes on approved by the Moroccan Government. He describes the beginning of the sale as follows:

"The crowd at the entrance party to the right and left to admit twelve grave men wearing white turbans and elabias. They are the dealers, or auctioneers, and the sale is about to begin.

"Slowly and impressively the deals advance in a line to the center of the slave market, almost up to the arcade where the wealthy buyers all expectant. Then the head auctioneer lifts up his voice and—oh, hideous mockery of it all—he prays.

"Now each deal has his people sorted out, and the procession begins. Followed by his bargains, he marches round and round the market, and I understand why the dust was laid before the procession commenced. Some of the slaves are absolutely free from emotion of any sort; they move round as stolidly as the blindfolded horses that work the water wheels in gardens beyond the town. Others feel their position.

"Twenty-one dollars—twenty-one," cries the deal at whose heels the one young and pretty woman who has not found a buyer limps painfully. She is from the western Sudan, and her big eyes have the terror-stricken look that reminds me of a hare that was run down by the hounds a few yards from me on the marshes near my country home last winter.

"Why is the price so low? I ask.

"She is sick," says the Moor, coolly; "she cannot work; perhaps she will not live. Who will give more in such a case?"

Early Colonial Administration.

The theory of colonial administration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was summarized by Montesquieu in the phrase, "Commercial monopoly is the leading principle of colonial intercourse." This was common to all nations having colonies, without exception. Passing over sundry minor, though important, details, by which the colony was made to minister to the individual welfare of members of favored classes, the monopoly was expressed under two principal heads—commerce and navigation. Under the first was comprised all exchange of merchandise between the colony and the external world. The mother country reserved to itself the right to send to the colony all needed supplies; not only of its own produce or manufacture, but of other countries as well, which must first be brought to it, and reshipped. In the same manner colonial products could be exported only to the mother country, which constituted itself a commercial entrepot whence they were to be distributed to other peoples. Thus the colonial market was reserved to the home merchant, and the colonist, for his market, was limited to the mother country. This restricted intercourse was called the direct trade; while the concentration in the mother country of supplies for the colonies, and of colonial exports, whereby she reaped the profits of storage, of handling, and of the commission of the middle man or broker, was known by the French word "entrepot."—From "The War of 1812," by Capt. A. T. Mahan, in Scribner's.

Plus X. Helped to Dig Grave.

A Baltimorean who is now in Rome writes home that many stories are being told of the new pope. One which he relates in his letter refers to the time when the present pontiff was parish priest at Salzano, a village near Treviso. The story depicts Plus X. as a gravedigger, and is accredited to the Rev. Alexander Robertson, a Protestant missionary residing at Venice. It follows:

"A son of the soil himself, the pope in his earlier days was always willing to help his countrymen. The sacristan tells how more than once when a body had to be brought to the church from a distance for a funeral service and three men only could be found to carry it Father Sarto, then thirty-two years old, would himself form the fourth. When, in 1878, cholera broke out at Salzano a panic seized the villagers, and none could be got to dig graves or bury the dead. 'Don Beppi,' as Father Sarto was called, then said to his sacristan, 'You and I must do it.' So getting spades they set to work. Their courageous conduct was not lost upon the parishioners, who soon relieved them of their toll."—Baltimore Sun.

Take a Look at the Wind.

Ever take a look at the wind? Can't see it, you say? Yes, you can. Some day when a gale is blowing and the atmosphere is cold, go out in your yard, taking a nice, bright hand saw. If the wind is blowing from the north hold the saw with its ends pointing, one to the east, the other to the west. Take the saw as if you were going to cut the air upward and let the teeth, which are on top, tilt it over till the flat part of the saw is on an angle of 45 degrees with the horizon.

Then if you look along the teeth of the saw you can see the wind pour over the teeth as plainly as the water over a waterfall.—Wilkesbarre (Pa.) Leader.

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