THE SNAKE TRADE.

REPTILES CAUGHT TO ORDER.

Menageries are always in need of snakes, and as India abounds in these reptiles, perhaps to a greater extent than any other country in the world, to India look the managers when their stocks begin to run low.

Snake hunting in India, unless one understands the trade, is a perilous business, for a larger percentage of the Indian serpents are poisonous than in any other part of the globe, and even a Hindoo has no desire to die of snake-bite, nor within the crushing folds of the constrictor.

Besides the demands from the menageries, the Indian Government pays a bounty on snake heads, so there is a double incentive to Indian snake-hunters, and when there are sufficient orders on hand from the menageries a hunt is organised. Preparations are made by ascertaining from the natives a promising snake district, which is usually a tract of jungle with a thick bamboo or grass undergrowth. In such lands snakes are found by thousands, and, after a promising patch is discovered, a beginning is made by clearing or burning the undergrowth from a strip entirely encircling the snake farm; then a broad expanse of perhaps an acre is cleared on one side, and there is set the snake trap, a netting extended for 300 or so yards on each side of the cleared track, its wings gradually contracting to lead the reptiles into a cul de sac, from which there is no escape.

Several hundred natives are assembled, and on a day when the wind blows from the right quarter they surround the district chosen, and, at a given signal, set fire to the jungle. After the fire has fairly started, the natives are called behind the netting, as there is no need of their services on the other sides, for every snake tenant of the brush flees in the same direction toward the fatal netting. Behind it stand rows of men, armed with clubs and sticks, ready to give their snakeships a lively reception. As the fire approaches the netting the snakes come in crowds, by hundreds, sometimes thousands. At the wings the men are concentrated, with their clubs, ready to kill those attempting to escape, and as the main body of the reptiles approaches the netting, the wings are pushed forward toward each other, the stakes supporting the netting are driven firmly into the ground, and the snakes are enclosed.

But snakes can climb almost as well as monkeys, and so the men at the wings are kept busy killing those that endeavour to escape over the ropes. After all the smaller reptiles which can work their way through the meshes of the net have been killed, attention is turned to the larger ones that remain.

In various parts of the netting there are loops which can be untied and then refastened, and, after the slaughter of the little snakes has been finished, the work of capturing the most promising specimens begins. The superintendent points at an anaconda that will bring a good price, and as the animal thrusts its head against the netting in fruitless efforts to escape, a stick with a wire loop at the end is introduced, the snake is lassoed imediately back of the head, the wire is tightened, and the future occupant of a menagerie cage, hissing and writhing, is dragged through and seized by a dozen natives at once. Bundles of bamboo, cut into proper lengths, have already been prepared. Three of four men straighten the snake and lay him on a bamboo, sometimes placing three or four smaller splints round him, and then lashing him securely down with bamboo withes every inch of his length. Generally the lashing is found to be sufficient, and only when the serpent is very large and powerful are the extra bamboos tied round him, for fear he might break the stick to which he is fastened. This operation is not carried on without much protest from the snake. But hissing and wriggling are all in vain; the Hindoos lash him down, finishing the operation by forcing his upper jaw upon the lower and tying the two together to the stick in such a way that he cannot even hiss. After all the best specimens have been selected and tied, the remainder are killed, beheaded, and the heads sent to the nearest Government station for the bounty. The captives are packed into carts for transportation to Bombay, where they are disposed of to the European agents.

THE DISUSE OF LAUGHTER IN SOCIETY.

Has laughter gone out? asks Sir Lewis Morris in an article in the 'Forum' for November. Are we never to have the honest guffaw—the loud laugh, which, as the poet says, bespeaks the vacant mind? Is this really a true account of the rationale of cachinnation? If so, probably it has gone out, at any rate in polite circles. Because we are nothing now, if we are not cultured and refined; and to be vulgar and to be ignorant are worse offences than any more explicitly forbidden in the decalogue. And yet it almost seems a pity too. It is not well, surely, to lose any innocent, and happily, infectious expression of pleasure in a world so bedevilled as ours.

Alas, I fear there is no doubt that the power or irrepressible laughter is the gift of youth, and youth only, whether in nations or in individuals. Passing the drawing-room door the other afternoon I could hear inside peal after peal of silvery, girlish laughter. It was Miss Ethel, who was entertaining her school friends with tea and bread and butter and jokes. That is the time of life for laughter. I dare say the jokes would not have made me smile. But when the springtide is blossoming, and the sap is running upward in the trees, and the vernal woods are bursting into leaf and echoing with song, and, wherever you look, all is verdure and joy, almost anything can move quick laughter. Or there is an earlier stage, when baby is being tickled by mamma and crows with delight. Or, though this, it is true, is often silent, there is that most beautiful of all sights—the little blue-eyed boy or girl, who lies in the white cot at dawn and smiles, and ripples with laughter at some innocent, childish thought. It is good to hear happy laughter, it is good to watch these baby smiles.

But laughter can be not only grotesque, but very dreadful as well. To hear a maniac laugh is one of the most terrible experiences. To hear a hundred laugh, as one does in nearing the Isola dei Pazzi at Venice, is a foretaste of the lower regions.

Farther on in the downward path of life, when the end is very near, the failure of the mind is often proclaimed by violent laughter. The old man is back again in the scenes of boyhood, and is going over in a dream the days of long ago. I remember well, lying awake in London lodgings, through an otherwise still June night, unable to sleep for the loud, incessant laughter pealing from the room above, where the old man of the house lay dying. When it ended, just before dawn, the old life ended with it; and in the morning his daughter came in to announce the fact and to express the hope that I had not been much disturbed. The old man, she assured me, had been in no pain, but had been going over his boyish days again; the old brothers, long years dead and forgotten, were with him; and they were cricketing, or gathering apples, or swinging, or swimming together across the old brook, all that sleepless night. One was glad it was so; but the laughter had an awful sound.

Stamp collectors must, says the 'Sketch,' look alive if they want to profit by the Graeco-Turkish War. During the occupation of Thessaly a special set of stamps has been issued, and, as it seems likely that the Turks may soon have to withdraw, these stamps ought to be worth collecting and keeping.

Australia claims the largest automobile carriage ever constructed for actual service. The car utilises seventy-five horse-power. The car travels from Coolgardie to the coast for the transportation of merchandise of the mines. Besides the load on the car itself, it drags two 'trailers' over a distance of 400 miles. A railroad was too expensive a luxury to indulge in in that country, and so the idea of the big motor was conceived. So scarce is water along the route travelled that the steam is not exhausted into air, but saved, reconverted into water, and thus used over and over again.