

all so held as to leave the head free, so the snake could strike if it wished. Most of the snakes showed no anger or resentment. But occasionally one, usually a small sidewinder, half coiled or rattled when thrown down; and in picking these up much caution was shown, the Indian stroking the snake with his eagle feathers and trying to soothe it and get it to straighten out; and if it refused to be soothed, he did his best to grasp it just back of the head; and when he had it in his hand, he continued to stroke the body with the feathers, obviously to quiet it. But whether it were angry or not, he always in the end grasped and lifted it—besides keeping it from crawling among the spectators. Several times I saw the snakes strike at the men who were carrying them, and twice I was sure they struck home—once a man's wrist, once his finger. Neither man paid any attention or seemed to suffer in any way. I saw no man struck in the face; but several of my friends had at previous dances seen men struck. In one case the man showed that he was in much pain, although he continued to dance, and he was badly sick for days; in the other cases no bad results whatever followed.

At last all the snakes were in the hands of the dancers. Then all were thrown at the foot of the natural stone pillar, and immediately, with a yell, the dancers leaped in, seized, each of them, several snakes, and rushed away, east, west, north, and south, dashing over the edge of the cliff and jumping like goats down the precipitous trails. At the foot of the cliff, or on the plain, they dropped the snakes, and then returned to purify themselves by drinking and washing from pails of dark sacred water—medicine water—brought by the women. It was a strange and most interesting ceremony all through.

I do not think any adequate explanation of the immunity of the dancers has been advanced. Perhaps there are several explanations. These desert rattlesnakes are not nearly as poisonous as the huge diamondbacks of Florida and Texas; their poison is rarely fatal. The dancers are sometimes bitten; usually they show no effects, but, as above said, in one instance the bitten man was very sick for several days. It has been said that the fangs are extracted; but even in this case the poison would be loose in the snake's mouth and might get in the skin through the wounds made by the other teeth; and I noticed that when any snake, usually a small sidewinder, showed anger and either rattled or coiled, much caution was shown in handling it, and every effort made to avoid being bitten. It is also asserted that the snakes show the quiet and placid indifference they do because they are drugged and one priest told me they are given "medicine," but I have no idea whether this is true. Nor do I know whether the priests themselves take medicine. I believe that one element in the matter is that the snake priests either naturally possess or develop the same calm power over these