

done in tranquil, matter-of-fact fashion, and the snakes behaved with equally tranquil unconcern. All was quiet save for the chanting. The snakes were handed to two of the men squatting round the bowl, who received them as if they had been harmless, holding them by the middle of the body, or at least well away from the head. This was repeated until half a dozen of the squatting priests held each three or four poisonous serpents in his hands. The chanting continued, in strongly accented but monotonous rhythm, while the rattles were shaken and the snakes moved up and down, or shaken, in unison with it. Then suddenly the chant quickened and rose to a scream, and the snakes were all plunged into the great bowl of water, a writhing tangle of snakes and hands. Immediately afterwards they were withdrawn, as suddenly as they had been plunged in, and were hurled to the floor, on and around the altar. They were hurled from a distance of a dozen feet, with sufficient violence to overturn the erect thunder-sticks. That the snakes should have been quiet and inoffensive under the influence of the slow movements and atmosphere of calm that had hitherto obtained was understandable; but the unexpected violence of the bathing, and then of the way in which they were hurled to the floor, together with the sudden screaming intensity of the chant, ought to have upset the nerves of every snake there. However, it did not. The snakes woke to an interest in life, it is true, writhed themselves free of one another and of the upset lightning-sticks, and began to glide rapidly in every direction. But only one showed symptoms of anger, and these were not marked. The two standing Indians at this end of the room herded the snakes with their eagle feathers, gently brushing and stroking them back as they squirmed towards us, or towards the singing, sitting priests.

The process was repeated until all the snakes, venomous and non-venomous alike, had been suddenly bathed and then hurled on the floor, filling the other end of the room with a wriggling, somewhat excited serpent population, which was actively, but not in any way nervously, shepherded by the two Indians stationed for that purpose. These men were, like the others, clad only in a breech-clout, but they moved about among the snakes, bare-legged and bare-foot, with no touch of concern. One or two of the rattlers became vicious under the strain, and coiled and struck. I thought I saw one of the two shepherding watchers struck in the hand by a recalcitrant sidewinder which refused to be soothed by the feathers, and which he finally picked up; but, if so, the man gave no sign and his placidity remained unruffled. Most of the snakes showed no anger at all; it seemed to me extraordinary that they were not all of them maddened.

When the snakes had all been washed, the leading priest again prayed. Afterwards he once more scattered meal in the bowl, in lines east,