CHAPTER V.

The Rattlesnake—Its powers of fascination--An object of veneration to all the tribes of the Continent—This curious fact probably connected in some way with their origin as a people—Cosmogony of the Cherokees or their notions of the world's creation--Great Rattlesnakes seen by Bernal Diaz in Mexico—Beautiful tradition of the Algonquins with whom the Cherokees were allied by blood--Curious account of the Horn-Snake, &c.

In the primitive history of Carolina, besides its quadrupeds and birds, there were a few reptiles, whose remarkable natural qualities, and singular association with the Indians and early white settlers, render them worthy here, of a notice of some length. The most important of these was the rattlesnake.

This interesting, but dangerous creature, occupies in the reptile kingdom the same position that the African lion does among beasts. He may be styled the king of snakes. Not that he was physically stronger than all others of his kind—for there were serpents that mastered him in strength and cunning, as there are quadrupeds which find no great difficulty in mastering the lion. But they resemble each other in the greatness of their absolute power, and in the generosity and nobility of their natures.

The vigor of the rattlesnake, however, did not consist so much in strength of muscles and hugeness

of proportions—though the largest serpent in America—as in the wonderful fascination of his eye, and deadly energy of his venom, whenever hunger prompted the one, and the encroachments of an enemy elicited the other.

It was partly on account of these qualities, there can be no doubt, that the Indians regarded it with so much veneration, if not as an object of worship. The most striking feature, perhaps, in the Indian character, was the great respect which they entertained for the virtues of generosity, independence and courage; a brave, generous enemy never failed to win their sympathy and admiration.

Veneration for the rattlesnake was not peculiar to the Cherokees, or any other southern tribe; it was known to exist among all the natives of the Continent. Thatcher mentions it as an object of worship, even among the more northern tribes, under the name of *manito-kinibic*. From Central America to the Great Lakes, it enjoyed the religious regard and affection of the aborigines; they were accustomed to address it as their grandfather, and the king of serpents. On no account would they destroy it themselves, even when struck by its deadly fangs, while wandering in the woods, nor suffer a white man to do it, if it was in their power to prevent it.

But while this curious respect for the rattlesnake was not peculiar to any one tribe, neither was it conferred exclusively upon that serpent; all the snakes of the country enjoyed a share of it, though in a less degree. The Indians suffered them all to live un-

molested. Some other cause, therefore, must be sought than the dangerous power and generosity of the rattlesnake, to account for these singular facts. It becomes an interesting subject of inquiry. Philosophers have written much to account for the origin of the aborigines; but we do not recollect to have seen this serpent-worship used among their speculations as an argument in favor of their having come from the East. It is, certainly, in some way connected with the story of the temptation and fall in the garden by the waters of the Euphrates.

It is impossible to read the curious cosmogony of the Cherokees, or their notion of the world's creation, without being forcibly reminded of the Scriptural account of the origin of evil and death. They believed that a number of beings were engaged in the work of creation. The sun was created first. The intention of the creators was that men should live always; but the sun, when he passed over, told them that there was not land enough, and that people had better die. At length the daughter of the sun, who was with them, was bitten by a serpent and died. The sun, on his return, inquired for her, and was told that she was dead. He then consented that human beings might live always; and told them to take a box, and go where the spirit of his daughter had fled, and bring it back to her body, charging them at the same time, that when they had obtained her spirit, they should not look into the box, until they had returned with it to the place where her body had been left. Impelled however by curiosity, they dis-

obeyed the sun's injunctions, and opened the box, upon which the spirit escaped, and the fate of all men was decided—they were doomed to die.*

The Cherokees,† as their name imports, were worshippers of fire, and they extended their adoration to the serpent, because they believed it to be the fire's messenger.

Bernal Diaz, in his account of the march of Cortez to the city of Mexico, says: "We to-day arrived at a place called Terraguco, which we named the town of the serpents, on account of the enormous figures of those reptiles, which we found in their temples, and which they worship as gods." Living rattlesnakes were kept in the great temple of Mexico as sacred objects. "Moreover," he adds, "in that accursed house, they kept vipers and venemous snakes, which had something at their tails that sounded like morris-bells, and these are the worst of vipers. They are kept in cradles, and barrels, and in earthen vessels, upon feathers; and there they layed their eggs and nursed up their snakelings; and they were fed with the bodies of the sacrificed,‡ and with dogs' flesh.§

The Natchezs on the Mississippi, had the figure of a rattlesnake, carved from wood, placed upon the altar of their temple, and paid it peculiar honors. The Linni Lenape held it in great respect, and like-

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* Archæological Researches. † Chera means fire.

‡ This is no more wonderful than many things stated by Mr. Prescott of the ancient Mexicans, on the same authorities.

§ Squire's Archæ. Researches.

wise the Hurons. We are told of a Menominee Indian who carried a rattlesnake constantly with him, and called it his great father. Sculptures of this serpent have been repeatedly taken from the mounds of the West.

There is a tradition of this remarkable reptile, once current among all the Algonquin stock of the aborigines, that is too interesting to be omitted in this connection. It is known as the Algonquin tradition of the evil serpent. Manabozho, the famous teacher of the Algonquins, was always regarded as an enemy to a great serpent; and he is represented as in constant conflict with his antagonist.

"One day, returning to his lodge, from a long journey, Manabozho missed from it his young cousin, who resided with him; he called his name aloud but received no answer. He looked around on the sand for the tracks of his feet, and he there for the first time discovered the trail of Meshekinibic, the great rattlesnake. He then knew that his cousin had been seized by his terrible enemy. He armed himself and followed on his track; he crossed the great river, and passed mountains and valleys to the shores of the deep and gloomy lake, now called Manitou Lake, or the Lake of Devils. The trail of Meshekinibic led to the edge of the water.

At the bottom of this lake was the dwelling of the serpent, and it was filled with spirits, his attendants and companions. Their forms were monstrous and terrible, but most of them, like their master, bore the semblance of serpents. In the centre of this horrible

assembly, was Meshekinibic himself, coiling his volumes around the hapless cousin of Manabozho. His head was red, as with blood, and his eyes were fierce, and glowed like coals of fire. His body was all over armed with hard and glistening scales of every shade and color.

Manabozho looked down upon the writhing spirits of evil, and vowed a deep revenge. He directed the clouds to disappear from the heavens, the winds to be still, and the air to become stagnant over the lake of the Manitous, and bade the sun to shine upon it with his fierceness; for thus he sought to drive his enemy forth, to seek the cool shadows of the trees that grew upon its banks, so that he might be able to take vengeance upon him.

Meantime Manabozho seized his bow and arrows and placed himself near the spot, where he deemed the serpent would come to enjoy the shade. He then changed himself into the broken stump of a withered tree, so that they might not discover him.

The winds became still, the air stagnant, and the sun shone hot upon the lake of the evil spirits. By-and-by the waters became troubled, and bubbles rose to the surface; for the rays of the sun penetrated to the horrible brood within its depths. The commotion increased, and a serpent lifted its head high above the centre of the lake, and gazed around the shores. Directly another came to the surface, and they listened for the footsteps of Manabozho; but they heard him no where on the face of the earth, and said one to another, "Manabozho sleeps." And

then they plunged again beneath the waters, which seemed to hiss as they closed over them.

It was not long before the lake became more troubled than before; it boiled from its very depths, and the hot waves dashed wildly against the rocks on its shores. The commotion increased, and soon the great rattlesnake emerged slowly to the surface, and moved towards the shore. His blood-red crest glowed with a deeper hue, and the reflection from his glancing scales was like the blinding glitter of a sleet-covered forest in the morning sun of winter. He was followed by all the evil spirits, and so great was their number that they covered the shores of the lake with their foul-trailing carcasses.

They saw the stump into which Manabozho had changed himself, and suspecting it might be one of his disguises, for they knew his cunning, one of them approached, and wound his tail around it, and made an effort to drag it down. But Manabozho stood firm, though he could hardly refrain from crying aloud; for the tail of the monster tickled his sides.

The great serpent wound his tail among the trees of the forest, and the rest also sought the shade, while one was left to listen for the steps of Manabozho.

When they all slept, Manabozho silently drew an arrow from his quiver, and placing it in his bow, aimed it where he saw the heart beat against the sides of the great serpent. He let it fly, and with a howl that shook the mountains, and startled the wild beasts in their caves, the monster awoke, and fol-

lowed by his frightened companions uttering mingled sounds of rage and terror, plunged again into the lake. Here they vented their fury upon the helpless cousin of Manabozho, whose body they tore into a thousand pieces; his mangled lungs rose to the surface, and covered it with whiteness. And this is the origin of the foam on the water.

When the serpent knew that he was mortally wounded, both he and the evil spirits around him were rendered ten-fold more terrible by their great wrath, and they rose to overwhelm Manabozho. The waters of the lake swelled upwards from their dark depths, and with a sound like many thunders, it rolled madly on his track, bearing the rocks and trees before it with resistless fury. High on the crest of the foremost wave, black as midnight, rode the writhing form of the wounded Meshekinibic, and red eyes glared around, and the hot breath of the monstrous brood hissed fiercely above the retreating Manabozho. Then thought Manabozho of his Indian children, and he ran by their villages, and in a voice of alarm, bade them flee to the mountains, for the great serpent was deluging the earth in expiring wrath, sparing no living thing. The Indians caught up their children, and wildly sought safety where he bade them. But Manabozho continued his flight along the base of the western hills, and finally took refuge on a high mountain beyond Lake Superior far towards the north. There he found many men and animals that had fled from the flood, that already covered the villages, and plains, and even the

highest hills. Still the waters continued to rise, and soon all the mountains were overwhelmed, save that on which stood Manabozho. Then he gathered together timbers and made a raft, upon which the men, and women, and the animals, that were with him, all placed themselves. No sooner had they done so than the rising floods closed over the mountain, and they floated alone on the surface of the waters. And thus they floated for many days; and some died, and the rest became sorrowful and reproached Manabozho, that he did not disperse the waters, and renew the earth, that they might live.

But though he knew that his great enemy was by this time dead, yet could not Manabozho renew the world, unless he had some earth in his hand wherewith to begin the work. And this he explained to them that were with him, and said, that were it ever so little, even a few grains of earth, then could he disperse the waters and renew the world. Then the beaver volunteered to go to the bottom of the deep, and get some earth, and they all applauded his design. He plunged in; they waited long, and when he returned he was dead; they opened his hands but there was no earth in them. Then said the otter, 'will I seek the earth,' and the bold swimmer dived from the raft. The otter was gone still longer than the beaver, and when he returned to the surface, he too was dead, and there was no earth in his claws. 'Who shall find the earth,' exclaimed all on the raft, 'now that the beaver and otter are

dead?' And they desponded more than before, crying, 'who shall find the earth?'

'That will I,' said the muskrat, and he quickly disappeared between the logs of the raft. The muskrat was gone very long, much longer than the otter, and it was thought he would never return, when he suddenly rose near by; but he was too weak to speak, and swam slowly towards the raft. He had hardly got upon it, when he too died from his great exertion. They opened his little hands, and there closely clasped between the fingers they found a few grains of fresh earth.

These Manabozho carefully collected and dried them in the sun, and then he rubbed them into fine powder in his palms, and rising up blew them abroad upon the waters. No sooner was this done than the flood began to subside, and soon the trees on the mountains were seen, and then the mountains and hills emerged from the deep, and the plains and the valleys came into view, and the waters disappeared from the land, leaving no trace but a thick sediment which was the dust that Manabozho had blown abroad from the raft.

Then it was found that Meshekinibic was dead, and that the evil Manitous, his companions, had returned to the depths of the lake of spirits, from which, for fear of Manabozho, they never more dared to come forth. And in gratitude to the beaver, the otter and muskrat, these animals were ever after held sacred by the Indians, and they became their breth-

ren, and they never killed nor molested them, until the medicine of the stranger made them forget their relations, and turned their hearts to ingratitude."*

In this beautiful tradition, worthy of the deep, poetic feeling of the red men, it requires no great knowledge of the Bible to discover many of the most striking points, though confused and jumbled, in the pathetic story of man's redemption, and the ancient account of the universal deluge.

The history of the aborigines furnishes no stronger presumptive proof than this of their Asiatic origin, and the error into which those intensely scientific philosophers have probably fallen, who teach that Noah's flood did not extend to the New World, and that the Indians bear no blood relationship to the first parents of the Anglo-Saxon and other races of men. The latter inference is necessarily included as a corollary in the first; for if the Indian originated in America, then the deluge could not have been universal; unless it can be shown with certainty that this Manabozho represents a real American Noah, and the mountain spoken of far beyond Lake Superior towards the North, an American Ararat; which would be a vastly more difficult feat than to prove the absolute historical truthfulness of the whole story of Manabozho and the serpent.

Arguments drawn from manners, customs, arts, and even language, in order to establish an identity

* American Review.

of origin between two people, long widely separated, are far less reliable than those derived from striking analogies plainly traceable in their ancient traditions, and cosmogonies.

This fable of Manabozho and the serpent, or something near akin to it, possibly entered into the religious belief of tribes much farther south than those living around Rainy Lake. Adair asserts that the Southern Indians never ate of the otter and musk-rat; and the Cherokees were closely related, through the Powhattans, to the Algonquin race.*

"Our old traders remember when they first began the custom of eating beavers; and to this day, none eat of them except those who kill them, though the flesh is very wholesome on account of the bark of trees they live upon. It must be acknowledged, they are all degenerating apace."

But, whatever may have been the source of this singular veneration with which the aborigines regarded the rattlesnake, it was exceedingly favorable to its growth and increase in every part of the country. The old traders and hunters met with them in alarming numbers, and of proportions sufficiently large to excite the awe and respect of the least devout of the natives; for though they had many endearing names for them, and refused to kill them, they knew well what a respectful distance was, when they chanced to come upon one in the woods, drawn up in his defiant coil, and sounding his notes of alarm.

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* Pickett's History of Alabama.

The following description of one of their famous haunts in the Cherokee Nation, must be given in the quaint style of the old trader who relates it:

"Between the heads of the northern branch of the lower Cherokee* River, and the heads of that of Tuckasehchee, winding around in a long course by the late Fort Loudon, and afterwards into the Mississippi, there is, both in its nature and circumstances, a great phenomenon. Between two high mountains,† nearly covered with old mossy rocks, lofty cedars and pines, in the valleys of which the beams of the sun reflects a powerful heat, there are, as the Indians affirm, some bright old inhabitants, or rattlesnakes, of a more enormous size than is mentioned in history. They are so large and unwieldy that they take a circle about as wide as their length to crawl round in their shortest orbit; but bountiful nature compensates the heavy motion of their bodies; for, as they say, no living creature moves within reach of their sight, but they can draw it to them; which is agreeable to what we observe through the whole system of animated beings. Nature endues them with proper capacities to sustain life; as they cannot support themselves by their speed, or cunning,

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* The Little Tennessee.

† If our author has reference here to the two head branches of the Little Tennessee, the locality which he would describe, lies somewhere among the mountains of the present Macon County in North Carolina, a few miles south-east of the village of Franklin. Fort Loudon stood on the same river in the territory of Tennessee, in the fork between it and the Tellico.

to spring from an ambuscade, it is needful they should have the bewitching craft of their eyes, and forked tongues.

The descriptions the Indians give of their color is as various as what we are told of the camelion; they seem to the spectator to change their color by every different position he may view them in, which proceeds from the piercing rays of light that blaze from their foreheads, so as to dazzle the eyes; for in each of their heads there is a large carbuncle, which not only repels, but they affirm, sullies the meridian beams of the sun.

They reckon it so dangerous to disturb these creatures that no temptation can induce them to betray their secret recess to the profane. An old trader of Cheeowhee told me that for the reward of two pieces of stroud cloth he engaged a couple of young warriors to show him the place of their resort; but the head men would not, by any means, allow it on account of a tradition, by which they fancy the killing of them would expose them to the danger of being bit by the other species of the serpentine tribe."*

Due allowance must be made in this singular narrative, for the superstition of the Indians; but there can be little doubt, from what has just been stated, that even more than one such horrible abode of those venemous reptiles existed at that period, in the gloomy recesses of the Blue Ridge, and granite hills of the upper-country. Many such dens have been

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* Adair.

brought to light by the advancing settlements in the far west.

Notwithstanding their religious regard for the rattlesnake, and their perfect knowledge of the fatal influence of his venom, it does not appear that the Indians feared to approach, and even to handle him, when armed with their famous antidotes. "I once saw," says Adair, "the high-priest of the Chickasaws chew some snake-root, blow it on his hands, and then take up a rattlesnake without damage soon afterwards he laid it down in a hollow tree with great care, lest I should have killed it. Once on their trading war path, a little above the country of the Creeks, as I was returning to camp from hunting, I found in a large cane swamp, a fellow-traveler, an old Indian trader, inebriated and naked except his Indian breeches, and moccasins; in that habit he sat holding a great rattlesnake round the neck, with his left hand besmeared with the juice of proper roots; and with the other applying the roots to the teeth of the reptile, in order to repel the poison before he drew them out; and having effected this, he laid it down tenderly at a little distance from him. I then killed it, to his great mortification, as he was afraid it would occasion misfortunes to himself and me. And he did indeed perish, not long after, by the hands of the Choctaws, under French influence, on the Chickasaw path."

There once lived in Tomassee—a town situated a few miles above the site of old Fort Prince George—a great "divine man," a famous rain-prophet of the

lower Cherokees, who, we are told, possessed a carbuncle nearly as large as a hen's egg, which he was reported to have found near where a great rattlesnake lay dead. It sparkled with such surprising lustre as to illuminate his dark winter house; like strong flashes of continued lightning its brightness appeared, to the great terror of the weak, who were afraid of being struck with sudden death, if they should approach the place where it had been deposited.

On the death of this prophet, according to the Indian custom, he was buried and the dreadful carbuncle with him, under the town-house of Tomassee, which stood on the extreme western side of the town. The remains of Tomassee can, no doubt, be traced; and it may be possible that this splendid relic of an age of romance, and of the curious serpent-worship of the aborigines, can yet be found, if diligently sought. It lies in the precise spot where it was interred with the beloved prophet, unless some rapacious white man discovered the secret of its history.

This is stated on the authority of Adair, who thus concludes his account of it. * * * "They who will run the risk of searching, may luckily find it; but if any of the rattle snake family detect them in disturbing the bones of their beloved relation, they would resent it as the basest act of hostility."

Lawson, in his surveying expeditions through the woods of Carolina, often met with the rattle snake; he gives a few curious particulars of its history. He

frequently stumbled over them, but was never once bitten. On one occasion, when out in the forest, he witnessed its remarkable powers of fascination in the case of a squirrel, which ran directly into the open jaws of one of them. When dead, and even when alive, we will see farther on, the Indians made great use of it in medicine. The cast-off skin was a remedy in some diseases; the rattles were reduced to powder, and given to lying-in women, to expedite their labor. The gall, made into pills with clay, was regarded as so great a remedy in fevers and small-pox, as to be regarded as one of the precious secrets of nature. This nostrum was borrowed at an early day from the Indians by the people of Connecticut, and it soon became famous under the imposing name of the *trochisci Connecticotiani.* It was deemed important that the rattle snakes should be taken in the spring, when a little meal or chalk mixed with their gall, and rolled into pills, formed the celebrated *trochisci.* Connecticut has been prolific of nostrums and notions ever since. The troches were anodyne.

The ancient surveyor must himself relate the instance in which the whole reptile, alive, was applied in a notable case. A certain planter had been long suffering under a lingering disease, which none of the regular physicians in his reach were able to remove, though with great patience he had tried them, one after the other, at the expense of all that he was worth. At last, almost in despair, he threw himself

upon the skill of an Indian, well known in his neighborhood by the name of Jack.

"After the bargain was concluded, the Indian went into the woods, and brought in both herbs and roots, of which he made a decoction, and gave it to the man to drink, and bade him go to bed, saying it should not be long before he came again, which the patient performed, as he had ordered; and the portion he had administered made him sweat after the most violent manner that could be, whereby he smelled very offensively. But in the evening, towards night, Jack came with a great rattle snake in his hand, alive, which frightened the people almost out of their senses. And he told his patient that he must take that to bed with him; at which the man was in a great consternation, and told the Indian he was resolved to let no snake come into his bed, for he might as well die of the distemper he had, as be killed by the bite of that serpent; to which the Indian replied, he could not bite him now, for he had taken out his poison-teeth, and showed him that they were gone. At last, with much persuasion, he admitted the snake's company, which the Indian put about his middle, and ordered nobody to take him away upon any account; which was strictly observed, although the snake girded him as hard, for a great while, as if he had been drawn in by a belt, which one pulled at with all his strength. At last, the snake's twitches grew weaker and weaker, till, by degrees, he felt him not; and, opening the bed, he was found dead, and the man thought himself

better. The Indian came in the morning, and finding the snake dead, told the man that his distemper was dead along with that snake, which proved so, as he said; for the man speedily recovered his health, and became perfectly well."*

Bartram, as late as 1775, frequently encountered the rattlesnake in his adventurous travels through Florida and the Carolinas. In one place he relates: "An occurrence happened this day, by which I had an opportunity of observing the extraordinary veneration or dread the Indians have for the rattlesnake. I was busy in my room in the council-house, drawing some curious flowers, when, on a sudden, my attention was taken off by a tumult without, at the Indian camp. I stepped to the door, where I met my friend, the old interpreter, who informed me that there was a very large rattlesnake in the Indian camp, which had taken possession of it, having driven the men, women and children out; and he heard them saying they would send for Puc-puggy, (that was the name they had given me, signifying the flower-hunter,) to kill him or take him out of the camp. I answered that I would have nothing to do with him, apprehending some disagreeable consequences. My old friend turned about, to carry my answer to the Indians, when I heard them approaching, calling for Puc-puggy. Starting up, to escape from their sight by a back-door, a party consisting of three young fellows, richly dressed and ornamented,

* Lawson's Carolina, page 219.

stepped in, and with noble simplicity and complaisance, requested me to accompany them to their encampment. I desired them to excuse me. They entreated, however, that I should go, for none of them had the courage to expel the rattlesnake from their camp; and, understanding that it was my pleasure to collect all their animals and other natural productions, that I was welcome to him, if I would come and take him away. I at length consented, and went with them to the encampment, where I beheld the Indians greatly disturbed indeed; the men with sticks and tomahawks, and the women and children collected together in affright and trepidation, while the dreaded serpent leisurely traversed the camp, visiting the fire-places, from one to another, picking up fragments of their provisions, and licking their platters. The men gathered round me, exciting me to remove him. Arming myself with a light wood knot, I approached the reptile, which instantly collected himself in a vast coil; upon which, I cast the knot at him, and luckily taking him on his head, dispatched him instantly. I took out my knife, and cut the head from his body, then, turning to the Indians, they complimented me with every demonstration of satisfaction for my heroism and friendship for them. I carried off the head of the serpent, bleeding in my hand, as a trophy of victory, and, taking out the mortal fangs, deposited them carefully among my collections."*

* Bartram, page 258.

The amiable traveler's adventure with this serpent, however, was not yet over; he had scarcely returned to his drawing, before he was, a second time, aroused by a tumult among the Indians. They had been deliberating on the death of the rattlesnake, and had come to the conclusion that his spirit must be appeased by inflicting upon Pne-puggy their customary punishment—he must be *dry-scratched* with the teeth of rattlesnakes; and they now approached with their instruments ready for the execution. Having surrounded him in his room, without the least intimation of their design, they attempted to lay hold of him. They now informed him that he was too heroic and violent, and that it would be good for him to lose some of his blood, to make him milder and tamer; and had therefore come to *scratch* him. Alarmed for the safety of his skin—for he knew well what they meant by a *dry-scratch*—he instinctively sprang to his feet, and stood on the defensive. At this point, when he seemed really in danger of the fate of having his skin lacerated by a process of the most exquisite and diabolical torture, a young warrior interposed in his behalf, when instantly the whole troop changed their countenaces, caught him by the hands, and proclaimed him a brave warrior, and a sincere friend to the Indians. They then returned to their camp, having, by this farcical demonstration, appeased the manes of the dead snake, and satisfied the superstitious prejudices of their people.

The instrument for dry-scratching was a curious

specimen of savage ingenuity. It was made in the following manner: A piece of split cane having been first flattened and smoothed at one extremity, a number of rattlesnakes' fangs were then inserted, with their points all turned towards the handle, and fastened securely, so that, when finished, it resembled very much a miniature brush or comb. The head men of every town or camp, it appears, were furnished with one or more of these implements, with which, for certain offences against the decorum or religion of the Nation, they were in the habit of inflicting the severest tortures upon the offenders. It will be seen in other places, that they not only scratched their children and young people with this horrible instrument, but even their most noted head men and warriors.

Lawson found it also in great use among them as a scarificator for drawing blood in disease, which they did in a very expeditious manner with their mouths, after the skin had been punctured with the snakes' teeth. There were two degrees of this torture when used as a punishment. If the culprit was deemed worthy of its severest application, he was instantly stripped, and the sharp penetrating fangs applied to the dry unyielding surface. This was termed *dry-scratching*. The milder form of it permitted the skin to be first softened and mollified with warm water.

In the first settlement of Carolina and Georgia, it is said that rattlesnakes were not unfrequently met with, seven, eight, and even ten feet in length, and

from eighteen inches to more than two feet in circumference. Some time before the period of the Revolution, however, these monsters of a primitive age, and pampered gods of the simple red men, had disappeared forever from their ancient lurking places. A race of men had invaded them who knew and honored the true Manabozho, and, for his sake, cherished undying enmity towards all the venemous serpent tribes.

Bartram again relates, that on one occasion, in Georgia, having wandered a little distance from the spot where he had pitched his camp, his steps were suddenly arrested by a huge rattlesnake that lay in easy reach of him, already coiled for the fatal stroke. He affirms, that the volume of this reptile, as he lay in that position, formed a spiral mound half as high as his knees. His generous forbearance in withholding his blow when the botanist was fairly in his power, made so great an impression upon him, that he and his companions voted him his life and a quiet retreat.

Some years after this, when, in company with his father at Old Fort Picolata, on the St. John's River, attending a congress between the authorities of Florida and the Creek Indians, they employed their leisure hours in making botanical collections in the woods around the fort. "The morning the treaty commenced," he writes, "we had been rambling in a swamp about a quarter of a mile from the camp, I being a head a few paces, when my father suddenly bid me observe the rattlesnake just at my feet. I

stopped, and saw the monster formed in a high spiral coil, not half his length from me. Another step forward and I must have stumbled over him. The fright I was thrown into at once excited resentment; at that time I was insensible to gratitude or mercy. I instantly cut off a little sapling and soon dispatched him.

This serpent was about six feet in length and as thick as an ordinary man's leg. Having fastened a vine to his neck, I dragged him after me, his scaly body sounding over the ground; and entering the camp with him in triumph, was soon surrounded by the amazed multitude, both Indians and my countrymen. The adventure reaching the ears of the commander, he sent an officer to request that, if the snake had not bit himself, he might have him served up for his dinner. I readily delivered his body to the cooks, and being that day invited to dine at the governor's table, saw the snake served up in several dishes, Governor Grant being very fond of the flesh of the rattlesnake. I tasted of it, but could swallow none of it down."

This Governor Grant of Florida, was the same officer who, as Colonel Grant, in the spring of 1761, had carried fire and sword among the Cherokees. It is highly probable that he found leisure and opportunity, while on that expedition, to rid some of those gloomy lurking places in the Cherokee mountains of their ancient reptile denizens of the jeweled heads, in the same easy, cheerful manner in which he disposed of the snake killed by Bartram.

It would appear, from an item which we find in a schedule of government charges, published with the statutes of South Carolina, that as late even as 1764, the rattlesnake was still sufficiently numerous and mischievous, to elicit from the legislative authorities so decided a notice as a handsome appropriation to secure, as far as possible, an abatement of the nuisance. In that year, a negro fellow, named Sampson, who claimed to have discovered an antidote for its venom, was voted an *annuity* of one hundred and four pounds sterling for his valuable service to the province.

There is no record of Sampson's famous recipe; it was, doubtless, nothing more than one of the potent native herbs that had been used by the Indians, for the same purpose, time immemorial.

During all his forty years' residence among them, Adair asserts, that he never knew one to die from the bite of the rattlesnake or any other venemous reptile, although frequently struck by the most dangerous species. When going into the woods, or upon an expedition, every Indian provided himself a pouch of the best snake-root, such as the seneca or fern snake-root, or the wild horehound, wild plantain, St. Andrew's cross, or some other of a variety of plants equally efficacious and well known in the forests of Carolina.

It will not be out of place to describe and name more particularly the most important of these primitive antidotes indigenous in our woods, and once so powerful in the hands of the savages who first dis-

covered them. The seneca snake-root—*senega polygala*—is abundant throughout all Upper Carolina. It is said to have derived its name from the fancied resemblance between its root and the rattle of the serpent, with whose history it is so intimately associated. It is more probable, however, that its English name originated from its well-known use among the Indians. They may have possibly been led first by that resemblance to apply it as a remedy for the bite of the rattlesnake. It grows in an erect, smooth stem, with alternate lance-like leaves. The flowers are white, closely clustered on the top of a spike or stem growing up from the root, and in bloom most of the summer. Given in moderate doses, the seneca is a warming stimulant, imparting a general glow to the system, and exciting profuse perspiration. In larger doses it proves both emetic and cathartic.

The Virginia snake-root—*aristolochia serpentaria*—is a perennial plant, and, like the seneca, abounds in the upper-country on dry ridges and uplands. It is easily distinguished from the latter—its leaves, stem and root are all totally different from those of the seneca. The stem is hairy and zigzag, like that of the wire-grass; the leaves heart-shaped and oblong; the white flowers expand themselves, not on a single spike, but on several little stems or peduncles rising from the root, and sometimes under the surface of the ground. It grows from eight to ten inches in height, and blooms through the summer. The root, however, is its greatest peculiarity, being exceedingly fibrous; it appears like a collection

of a great number of orange-colored strings, all branching out from the same point.

Like the seneca, however, it is powerfully stimulant and sweat-producing, with the additional claim of being both a tonic and preventive of putrifaction. Mr. Eberle, in his Therapeutics, remarks of these plants, that they have been discovered to be utterly useless as antidotes to the poison of venemous serpents. A moment's reflection, however, will reveal the reason of this, and vindicate both the credibility of their history and the good sense of the Indians, who asked for no other remedy when struck by the fangs of the deadly rattlesnake. The truth is, there is not now, nor never was, any sure remedy for the bite of that dangerous serpent, unless it was immediately at hand, to be applied the moment the venom was injected into the blood. The Indians knew this better than any learned writer on modern materia-medica, and seldom ventured into the woods without a safe supply of such remedies, as their experience and observation had taught them to be perfectly reliable when seasonably used.

In later times, however, after the god-rattlesnake of the supplanted red men, began to bruise the heels of the English, and Anglo-Americans, in the greater number of instances, it was under circumstances when no remedy could be applied at all, before the poison had become completely incorporated with the blood, and then these ancient, famous plants being prescribed, and necessarily failing, were set down as utterly valueless. Be-

sides, the manner in which it was directed to apply them—beaten into cataplasms, or infused in water or spirits, was enough, even though ready at hand, to insure the death of the patient, by the loss of precious time. The Indians knew nothing of this; the instant one of them felt himself struck by a serpent, he sat down, took the root from his pouch, chewed it as rapidly as possible, so as to swallow in time the necessary quantity of juice, and then taking it from his mouth applied it to the wound. In this way he had already set up in his system a powerful antagonism to the venom of the serpent, while the man of the pharmacopæia would have been beating up his poultice or preparing his infusion. The Indians fought the venom of the rattlesnake as Napoleon I. fought the Austrians; the learned faculty, as the Archduke of Austria fought Napoleon. The analogy would be complete, if the former had had the weakness to lay his defeat upon the want of strength in the metal of his arms.

After swallowing his medicine, "for a short space of time," says one who often witnessed its operation, "there is a terrible conflict through all the body of the Indian by the jarring qualities of the burning poison, and the strong antidote; but the poison is soon repelled through the same channel it entered, and the patient is cured."

There were other antidotes, not less trustworthy with the American savage, and scarcely less famous than the snake-roots. The wild horehound, the rattlesnake's master, or the rattlesnake's plantain, fre-

quently formed the only store of his indispensable medicine pouch. These plants are quite common on all the dry soils of the upper-country. On the high ridge between the Savannah and Saluda Rivers, particularly in the vicinity of the villages of Greenwood and Cokesbury, few native plants are more abundant.

The wild horehound is a *eupatorium*, and belongs to the same natural family with the well-known *bone-set*; it grows, however, on highlands, while the *bone-set* is chiefly found in wet marshy places. It attains a height of two or three feet; the stem is hairy, the leaves triangular in shape, coarsely notched on their edges, and so arranged in pairs, as to cross one another at right angles. During the months of July and September, its white flowers are full blown, and may be readily recognized by their resemblance to those of the bone-set, clustered in a dense, flat corymb at the top of the stem.

The rattlesnake's master—*liatris squarrosa*—abounds on dry soils and shady woods. It can be easily distinguished by its green grass-like leaves and purple flowers, arranged on their spike, like those of the hyacinth. They are in bloom through September and October.

The rattlesnake's plantain—*goodyera pubescens*—found in the same situations, belongs to the tuberous root family. It grows from six to ten inches in height, having a stem quite hairy towards the top, with egg-shaped leaves, and a spike of white flowers.

Besides the virtues of these plants, as reliable an-

tidotes for the poison of serpents, when applied in time, they are invaluable as remedies in a variety of diseases; for which the seneca and serpentaria, at least, have been greatly extolled in the regular practice.

Dr. Bartholomew Parr, in his huge folio Dictionary of Medicine, published in 1819, makes mention of a specific remedy for the bite of the rattlesnake, that had been discovered by a negro, which may possibly be the same for which South Carolina so generously paid the annuity recorded in the Statutes. It is doubtless worthy of a resurrection from its ponderous tomb; for it consists wholly in the united strength of two of the most potent of the antidotes whose powers and natural history have just been detailed.

"Take of the roots of plantain and horehound—in summer the whole herb—a sufficient quantity; bruise them and squeeze out the juice, and give immediately a large spoonful. If the patient is swelled pour it down his throat. If it does not relieve in one hour, give a second dose, which never fails. The roots, when dry, should be bruised in water."

Besides the rattlesnake, there was one other, in the early periods, sometimes seen and felt in the woods of the upper-country, that is worthy of a brief notice. Around the history of the *horned serpent*, there hangs an obscurity, which, perhaps, no research will ever fully clear away. Some, indeed, have wholly denied that such a reptile was found on the Continent. Others admit its primitive existence and

describe it as a curious and harmless creature. There are others, again, who, while they regard it as having once belonged to the catalogue of our native serpents, describe it as possessed of a venom, whose fatal energy no antidote was ever known to master.

Bartram met with a reptile which he calls the horn-snake in his travels in Carolina, and speaks of it as follows:

"The pine or bull-snake is very large and inoffensive, with respect to mankind, but devours squirrels, birds, rabbits and every other creature it can take as food. They are the largest snake yet known in North America, except the rattlesnake, and perhaps exceed him in length; they are pied black and white. They utter a terrible loud, hissing noise, sounding very hollow, and like distant thunder, when irritated, or at the time of incubation, when the males contend with one another for the desired female. These serpents are also called *horn-snakes*, from their tail terminating with a hard, horny spur, which they vibrate very quick when disturbed, but they never attempt to strike with it. They have dens in the earth, whither they retreat precipitately when apprehensive of danger."*

Lawson, who traversed the same region about seventy years earlier than the botonist, describes another under the name of the horn-snake serpent, of a totally different character. "Of the horn-snakes," he says, "I never saw but two, that I remember.

* Bartram, p. 272.

They are like the rattlesnake in color, but rather lighter. They hiss exactly like a goose, when anything approaches them. They strike at their enemy with their tail, and kill whatsoever they wound with it, which is armed at the end with a horny substance like a cock's spur. This is their weapon. I have heard it credibly reported, by those who said they were eye witnesses, that a small locust-tree, about the thickness of a man's arm, being struck by one of these snakes at ten o'clock in the morning, then verdant and flourishing, at four in the afternoon was dead, and the leaves red and withered. Doubtless, be it how it will, they are very venomous. I think, the Indians do not pretend to cure their wound."

This singular statement of the old surveyor, in relation to the locust-tree, could scarcely have ever come to the knowledge of the good, but plain people living on Coronaka and Wilson's Creeks; yet there is still extant in that region, a tradition, in which it is related, that many years ago, a man in the lower part of the district or in Edgefield, being closely pursued by a horn-snake, took refuge behind a tree, when the enraged serpent, rolling swiftly after him, like a trundled hoop, plunged its horny sting deep into its trunk, where it was made fast, and so diffused its venom into the circulating sap, as to destroy completely, in a few hours, the vitality of the tree.

Bartram, with all his acuteness and enthusiasm as a naturalist, has certainly confounded the names of

two distinct native serpents of Carolina. The bull-snake, as he describes it, was well known in the upper-country at the period of his visit, and long after; but the old people had seen, and talked much of the horn-snake as well, whose sting they dreaded as the visitation of death. Hewit informs us, that the horn-snake was found in Carolina, and owed its name, not to a horny excrescence growing upon its head, as some have supposed, but to the horn-like sting at the extremity of its tail, with which it defended itself, striking it with great force into every aggressor. It was also deemed exceedingly venemous; and the Indians, when stung by it, did not resort to their usual antidotes, but instantly cut out the wounded part, as the only safe preventive of the deadly poison's being infused through the system.* Mills, in his Statistics, enumerates, among the indigenous reptiles of Carolina, both the horn and bull-snake. The former must, however, have been exceedingly rare; for, at a comparatively early period, it had already become a creature of curious tradition. Lawson, it has been observed, saw but two of them as early as 1718, notwithstanding no white man of his day enjoyed better opportunities for making such discoveries in Carolina. Among the innumerable facts that may be gathered from natural history illustrative of God's goodness, there are few more deserving of notice than this rareness of a reptile so fierce,

* Carroll's His. Col. p. 82.

and deadly as the horn-snake must unquestionably have been. Had it been as abundant, as the other venemous species, the Indians even, though furnished with their potent antidotes, could hardly have inhabited the country. The imagination is taxed to conceive of an object more repulsive or truly terrible. It possessed scarcely a single redeeming feature; there was nothing of the admirable craft of the eye—nothing of the beautiful changing colors or characteristic magnanimity of the rattlesnake—but with dull eye, insensate skin, and vengeful spite, ready to dart its dreadful sting into every approaching intruder, it lay a horrible compound of all the hated qualities of its race—the incarnation of death.

On an afternoon, nearly forty years ago, a party of gentlemen were riding from Abbeville Village towards the Calhoun settlement, and when approaching the place now known as the Cabins, they passed a dwelling near the wayside, just at the moment when a little girl, whom they had seen to cross the road some distance before them, gave a piercing shriek, and ran back into the house in an agony of pain and fright. Perceiving that something serious had occurred, they hastily alighted to ascertain the matter; and entering the room, found the child stretched upon a bed, and already a *corpse*. She had lived long enough, however, to whisper to her mother that a snake had struck her, while she was in the act of gathering fire-wood on the road-side. The party instantly sought the spot, and there discovered a large specimen of the

horn-snake which they dispatched. The skin of this serpent was stuffed, and preserved by an intelligent gentleman* of the neighborhood; and it was long an object of great curiosity at his residence, and afterwards at Old Cambridge, where it was last seen.†

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* Captain Thomas Parker.

† Conversation of James Taggart, Esq., and others.