

studied zoölogy a little and had learned that the spread-head was said to be non-venomous. Consequently when I next met one, and began to cultivate a closer acquaintance with him, and he seemed after a time to kill himself, I was much surprised, and began to investigate his mouth, to see if he did not have poison fangs after all. He, as they all do, had turned himself on his back and was lying rigid in that position. In the course of my investigation I turned him over, "right side up," again. He was playing dead so earnestly that he could not lie in so life-like a position, but immediately turned himself on his back again. Then, of course, I knew that a snake which was *too dead* to stay in the position in which I placed him, was *too alive* to be very badly hurt. I determined to watch him. Accordingly I removed him to a smooth, clear place and then withdrew to a little distance to quietly watch developments. In about fifteen minutes the snake cautiously raised his head and two or three inches of his body and looked around. If he saw me he failed to recognize me, and in a few seconds had turned himself over and was making off. When I advanced quickly towards him he redoubled his efforts to escape, but was easily captured. He did not, at that time, again "play possum."

Often since then I have watched them go through this pretended suicide. Usually when becoming active again, they behave like the one just described; but occasionally when they find themselves overtaken as they are making off, they will again at once feign death. Sometimes while "playing dead," if one is sharply pricked with a needle or otherwise acutely stimulated, he will promptly resume his interest in surrounding things and either show fight or try to escape.

Occasionally when I have spoken to friends about this matter and they have shown a disposition to regard my statements as "snake stories," in the popular sense of that expression, I have been fortunate enough to get hold of

a spread-head and show them what I had before described to them.

It is usually easy to provoke a *Heterodon, niger*, *H. platyrhinus*, or *H. sinus* into feigning death by striking him with small twigs or a good bunch of broom straw, or by a little brisk handling. I wish some one else would examine these snakes with reference to this habit and report his conclusions. I think "fainting from fear" is shown to be wrong by the snake's refusing to stay in any other position than "flat on his back."

Recently while conversing with a friend about this matter, he suggested that perhaps the rattlesnakes which are so often provoked into biting themselves and then seeming to die, were also acting a deceptive part in order to escape. This seems more probable as one noted experimenter, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, says that the injection of rattlesnake's venom into the snake's own circulation does not appear to cause any special inconvenience to the snake.

I would be glad to get some further information on this subject.

J. W. KILPATRICK.

Fayette, Mo., Sept. 23, 1893.

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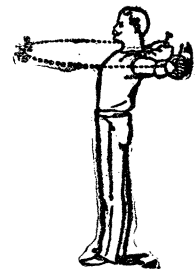
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