Paul had placed the faggot on the fire,  
and was settling or arranging it in its  
place, when the viper glided out of the  
heat and fixed on his hand. The verb  
in the original implies that the serpent  
glided out *through* the sticks.

**fastened on his hand**] The narrative leaves  
uo doubt that the bite did veritably take  
place.

**4.**] The natives, who were  
sure to know, here positively declared it  
to have been a *venomous* serpent. I make  
these remarks to guard against the disingenuous

shifts of rationalists and semirationalists,

who will have us believe either  
that the viper *did not bite*, or that if it did,  
it was *not venomous*.

**No doubt this  
man is a murderer**] “They saw his fetters.”  
Bengel.—The idea of his being a murderer  
is not to be accounted for by the *member*  
which was bitten (for this would fit any  
crime which the hand could commit),—  
nor by supposing the bite of a serpent to  
have been the Maltese punishment for  
murder ; it is accounted for by the

obviousness of the crime as belonging to the most  
notorious delinquents, and the aptness of  
the assumed punishment,—death for death.

**Vengeance**] or *Nemesis*. What the  
Phœnician islanders called her, does not  
appear; but the *idea* is common to all  
religions.

**5.**] “Luke does not so much  
as hint, that any divine intervention took  
place.” De Wette.—True enough: but  
why ? Because St. Luke believed that the  
very dullest of his readers would understand  
it without any such hint. According to  
these rationalists, a fortunate concurrence  
of accidents must have happened to the  
Apostles, totally unprecedented in history  
or probability. Besides, did not the natives  
themselves in this case testify to the fact ?  
None were so well qualified to judge of the  
virulence of the serpent,—none so capable  
of knowing that the hanging on Paul’s  
hand implied the communication of the  
venom :—yet they change him from a murderer

into a god, on seeing what took place.  
Need we further evidence, that the divine  
power which they mistakenly attributed to  
Paul himself, was really exerted on his behalf,

by Him who had said “ *they shall  
take up serpents?*” See below on ver. 8.  
The fact that St. Luke understood what  
the natives said, is adduced by Dr. Wordsworth

as another proof (see his and my  
note on ch. xiv. 11) that the Apostles and  
Evangelists commonly understood unknown  
tongues. But such an inference here has  
absolutely nothing to rest on. Are we to  
suppose that these “barbarians” had no  
means of intercourse with Greek sailors ?

**6.**] Both these, the inflammation of  
the body, and the falling down dead suddenly,

are recorded as results of the bite  
of the African serpents.

**7.**] **The  
chief**, or **first man** of the Melitæans, was  
probably an official title: the more so, as  
Publius can hardly have borne the appellation

from his *estates*, during his father’s  
lifetime. Two inscriptions have been found  
in Malta, at Citta Vecchia, which seem to  
establish this view. If so (and his Roman  
name further confirms it), Publius was  
*legate of the Prætor of Sicily*, to whose  
province Malta belonged.

**us**] Hardly  
perhaps more than Paul and his companions,