is neither acid nor alkaline ; there is nothing peculiar in its odour, and when applied upon the tongue it produces a sen­sation resembling that of fresh fat. Our recorded notices on the subject are, however, somewhat contradictory. Dr Mead and his associates, in certain experiments on the poison of the viper, inform us that that fluid, “ when dilut­ed with a little warm water, was very sharp and fiery when tasted with the tip of the tongue, as if the tongue had been struck through with something scalding or burning; this sensation went off in two or three hours ; and one gentle­man who would not be satisfied without trying a large drop undiluted, found his tongue swelled, with a little inflam­mation, and the soreness lasted two days.” The Abbe Fon­tana, on the contrary, describes it as of no particular acri­mony of taste, but rather resembling oil or gum ; and Dr Russel makes the same statement regarding the poison even of the Cobra de Capello, a species much more venomous than any viper. The accounts of its effect upon the sto­mach, when taken internally, also show that doctors differ. It is long since Celsus said, “ nam venenum serpentis non gustu sed in vulnere nocet.” Boerhaave quotes the well- known case of Jacob Sozzi, who, at the court of the Duke of Tuscany, is alleged to have taken three drams of this poison, without experiencing any bad consequences ; while Fontana affirms, that although its internal effect is not like that of a bite or puncture, it cannot be swallowed with im­punity. On this point the older authors, as Dr Shaw in­forms us, also disagree. Matthiolus asserts, that even when sucked from a wound it has proved fatal ; while others con­firm the prevailing opinion of ancient writers, and the ex­perience of Cato’s soldiery, that it is harmless when so re­ceived. The practice, indeed, of the Psylli and Marmari­des of old,

Tame, at whose voice, spell-bound, the dread Cerastes lay,

probably proceeded upon this principle of suction. These Psylli were African tribes, and were employed, according to Lucan, by Cato, for the recovery of such of his men as had been bitten by serpents during their march among the Libyan deserts. The heroic Roman is also said to have assured his followers, who feared to drink, even in “ a dry and desert land,” of the translucent fountains, lest they too should be infected by serpents, that, however noxious might be the bite of these envenomed reptiles, yet the poison must lose its effects when mingled with so pure an element.

And now with fiercer heat the desert glows,

And mid-day gleamings aggravate their woes ;

When, Io! a spring amid the sandy plain Shews its clear mouth to cheer the fainting train.

But round the guarded brink in thick array Dire Aspics roll’d their congregated wny,

And thirsting, in the midst, the dreadful Dipsas lay.

Blank horror seized their veins, and at the view Back from the fount the troops recoiling flew.

When, wise above the crowd, by cares unquell'd,

Their awful leader thus their fears dispell'd :

Let not vain terrors now your minds enslave,

Nor dream the serpent brood can taint the wave ;

Urged by the fatal fang their poison kills.

But mixes harmless with those bubbling rills.

Dauntless he spoke, and bending as he stood.

Drank with cool courage the suspected flood.

The poison of the viper, according to Boerhaave, is ren­dered inactive by digestion in the stomach and bowels, so that it will not afterwards exert its fatal influence on the blood ; “ for a whole ounce of this venom taken by the mouth will not kill an animal, while at the same time a small needle only dipped in the same fluid, and taking up perhaps not more than the hundredth part of a drop, when thrust into the blood of a living creature, almost infallibly destroys.”@@1 The following is Bruce the travellers well-

known but extraordinary narrative. “ I will not hesitate to aver that I have seen at Cairo (and this may be seen daily, without trouble or expense) a man who came from above the catacombs, where the pits of the mummy-birds are kept, who has taken a cerastes with his naked hand from a number of others lying at the bottom of the tub, has put it upon his bare head, covered it with the common red cap he wears, then taken it out, put it in his breast, and tied it about his neck like a necklace; after which it has been applied to a hen, and bit it, which has died in a few minutes ; and, to complete the experiment, the man lias taken it by the neck, and beginning at the tail, has ate it as one would do a carrot or a stock of celery, without any seeming repugnance.”

This opinion, however, that the poison of snakes may be taken internally without producing any troublesome effects, has been recently contradicted by the experience of Dr Hering, at Surinam. This traveller took at different times various doses of the poison of a rattle-snake (*Crotalus mu­tus)* mixed with water, and suffered from its effects for up­wards of eight succeeding days. These manifested them­selves by pains in the larynx and other parts of the body, by an increased secretion of mucus in the membranes of the nose and œsophagus, and by frequent diarrhoea, accom­panied by pain in the rectum. To these symptoms were added several others of a rather curious kind, attributable to the influence which this poison seemed to exercise even over the moral faculties.

By far the most deleterious effect, however, of this subtle fluid is produced by its mingling with the blood, through the medium of an inflicted wound. It then shows its mor­bid influence with a rapidity often frightful, and usually proportioned to the quantity of the poison instilled, and to the abundance with which the wounded part is furnished with those vessels which bear the stream of life. For this reason, of course, the bite of a large snake is more dan­gerous than that of a small one ; and so also a wound in the tongue, or in any vein, is almost always mortal, while it not unfrequently happens, that when a hard or callous part is bitten, no injurious results are found to follow. Cold­blooded animals are much less affected by the bite of a snake than are quadrupeds or birds ; and in the majority of invertebrated tribes it produces no effect whatever. Gene­rally speaking, however, the smaller the victim, the more deadly are the consequences of a wound. In Europe, the human race scarcely ever suffers fatally from the bite of a viper; and it is supposed that the poison of several would be required to kill a bullock or a horse. So at least say many modern writers; yet we cannot help remembering what Boerhaave tells us regarding a viper, which, “ being enraged by the members of the Tuscan Academy,” and then suffered to bite the nose of a strong bull, the pon­derous creature died in a very short time. A small quad­ruped dies rapidly from an infliction of the slightest wound. In tropical countries, however, where the poisonous species are often of considerable size, and their venom is both more abundant and in a state of higher concentration, the effects are fatal both to man and beast. The activity of the poison, in truth, increases with the temperature of the climate.

Various experiments have been tried, with a view to as­certain the strength of this animal poison in different spe­cies of serpents, and the best means of arresting its fatal influence. The observations of Laurentius, Fontana, Russel, Davy, and Lenz, are familiar to the student of physiology, but less satisfactory in their results than might be desired, from the modifying effects of special circumstances. To obtain well rectified general inferences, it would be neces­sary that numerous experiments should be tried with ser­pents of corresponding size, existing under similar circum­

@@@, See Shaw's ***General Zoology,*** iii. p. 371.