

TEAMING WITH THE TEAMSTERS

By THOMAS E. LEON.

IT IS the next thing to a disgrace these days if a person can truthfully say, "I never had an automobile ride in my life." The chuck-chuck machine or "devil wagon," as conservative people like to call it, has become a prominent factor in modern life. It is, apparently, as much a present-day necessity as is the telephone or the electric bell or—heavens preserve us!—the gramophone. Everybody who pretends to be at all up to date must of necessity have enthusiastic over the auto. And we all must join in the chorus and sing with De Wolf Hopper:

"I am a sea of gurgling steel,
With ecstasy on tap!"

Next "mahouting"—Mark Twain coined the phrase, or, rather, applied it to motoring, and we ought to stick to it—driving in the Park is the most popular form of a good time out of doors. Enthusiasts assure us—and there are enough of them to make the assurance carry weight—that spinning along the south drive, behind a span of thoroughbreds, with the breeze blowing about one's face and the invigorating tang of the ocean air in one's nostrils, is about two degrees below the happiness of eternal bliss. There is music, they say, in the beat of the horses' hoofs on the yielding oiled road, and poetry in the ever-changing panorama of flecked sky above and smooth brown earth beneath and varnished green and russet on either hand. No doubt there is a little prose on occasions when the thoroughbreds make up their minds to bolt or when one of those mild-mannered Park policemen makes an arrest or two for fast driving, but the enthusiasts are not precisely keen on prose.

Lately, and quite by accident, I discovered a diversion that beats motoring quite all to pieces and gives driving in the Park an irrevocable double cross. The new diversion is teaming with the teamsters. It is to be sure, a somewhat rougher game to play than either "mahouting" or driving, and you mustn't wear a white waistcoat and patent-leather pumps; but you get the greatest fun ever. More than that, you get, if you keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth discreetly shut, you get a clear and luminous insight into that thing which has for all of us a compelling interest and an abiding charm—life.

For, most assuredly, the San Francisco teamster sees life. And the life he sees and knows and feels and lives is not the artificial life of the fashionable reception room, nor the debased and debasing life of the slums and benzine boulevards, nor yet the lopsided superficial life of the promenade avenues and the shopping districts, but the life that is real, intense and elemental, the life which only sturdy men can live, the life that forever throbs resonantly about the heart of the most wonderful city in the world. That life the teamster knows.

My introduction to the fascinating sport of teaming with the teamsters did not, however, come about in response to the call of life. On the contrary, it came in response to the call for copy. The incorrigible car who wields a blue pencil in lieu of a scepter demanded something new, something different, and the demand must forthwith be supplied. "Mahouting" is not something new; driving in the Park is not something different. So what was to be done?

The answer came in the shape of a fine, strongly built, dirt-begrimed Studebaker drawn by two thick-necked, stout-limbed horses. The team swung down Webster street and into McAllister and bowed noisily along in the direction of downtown. Here was something new, here was something different. Why not ride with that driver for a whole day and make a "story" out of the experience?

Driving With Jim Duggin.

The result was that, at a painfully early hour the next morning, I was sharing the elevated spring seat with Jim Duggin and watching the rise and fall of the horses' heads as the wheels bumped over the stones and across the intersecting cracks. Jim was a perfectly obliging fellow and, since I wanted to know what teaming was like, he was eminently capable and only too happy to show me. Jim is one of the numerous free lances among San Francisco's teamsters. He owns the horses and the dray and is absolutely his own boss. He goes anywhere and everywhere for a load and hauls about everything that is haulable. He knows every square inch of the water front, understands the knack of getting up and down those Green-street hills and could drive back and forth from the Potrero blindfolded. Occasionally he and his team cross the bay on the huge, gaping Throughfare, and once he managed to get as far away from home as San Leandro. He has been teaming off and on—chiefly on—for sixteen years, and what he doesn't know about the sturdy art is not in any serious sense worth knowing.

Teaming is a business proposition for Jim Duggin. On this particular occasion teaming was likewise a business proposition for me, and I had determined that I would do the thing thoroughly and systematically. The right-hand pocket of my sack bulged with my paper, and my fountain pen was freshly filled and impatient to get to work. I would take notes copiously, of course. I would trace on a pocket map of the city the various routes traversed that day, and, at a propitious moment, I was to connect with the photographer, and Jim and his boys and his Studebaker would fall victims to the smooth bore of the camera. It was all very nicely planned. That was precisely where the difficulty came. It was all so very nicely planned that the fates grew jealous and upset and mixed things generally. To begin with, Jim assured me that it was going to be a powerful busy day and he guessed he couldn't make time to meet that camera feller, leastwise not just yet. Then he drove so fast and turned so many corners and criss-crossed so very, very much all over town that following the line of march with map and fountain pen was obviously out of the question. The sight of that fountain pen, indeed, made Mr. Duggin smile good humoredly.

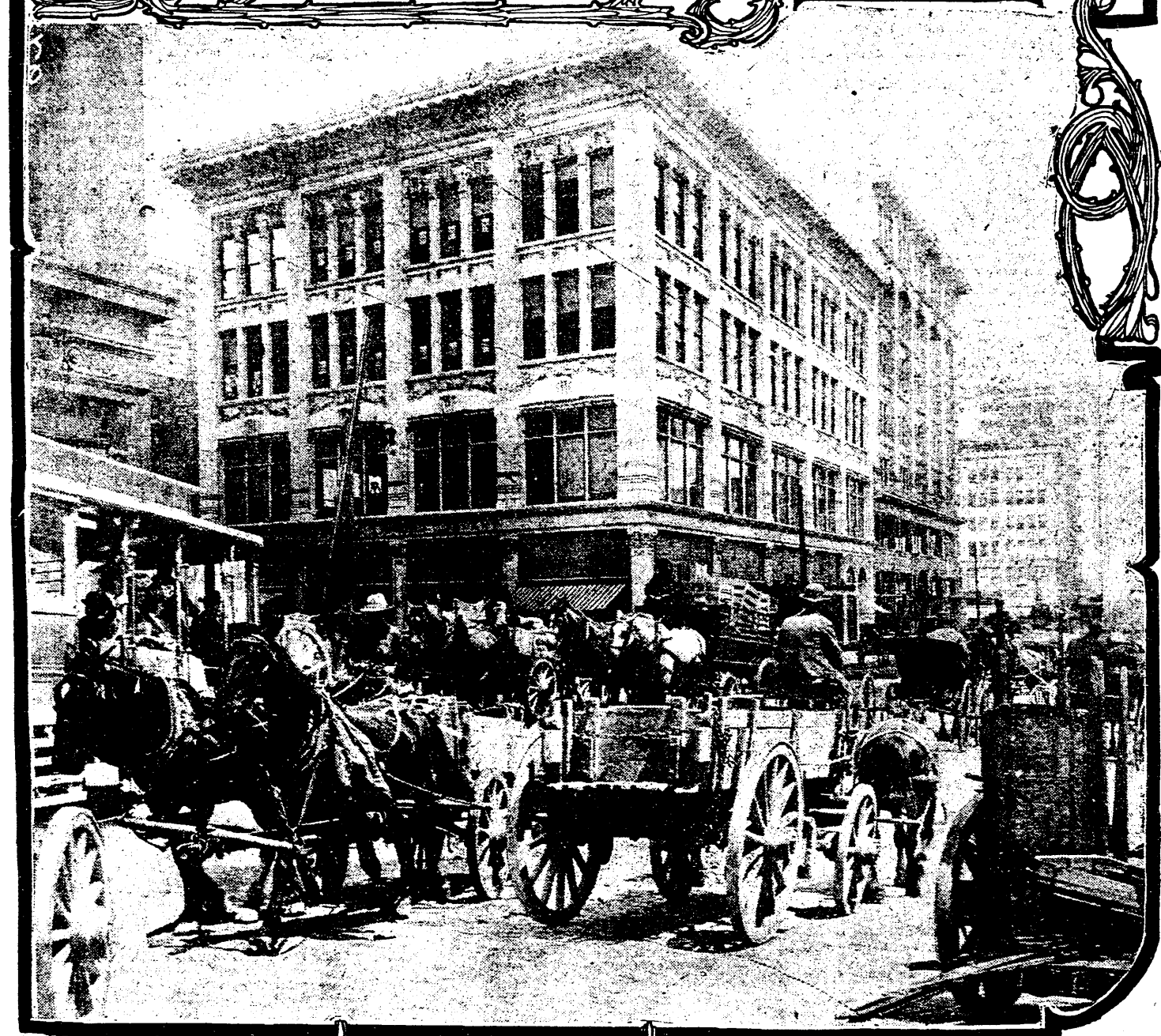
"Ever try writin' up here when the team's a-goin' lickety-split? Hum, I guess not. I'll guarantee you'll never make a fortune out of all you'll write up here, all right, all right. Why didn't you bring a typewriter along and be done with it?"

And he snapped his long whip gleefully over the broad backs of the patient, plodding bays. Hence no detailed record of that day's trips remain. We got our first load—furniture—at a wholesale place on Eddy street, and we came home in the evening by way of Valencia, Eighteenth and Church streets; but where we went and what we hauled in the long intervening hours is at present but one vast blur in my memory. It seems now that we were everywhere, North Beach and Chinatown, the wholesale district and the Union Iron Works, the district adjacent to the cemeteries, the ever-busy Mission-street pier—we visited these and many similar portions of the city, but whether it was before or after the noon hour that we hauled the spoil of wire rope from Howard street, or whether it was at one o'clock or so that we got the wrong trail and hunted along Duboce avenue for an address that doesn't exist—these things I cannot tell.

An Absorbing Sport.

The details have vanished, but the general impressions remain. The trip more than served its purpose. It gave me a teamster's appetite for nearly a week afterward and bestowed on me for life at least some inkling of the teamsters' attitude toward the world and the teamsters' outlook on men and things. Above and beyond everything else, it brought home the unalterable conviction that, at least under the rule of a man that we get the wrong trail and hunted along Duboce avenue for an address that doesn't exist—these things I cannot tell.

The teamster has troubles of his own. Many and many a time in the course of that old-letter day was the realization of this truth imparted upon my consciousness. Jim Duggin is a light-bearded fellow, the kind of man who never borrows trouble as the saying is, and yet, at no time was his face quite free from those worry lines which bespeak a brain ill at ease.



CROWDED WITH TEAMS AND CARS

The teamster is always prepared for trouble, always expects the unexpected. As a consequence, no matter what happens, he is never altogether unnerved.

Once Katie, the "off" horse, succumbed to a bad attack of nerves ("Them horses is just like women," Jim says) and plunged and reared desperately until she had succeeded in snapping the trace in two. This occurred on Third street, near Mission. Naturally enough everybody around who didn't happen to be teamsters became more or less excited, but Jim absolutely kept his head. He spoke to Katie calmly, persuasively, authoritatively. He manipulated the lines in such a way that, even when the mare was plunging and rearing at her wildest, she did not run amuck among the numerous other teams stationed between the car tracks and the sidewalk. It is true, Jim did use some strong language after Katie had been quieted; but he didn't use it on Katie. It was the motorman whom Jim blamed for all the trouble who got the contents of the vials of Jim's wrath, and manifestly Jim felt even so much better after the vials were empty. He is a handy man and it required but a few minutes' time to adjust the new trace, which Jim carried in the box under the seat in anticipation of just such emergencies.

What brings out the lines on every teamster's face is the sense of responsibility which weighs upon his mind from the time he climbs up to his seat in the morning to the time when he stables his team at night. He cannot get away from it—not for a single instant. In time, of course, he becomes used to the thing and often as not will pool-pool it all as so much nonsense; but it is always there. Let him so much as once lose his head and there will be trouble, mashup very serious trouble.

His Responsibilities.

Do you care to realize somewhat just the sort of thing that perennial sense of responsibility is? Put yourself in the teamster's place. You are due at the Mission-street pier at 11:15. The big clock in the jeweler's window on Van Ness avenue, near Market street, informs you that it is 11:07 now. You snap your whip, shout something like "get up, you beloved angels!" to your trotting horses and wheel into Market street. Here cars are clanking, autos screeching, voices of all sorts charging up and down, and pedestrians dodging hither and thither. And the nearer you get to the ferry the greater does the congestion become. You have to get to Mission-street pier by 11:15—that in itself is a big enough problem. But you have to think about more things than that. You have to keep those fool motormen from running into you—you're a teamster, you know, and all motormen are the blinkety-blankest kind of blank fools—and you have to see to it that those lunatics who, owing to some miscalculation of Providence, are trying to drive wagons, don't put your team out of commission for the day, and that your careering bays do not prance the life out of those staid and stupid old men and women who insist on standing paint-stricken in the middle of the street. Why it's all enough to make a man crazy.

I confessed the thought to Jim Duggin, teamster, as we catered down Market street under the conditions just described.

"A feller can't afford to go crazy," was the prompt retort, as he flung the bays out of the way of a clanking green car and missed running into an unwieldy lumber van by what seemed to be an imperceptible fraction of an inch. "No, sirc, not by a long shot. A feller sees so many people that are bughouse that he doesn't believe in goin' bughouse himself. Bless you, Katie!"

A diminutive newsboy, intent on boarding another car, started up suddenly scarcely a yard in front of the bays, and Jim swung the team aside with a strong, lightning-like jerk.

"Hi, you kid!" he yelled at the newsboy, who, with the nonchalance characteristic of the species, glared in supreme indifference at the perspiring teamster, and then, calmly raising his thumb to his nose, deliberately wriggled his fingers. I know the linotypist would flatly refuse to put Jim's remarks into print.

Think Any Fool Can Drive.

"Teaming isn't altogether a joke, is it?" I questioned, idly, when Jim had reached the limit of his vocabulary and the bays had a comparatively clear stretch of street before them.

"There's nothing wrong with teamin' if a fellow only knows his business," expostulated Duggin. "The

whole trouble is, some people seem to think that any old fool can drive. But any old fool can't. Some of the guys what I know and see every day, a-drivin' teams ain't got sense enough to drive a hobby horse, so they ain't."

"But things ain't as bad as they was," Jim continued, reminiscently, after a pause that tried his skill to the utmost. "I remember in the refugee period, right after the fire, you know, there was dozens of fellers—just kids, some of 'em—put on teams; and I'd bet bushels to blazes half of 'em never seen a horse in their lives afore. Why, I remember once down at the Mail dock there was a chap kept us all waitin' for upward of a half an hour while he—the blamed fool!—was a-tryin' to back up his team against a truck. Say, you just ought to see him! He beat them poor plugs till most of us was sick, and he sawed at their mouths, and stood up and sat down and looked around and cussed and cussed. Enough to make a man sick! And he didn't even know how to cuss, neither," Jim added, as an afterthought.

Thus did Duggin take his troubles lightly. But they were very real troubles, for all that—troubles that, day after day, he and his brother teamsters face with spirits undimmed. We next got talking about accidents, and Jim told me of the only serious one in which he has thus far figured.

"It was 'way back in '92," he said, "when I started teamin' with the old man. He put me wise to all the tricks of the thing, you see, and, even if I wasn't so very old, I was strong as Hades, and I learned fast enough, too, I guess. Well, one day we was goin' up Sansome street for a load. I was drivin' and the old man was sittin' behind with his legs hangin' out over the tailboard—it was one of them low tailboards they used to have then. Everything was goin' on serene till we got up to Clay street. Then a big truck came down Clay lickety-split and turned in to Sansome. Look out, there, sonny!" says the old man. That spoiled it. If the old man had kept quiet, I know there'd have been nothin' doin' but—well, I just kinder lost my head, you see, and I didn't pull out in time and the big truck swung around—the fool what was a-drivin' it ought to've had more sense, anyway—and smashed kerplunk into our front wheel and—that finished it!"

"How finished it?"

"Smashed us all to blazes, that's how. And the old man was in the hospital for two weeks—no bones broken, you know, but shook up all to pieces; and me, why, I broke my left leg below the knee and got my collarbone put out of business and was knocked clean silly. It was two measly months layed up for mine."

"I'll bet you felt just the least bit scary the next time you got on the driver's seat after that?"

Jim spat vehemently. "You can just bet I didn't," he declared with righteous indignation. "I felt darned mad, that's all. The old man wasn't a millionaire, you know, and the confounded smash-up made us lose a heap of rocks. I'm mad yet whenever I think of it."

Comfort and Satisfaction.

Yes, the teamster has troubles of his own. But it would lead one to suppose that he has nothing but troubles. He also has comforts and satisfactions, delights and advantages of his own. And, sensible being that he is, he makes less ado over the bitter than over the sweet.

One blessing that the teamster enjoys is this: He spends most of his time out in the air and the sunshine. Cranks, of course, will object that the air the teamster breathes is not always the purest, and that, even if he is blessed with sunshine, he likewise gets his share of the rain that falls upon the unjust and the just. Well, ask Jim Duggin about it. He will tell you, in his own inimitable way, that while he can't see how why a fellow has any reason to be keen on fresh air and sunshine and all that rot, he, Jim Duggin, ain't afraid of a little rain—he ain't neither sugar nor salt, you see, and he won't melt. And, in sooth, there is nothing that looks particularly melting about Jim.

Oh, yes! Teaming is hard work if you will, and Jim, when he drives into the yard and unwhittches his bays of nights, is usually good tired. But he's hungry, too, and puts away a huge meal with relish; and when he goes to bed he doesn't suffer from insomnia. Not he! And he isn't afraid of all the microbes that ever squirmed.

Perhaps the greatest benefit Jim gets from his work is its effect on his character. He has learned to think quickly and to act surely, and has learned the supreme importance of the motto which reads, "Do it now!" Jim always does it now. He has a rugged common sense, has Jim, and a practical, cut-to-the-gore sort of philosophy which, whether he knows it or not—and he probably doesn't—serves him in good stead. Teaming with the teamsters is a great training school for men.

"What particular thing do you enjoy most in your life?" I asked Duggin as we rolled Missionward well on in the afternoon. He ruminated a long time before replying.

"Well," he said at length, "it seems to me that the thing I get most fun out of is washin' up." Candidly, this was unexpected.

"Washin' up?" I repeated incredulously.

"Sure," reiterated Jim with an air of conviction. "Washin' up. You don't know how good it feels to be clean till you have to be dirty. Look at me now, will you? I ain't just as spick and span as a butterfly dunder, am I? Well, I guess, I travel around pretty near all parts of town in a day, and I pick up samples of all sorts of dirt as I go along. And when I get home at night I feel great when I splash around with lots of soap and water handy and chuck the whole collection. There goes East street, says I, and I lather up again. There goes North Beach, and I splash some more. Here comes South of Market all at a lick, and so on and so on. You can't understand, I guess, but I tell you there's nothin' like it!"

A little later on Jim grew confidential on a topic remotely allied.

"There's one thing about teamin'," he began, "that always hits me in the right place, and that's this. When you're up here sittin' on your own seat and snappin' your own whip at your own nags, you're the high cockalorum of the whole blamed circus—see? You ain't got no boss to chuck the bull at you; you needn't be afraid of gettin' the hook on Saturday night. You're it—that's what, you're it! Maybe you'll laugh, but sometimes when I get thinkin' about it I can feel my head swellin'. There's nothin' like it, for sure."

Use Strong Language.

One amenity of teaming with the teamsters made a deep impression. The teamsters as a class are given to strong and unequivocal language. Down on Spear street there were as many as fourteen teams all working on the same job, and all the teamsters were talking at once. Their figures of speech, though lacking somewhat in variety, were ultra-poetical and startlingly picturesque. There was nothing commonplace and half-hearted about their language.

"Why, bless it," explained Jim when I had confessed to him my impressions of the teamsters' linguistic feats, "it's just a part of the business. We've got to talk like that—just got to. Why, if I didn't the horses just couldn't understand us. No horse as I ever met knows real, regular lit'ry English; if you want to say something to a nag you've got to talk in plain United States—and pile it on pretty thick, too."

I recalled his contemptuous regard for the "kid" teamster who "didn't" even know how to cuss, and nodded understandingly. Jim seemed a little troubled.

"I want you to get on to one thing," he said slowly. "We don't always talk like that, you know. Now, I never let my kids hear me swearin'—no sirc. The cussin' is part of the business, and no man with any sense ever talks business at home."

There was the explanation in a nutshell. The unconventional language of the teamster is precisely like the lugubrious countenance of the undertaker. Both are essential during the course of the day, but both are to be put aside during the evening—and on Sundays. Now that you come to think about it, you will remember that undertakers, outside of office hours, are usually jolly good fellows. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

I ventured to remark, however, that one would suppose that the teamster finds it more or less difficult to abandon his terrifyingly picturesque vocabulary even after business hours. I reminded Jim of the drug clerk who was telling a young lady how much he loved her.

"Am I really the only woman you ever loved?" she asked appealingly, looking steadfastly into his face.

"Well, no," admitted the embarrassed knight of

mortar and pestle, "but you're something just as good!"

"That reminds me," said Jim, "of a good story they tell about Gilligan. He used to cuss something awful. But he was a blamed good feller for all that, and, among other things, wanted to have the young 'uns brought up right. One of his kids—as tough a little chap of 10 as ever I set eyes on—was attendin' the Sisters' school. Well, one day Gilligan got a note from the head Sister askin' him to call at the office. He went all right and brought young Johnnie along. The Sister was very nice about it, but she made the old man understand that the kid was in the habit of cussin' something fierce, and that, if he didn't quit, he'd get the hook. Well, maybe the old man wasn't mad! He grabbed the kid by the hair and swung him clear around. 'You blinkety-blank-blank-blank!' says Gilligan, 'if I ever hear of you cussin' again, I'll knock the blinkety-blank-blank block off you!'"

But, after all, the language is only an incidental; in teaming with the teamsters, the life is the thing. There is a glamour to it and a fascination, despite its dangers, despite its prosaic labor and its not less prosaic grime. And even the grime of it is honest grime. The teamster, indeed, may be dust-specked without, but he is pretty certain to be wholesome within. His life is such that he must preserve, at all costs, a clear head and a clean heart. Otherwise he is perforce compelled to join the army of drifters and fall unnoticed by the way.

AN AUSTRALIAN SNAKE CHARMER

THE Indian snake charmer has found a rival in a man named Morrissey, who, some few years ago, made his way to Australia in the hope of bettering his condition. He was first heard of in Tasmania, whither he had been allured by the prospect of employment in one of the rich silver mines. While engaged in seeking employment he was told a great deal, mostly pure invention, respecting the characteristics of Australian snakes; but up to this time he had never seen one save a stuffed specimen in a shop window of a London taxidermist. One day, while proceeding with a fellow prospector through the bush he came across a tiger snake, which presented a beautifully attractive appearance, having just shed its skin. He stepped forward with the intention of picking it up, but was hurriedly warned to desist by his mate, who declared that the bite of the reptile was deadly. Morrissey, the future snake charmer, immediately crushed the head of his struggling victim beneath the heel of his heavy miner's boot. This formed his introduction to the Australian snake world. He subsequently became expert in the art of snake-killing, but instead of crushing them to death he would pick up one by the tip of the tail and break its back by a sudden jerk, in the same manner.

Some few months later Morrissey made his appearance in Victoria, no longer in the guise of a snake-killer, but in that of a snake-charmer. He carried a bag of snakes, and, entering a public-house, would plunge his arm into the receptacle and withdraw a handful of the wriggling creatures, which he would play with as if they were pet mice. A surgical examination of his body showed it to be covered with snake bites; even his face had been bitten. He had, in fact, imbibed sufficient snake poison to kill a whole town. Yet there he stood, perfectly immune. He makes no mystery of his discovery of the antidote employed by him, but refuses to reveal the secret of its preparation. He states that it was suggested by the alleged immunity of the iguana when bitten by a snake. He made experiments with a snake and an iguana in a grassy inclosure. At first the two creatures appeared in deadly fear of each other, and endeavored to escape. He then threw the animal on to the snake, and a battle royal followed. At last the iguana was apparently bitten in a vulnerable part, when it rushed away and hid its head in the grass for a few moments, after which it would eject from its mouth some liquid substance on to the wound, and proceed to renew the combat. But Morrissey states that, even with the closest observation, he could not tell whether the iguana had eaten something, masticated it and injected the fluid resulting into the wound, or whether the animal merely brought into requisition some natural secretion from its own organs. This was the problem to be solved, and Morrissey commenced the work of investigation by searching for specimens of herbs likely to be used by the iguana.

The task was a tedious one, but at last a plant was discovered which appeared to possess the coveted virtue. Experiments made in the preparation of a liquid from it resulted in several failures, but finally success was achieved. Morrissey states that the plant from which his remedy is obtained is one of the most common and abundant in the commonwealth, and that the cost of preparation is comparatively trifling. He refuses to sell the recipe to private speculators, or to prepare the antidote for sale, but is quite willing to make it public if the Federal or any of the State Governments are prepared to make him a suitable reward. Probably when he reaches Sydney and has been examined by the medical profession something of the kind will be done, unless his discovery becomes anticipated by other bush naturalists, of whom there are not a few in the commonwealth, and who have acquired a mass of Australian natural history not to be found in ordinary works of reference.

SHOCKIN' BAD LUCK.

First Cabby—Well, Bill, how things wiv yer?
Second Cabby—Bad, shockin' bad. Every blessed cove I've drove this week's been sober—Ally Sloper.

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