

Who's Who in the Snake World

THEY HOP AND CRAWL. By Percy A. Morris. Jacques Cartell Press. 1944. 248 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WALDEMAR KAEMPFERT

IF cows go dry it is not because snakes have milked them, as the countryside still believes. A snake's mouth is not constructed with the necessary mobile lips. The king cobra of India is the only known serpent that will attack a man; rattlers, moccasins, copperhead, and their equally venomous relatives will not. The mate of a snake that has been killed will not haunt the neighborhood seeking revenge. Snakes will not swallow and later disgorge their young, none the worse for the experience. The "hoop snake" will not perform the acrobatic feat of taking its tail in its mouth and rolling along to reach its destination, and it has no deadly sting in its tail. Snakes do not charm birds in their nests, and when a gun is aimed at them they do not obligingly rear their heads and "line up with the sights," so that the marksman simply can't miss.

Morris, chief preparator on the staff of the Peabody Museum of Yale who has done much field work in this and other countries, begins an interesting, popularly written volume with an exposure of these common fallacies. After he has examined harmless and poisonous snakes, crocodiles, lizards, turtles, toads, frogs, and salamanders the reader ought to reach the conviction that serpents make us shrink and sometimes shudder simply because we have not been taught the truth about them.

It turns out that some snakes have their good points, that whisky as a cure for snake bite does more harm than good, and that because a snake has a triangular head it is not necessarily poisonous. Crocodiles do not weep. If they seem to do so, it is because their eyes have narrow vertical pupils and because the creatures almost always drip water. "Turtles," "tortoises," and "terrapin" are not good names. To a naturalist the tortoises live entirely on land, and "terrapin" is to him a fresh-water variety. If you must have a generic term use his "chelonians."

Morris has written an excellent popular work which ought to dispel the illusions of the city dweller in particular and teach him to look on any serpent or lizard as he would on deer or for that matter a cow, that is as a living creature which has its place in the economy of nature.

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V-LETTER

BY

Karl Shapiro

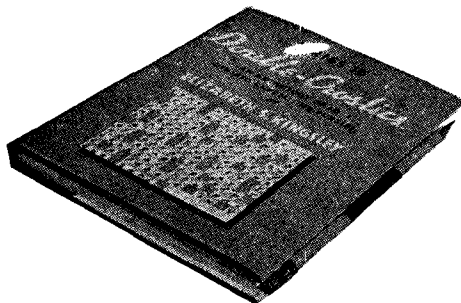
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Age-Old Cultural Pattern

THE NAVAHO DOOR: An Introduction to Navaho Life. By Alexander H. Leighton and Dorothea C. Leighton. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1944. \$4.

Reviewed by

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT

THIS modest and quiet book, by a pair of resourceful young psychiatrists, who have studied the Navaho Indians and their health problems under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is brilliantly suggestive in its approach. Our largest, most vital, least Americanized tribe, on its vast, semi-arid Southwest reservation, has been offered for some years, along with other Government services, a certain amount of modern medical care, hospitalization, out-patient advice. Nevertheless, native medicine still flourishes among the Indians and white therapeutic ways are suspect and strange to the less educated or accessible mass.

Here is a problem, repeating itself, of course, in other realms, like soil erosion control and herd reduction, where modern white techniques have been urged or enforced among the Navahos. To study it, the Leightons, who have a psychological and sociological as well as a medical concern, moved, as Commissioner Collier points out in his introduction, "into the centre of the Navaho's world-view and his life effort." They set themselves to find out who and what a Navaho is in his own right—his history, religion, relationship to the Indian Bureau, the conditions of his daily life, above all his manner of dealing with illness. Dismissing the premise that the white doctor knows all the answers, and must apply his knowledge rigidly, they frankly seek "mutual adjustment and coöperation between peoples who are separated by language, skin color, and a whole way of life."

Illness, the Navaho believes, derives from some lack of harmony between the sick person and the universal. The religious rituals and ceremonials, in which the Navaho spends from one sixth to one half of his productive time, are conducted by medicine men,

"chanters" who combine priesthood and practice, in the interest of the sick. Family and friends who assemble join in a concentrated effort to ward off evil forces and bring the sufferer to a positive state of mind and health.

The Leightons suggest that the white doctor cash in on the Navaho's affirmative preoccupation with health (mystical or not), his native intelligence in this field, the tendency now shown to use white medical aid, in addition to his own. Every patient should be regarded as offering an educational as well as a therapeutic problem. Patience in explaining baffling white procedures, in simple graphic words, will pay health dividends. Why not reveal that digitalis derives from a plant, like most Navaho remedies, that iron can be reduced to a pill? Display X-rays to tubercular patients to make clear what happens to a diseased lung with care or neglect? In out-patient work, time medication by the sun, make use of native yucca and sweat baths? Finally, since the medicine man is a potential colleague, admit him to the hospital as spiritual adviser, just as white ministers and priests are so admitted? He thus will learn, observe, disseminate knowledge.

The Leightons make the basic point that the widening of common ground between the races is possible and also practical. If a native cultural pattern, of age-old import, is understood it can be built into the foundations of new ways. As the Indian Commissioner remarks, the implications of this viewpoint are world-wide. The victorious Allies, in their role of advisers and administrators to primitive minorities, will succeed only if they look for fertile spots where differing minds and cultures may meet.

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Hesperus, Norman's Woe, daughter, drifting mast.
2. Dutch, Chinese, gingham, calico.
3. Casey, Mudville, striking out, ninth.
4. Hamlin, 1000, rats, the Pied Piper, children.
5. Henrik Hudson, Catskill, Rip Van Winkle, 20 years.
6. Madeline, the barroom floor, chalk.
7. Crossbow, albatross, the Ancient Mariner.
8. Two lanterns, Old North, Paul Revere, Middlesex, British, sea.
9. Curfew, Basil Underwood, Bessie, clapper.
10. Abou Ben Adhem, an angel, gold, loved the Lord.
11. Horatius, Lars Porsena, bridge, Rome.
12. Ducats, three, Shylock, flesh, Antonio.



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