

capable of producing are not only inflicted by the animal itself, but by men, more mischievous even than serpents, who prepare their venom to destroy each other. With this the savages poison their arms, and also prepare their revengeful potions; the ancients were known to preserve it for the purposes of suicide; and among some barbarians, the venom of snakes is used as a philtre to this day. But though their poison is justly terrible to us, it has been given to very good purposes for the animal's own support and defence. Without this, serpents, of all animals, would be the most exposed and defenceless; unable to inflict wounds, or to escape by speed, they would have been the prey of all; but from being furnished with a powerful poison, every rank of animals approaches them with dread, and never seize them but at an advantage. Nor is this all; for the malignity of a few serves as a protection for the whole. Though not above one tenth of their number are actually venomous, yet the similitude they all bear to each other, excites a general terror of the whole tribe; and thus the uncertainty in which the poison resides, renders even the most harmless formidable.

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