

Whether this were really the case, or that the Indian made use of some artifice to surprise his spectators, it is of little consequence, for the fatality of the serpents poison is too well known. It is very seldom that any of this malignant kind are seen to exceed nine feet in length; their food chiefly consists of small prey, such as birds, moles, toads, and lizards, and they never commence an attack with any formidable animal with whom they are likely to have a serious encounter. They lurk in the clefts of rocks, or among stony places; they entwine round the branches of trees, or bask themselves in the sun among the long grass at the bottom. There they only seek repose and safety; and if some unwary traveller happen to invade their retreats, their first effort is to fly; but when either pursued or accidentally trod upon, they then make a fierce and fatal resistance. For this purpose they raise themselves upon their tail, erect their head, and seize whatever presses them; the wound is given and the head withdrawn in a moment. And this is probably one reason why the Asiatics, who live in regions where serpents greatly abound, wear boots and long clothes, as they are by that means in some measure protected from the resentments of these reptile annoyers.

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