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TRINIDAD SNAKE-CHARMER REVEALS SECRETS OF HIS ART.

FIGHT WITH A MACAJUEL REPTILE IN CUNUPIA WOODS.

By Irving Greenidge

Snake-Charming here is always associated with magic-making East Indians, or loraison-muttering Spaniards.

Well, I have just had a long chat with a rugged, matter-of-fact creole, who once earned his livelihood by supplying live snakes to Mr. Mole's vivarium which was in Diego Martin.

This matter-of-fact man avers that will power, brawn and tact are all the magic art [...].

He is Joseph Peterson of El Socoro Village, San Juan, a most interesting character in many ways.

Standing about five feet six, he carries an intelligent mien, with a fair skin, and deep-set, blue eyes.

He has been at one time or another a carter, a hunter and trapper, cabman, snake-charmer, magician, agricultural labourer, horse swapper and gardener.

In the course of these heterogeneous occupations, he has been through a cart smash, been deceived by jumbie game, fought hand-to-hand with monster serpents tumbled from a towering coconut tree top, been three times bitten by venomous snakes, lost in the forest for days, and been hurtled down a forty-foot hollow by a rampaging motor truck.

He told me how his very birth was cast in drama. His mother, a Grenadian, had set out by sloop to seek fresh fields and pastures new in Trinidad, when to her surprise, he was born while the clumsy craft laboured through the bocas.

HIS FIRST JOB

His very first day on his very first job brought tragedy. He was driving a cart from Port-of-Spain to San Juan, when on reaching Barataria, one wheel slipped off the cart, throwing him to the ground with boxes, bags and barrels piling over him and pinning him where he lay.

A passing fellow-carter relieved him, but he gave up the job that day.

It is his snake charming career which furnishes the most thrilling episodes of his eventful life.

"Dey has no prayers, no magic in this job, I tell you; it is only you mind, you strenk (strength) and you smartness," he said.

"I ketch all kind of snake already," he went on, "mapipire bite me, cascabel bite me, mapanare bite me," he said, showing me some small black scars, "but let me tell you how I fight a macajuel man-man one time in Cunupia high-wood."

He lit a cigarette and went [with] relish right into the story.

FIGHT WITH A SNAKE

He had found the reptile, a huge creature, in a great heap, fast asleep in a grotto-like cavity within a rotting tree stump.

Unable to locate its head, he walked a little way off and cut a long rod with a forked end, intending to rouse the sleeper and pin him by the neck when he presented his head.

The prodding had a quicker and more sudden effect than he had bargained for, and the monster whipped out an open mouth with a vicious lurch at the intruder at such close range, that he could not use his forked rod.

“God make me have me ole felt hat holing tight from the inside wid me left hand I gie him dis wid all me strenk right down inside he throat.

“Same time I leggo de rod, an take im by de neck wid me right han as much as I could hole, and I kneel down frank omen on he body.”

Meanwhile the reptile, recovering from the shock, relieved itself of his weight by a stupendous heave, and proceeded to coil its folds about the hips of its assailant.

By means of a series of queer facial and bodily contortions, Peterson tried to convey to me the crisis of his plight.

STRUGGLE ON THE GROUND

“Dis time we two beat down de high bush all about like a steam roller did pass. Sometimes, get to stan up, but mostly we two hugging one anodder on de ground.

“I feel me hips was goin to turn in soup, an me body like it was in a vice til I can't even take win good!

“God put something in me head; I leggo wid me right han an pull out a coil of the rope I always carry in me waist. I pass one end of dis around he neck an manage to make a tie so I pull out me left fist from me mout, an I gie him a knot, as tight as strenk could pull! Now I hole on to de rope in de two end.”:

He told me how the monster had floundered about famously till about six in the evening, when at last it grew too exhausted to move.

So he bagged it and started out of the forest.