



### THE FAIRIES' COBBLER.

I SAT at work 'neath the lintel low,  
And the white-walled street was still,  
Save for the sound of my neighbour's loom,  
'Plik-a-plek-plek,' through the twilight gloom,  
And a curlew crying shrill.

The curlew cried, and I raised my head,  
For I felt the good folk near;  
Slim little shapes in the fading light,  
Dusk and dim, but their eyes gleamed bright,  
And they bailed me thin and clear.

In they swept with a rustling sound,  
Like dead leaves blown together;  
Bade me fashion their dainty shoon,  
'O the morrow's e'en the Feast of the Moon,  
And we dance on the wan white heather.'

So I took their gay stuffs, woven well,  
As never a mortal weaves;  
Fashioned daintily, fashioned fair,  
Little red shoon that the Pixies wear,  
Of the blood-red autumn leaves.

They stood at my knees, they crowded near,  
And shrilled a piping tune,  
Their great eyes glowed, and they whispered, 'Quick!  
And my work went merrily, 'tic-tac-tic,'  
By the light of the yellow moon.

'Thanks and thanks for thy labour done,  
And aye when the summer's o'er,  
And reapers carry the last brown sheaf,  
We'll send our sign of a yellow leaf,  
A leaf blown in at the door.

'So shall ye know that the time hath come,  
And merry at heart shall rise—  
Rise and go where we lit and fleet,  
Follow the track of twinkling feet,  
And the glow of our golden eyes.'

They reeled away through the starlight air,  
And cried 'On our crystal shore,  
O friend, you shall 'scape the winter's grief,  
Follow the sign of the golden leaf,  
The leaf blown in at the door.'

So shall I know when the time hath come,  
And merry at heart shall rise—  
Rise and go where they lit and fleet,  
The little red shoon on the twinkling feet,  
And the glow of the golden eyes.

Winter will come with snow-stilled skies,  
And the neighbours' hearts aglow;  
But the owls will drowse on my cold hearth-stone,  
For I shall be gone where the birds are flown  
And the great moon daisies blow.

I sit at work 'neath the lintel low,  
And the white-walled street is still;  
The twilight deepens dim and grey,  
To-morrow it may be—no to-day—  
And I wait the Pixies' will.

### TWO SIMPLE CONJURING TRICKS.

**A WONDERFUL KNOT.**—For this you require a sheep bone, which you must offer to tie in a knot. How is it done? By soaking the bone in a strong acid until it is pliable. On the same principle you can put an egg into a bottle. Soak it in vinegar until the shell is quite soft; then squeeze it through the mouth of the bottle. To one who does not know the secret, the egg in the bottle seems a marvellous thing. Acid acts in the alkaline lime of the bone and the egg shell.

### A MATHEMATICIAN.

**SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER** (to infant class): 'Who can tell what is meant by forefathers?'  
**Sage of Eight** (promptly): 'One less than five fathers.'

The New High Arm Davis Vertical Feed is acknowledged by experts to be the most perfect Sewing Machine the World has yet seen.—ADVT.

**FLAG BRAND PICKLES.**—Ask for them, the best in the market. **HAYWARD BROS.** Christchurch.—(ADVT.)

## FIGHTING A BOA-CONSTRUCTOR.

AN ADVENTURE IN BRAZIL.

BY DAVID KER.

**N**OT much shooting here now, said my kind Brazilian host, Dom Joao de Sanchez, as we sat at dinner on the spacious piazza of his country house, watching the red sun sink over the endless mass of tree-tops that flanked one of the great tributaries of the Amazon.

'Is there not?' cried I. 'Why, I should have thought that such a spot as this would be just the very place for it.'

'So it was a few years ago,' replied Sanchez; 'and then it wouldn't have surprised me in the least to have seen a panther creep in through the window, or a big snake poke his head out from under my bed just as I was going to get into it. But now, what with so many people settling here, and the thickets being cut away, and the officers from the towns coming up here to hunt and shoot every year, the game is being thinned off at a great rate. Even the alligators are getting shy, and the only sport that we have which is worth speaking of is when a boa-constructor comes up now and then out of the great swamp yonder, into which no man can penetrate.'

'A boa-constructor?' I exclaimed. 'That must be rather awkward for your cattle, whose pastures lies right along the edge of the swamp that produces these bad neighbours.'



FIGHTING A BOA-CONSTRUCTOR.

'True enough,' said Dom Joao; 'we have lost several beasts that way, and as soon as I can spare the money, I'm going to build a spiked fence all along the edge of the pasture that the snakes won't be able to get over.'

Just at that moment there came an unexpected commentary upon our talk, in the form of an Indian servant attached to my host's household, who had come up to report that a monstrous python (boa), larger by far than any yet known in the district, had been seen that evening among the reeds of the great swamp, just on the edge of the estate.

'Then the sooner we make an end of him the better, before he has time to do any harm,' cried Dom Joao, starting up excitedly, for he was very proud of his fine cattle, and had no mind to see another of them snapped up by these troublesome snakes. 'To-morrow morning I'll go on and see if I can find him; and if you, senhor, care to see the sport, I shall be very glad to have your company.'

I agreed at once, and early the next morning Dom Joao and I sallied forth in quest of the boa, along with our Indian retainer, I and my host carrying double-barrelled rifles, and the Indian armed with a long and very heavy club.

Our way led right through the cattle pasture, and Dom Joao pointed out to me with no small pride the fine show of live-stock that he possessed. In fact, it would have been hard to imagine a prettier picture than the long, low, old-fashioned looking house with its trim little garden in front, and the smooth green pasture meadows all around it, dotted with grazing cattle.

But as we drew nearer to the edge of the estate, and came in sight of the dismal swamp of which my host had spoken, this charming landscape underwent a sudden and ghastly change. Contrasted with the rich and grassy meadows that looked so green and beautiful in the bright morning sunshine, the black dreariness of the festering swamp beyond them seemed doubly hideous. The rank, unwholesome green of the long wiry grass, the sluggish pools of black slimy water half hidden beneath it, the glistening banks of food, half-liquid mud and spongy turf, into which were fastened the claw-like roots of dark, leathery bushes, were all wild and desolate to the last degree; and the horror of this evil place was increased by the gloomy shadow cast

over it from the huge trees that grew along its border. In truth, it would have been hard to imagine a fitter spot for the abode of serpents and alligators and destroying monsters of every kind.

'What a horrid place!' cried I. 'They talk of the swamps of Florida and Louisiana, and I've seen some pretty bad ones myself in Sumatra and Siam, to say nothing of the Sunderbunds below Calcutta; but, upon my word, I think this one would take the prize from any of them.'

'I wish it were possible to drain it,' replied my host, 'or at least to drain the part of it that borders my land. But one might just as well try to drain the sea; for every time the river overflows (which happens here every few months), the whole swamp is flooded over again from one end to the other.'

While we were talking thus, our Indian guide's keen eyes had been glancing round on every side in quest of the snake of which we were in search; for it was not far from this spot (so he gave us to understand) that the monster had been seen the evening before. But look as he might, there was no trace of it to be seen.

By my host's instruction I climbed into one of the low branches of a tree and sat there holding my gun ready for action.

'That's a venturesome little beast of yours over there, Senhor Dom Joao,' said I, pointing to a small white calf that was browsing carelessly beneath the ghostly shadow of the huge trees that stood along the very brink of the hideous morass. If it knew what was good for it, it wouldn't feed quite so near the edge of a swamp that swarms with big snakes.'

'My daughter's pet calf!' cried my host, with a start. 'This will never do; if it goes straying as near to the swamp as that, it may get snapped up at any moment.'

'So its mamma seems to think,' said I, glancing at a white cow on the other side of the meadow, which had just looked up from her pasture, and seeing whither the calf had strayed, lifted her head, sniffed the air uneasily for a moment, and then began lowing excitedly, as if to call back the truant from its perilous wanderings.

'Manoel,' called out Dom Joao to his Indian follower, 'go quick and drive that calf back again.'

But ere the Indian had time to obey, there occurred a sudden and startling interruption.

As we had neared the border of the swamp, I had noticed once or twice, among the higher boughs of one of the tall trees along its edge (under which the unwary calf was feeding), a strange many-coloured glistening, somewhat resembling—though on an immensely large scale—the peculiar light cast by the sun upon a wet cobweb.

I was just wondering what this singular rainbow could be, when all at once there came a flash of green and gold through the dark leaves, my 'rainbow' shot downward with bewildering swiftness, a shrill cry of mortal terror and agony was heard, and in an instant I saw the poor little pet calf writhing in the coils of a monstrous boa, no doubt the very one of which we were in quest.

My host uttered a cry of rage, and his gun was at his shoulder in a moment; but ere he could fire, a hoarse bellow made the air ring, and the white cow, dashing wildly to the spot, flew at the destroyer of its young, pushing and goring with its horns at the entangled monster with a headlong fury terrible to see.

Dom Joao and I looked on in silent amazement; for so great, as a rule, is the terror of cattle for any large snake that no amount

of lashing and goading can force them to pass near a spot where one of these monsters lies hid. But in this case the beast's insinuating fear of its natural enemy appeared to be wholly gone, with nothing left but a mad eagerness to rescue or revenge its entrapped young.

Meanwhile my host and I, not daring to fire at the mixed and struggling group, stood silently watching this unheard-of battle, in which, for a time, it really seemed as if the cow were going to get the best of it.

In fact the boa, with more than half its length coiled round the tree and the body of the calf, was in no condition to make a vigorous defence against its new foe, every plunge of whose long sharp horns made a fearful wound in the monster's scaly body. The snake began to uncoil itself, in order to seize and crush the cow in its turn; but ere it could do so (for the slowness and heaviness of its movements showed how badly hurt it must be), the assailant's horn was driven right through the serpent's neck, almost pinning it to the ground!

With a mighty effort, however, the boa wrenched itself free, and in a moment more all would have been over with the brave beast—for the snake, though bleeding and sorely wounded, had at length got free for action those terrible coils, which could have crushed the bones of the largest buffalo to splinters with one squeeze—but just then Dom Joao who was one of the best shots in the whole province, sent a ball into the monster's uplifted head, and then, coming up at a run, despatched it outright with a second shot.

'Well, I'm glad we've got rid of that rascal,' said the planter, eyeing with hunter-like admiration the vast bulk of the conquered foe; 'but I've paid more for him than he's worth—he has cost me a cow and a calf.'

'A cow?' echoed I, in surprise. 'What do you mean. The cow is not hurt a bit!'

'She won't live, though, poor thing!' said my host, with a pitying air; 'she'll never get over the loss of her calf.'

His words proved only too true. From that day forth the poor mother began to pine away, and died within a very few weeks after her strange exploit.

FLAG BRAND PICKLES AND SAUCE cannot be equalled. HAYWARD BROS., Manufacturers, Christchurch.—(ADVT.)