



A SPIDER FARM IN MADAGASCAR.

**Spiders That Make Silk.**

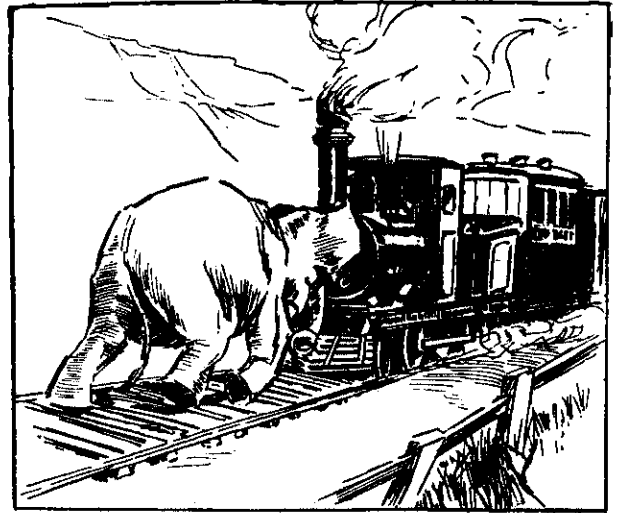
The spider has now become the real competitor to the silk worm. One of the most unique industries of modern times has been lately fully developed in Antananarivo, the capital of that wonderful island Madagascar — with the spider as the principal labourer — the skilled high-class mechanic.

Spider silk has for years been a chimera of naturalists. Practical men laughed, and said that it would be a great thing, but they never took the idea as a serious one or as feasible.

The Madagascar spider that spins is called the Helebe. The female only does the work, and she is so ferocious that if a male happens to come anywhere near her while she is spinning

she quits work and turns to kill him instantly. Then she calls her female comrades together and they devour him.

Like others of their sex, these industrious spiders will work only under the most favourable circumstances, and when they are fully supplied with such food as is most pleasing to their palate. This too, is said to prevent them from eating each other, when they imagine through jealousy some other spider has failed to show some other spider the requisite amount of courtship, or has shirked her share of labour. They are kept under the great mango trees in the Royal Gardens in Madagascar's capital when they are in training. Such care must be taken of them



TOO MUCH FOR THE ELEPHANT.

that they can only be employed to good financial advantage in the highest priced clothes. The silk of these spiders is equal to gold in its purity. It has such strength and elasticity that it can be used to make such cloth as shall defy competition.

Either on the day the spinning is to be done, or the day previous, the spiders are brought down from the country in wicker baskets by the Malagasy women. Unless they are carefully kept apart on the journey they will fight to the death.

They are then placed in separate wooden boxes in groups of twelve to twenty-four. Each compartment is shaped like a guillotine. The spiders are held down by two pieces of wood shaped like half-moons. The women who have them in charge are very light-fingered. They stroke them as they work away. The spiders toil with great industry until they fall

exhausted, when they are taken out of their compartments and replaced by other fresher spiders. The greatest care is required not to injure them. A healthy spider will spin four thousand yards of thread before it dies.

**Too Much for the Elephant.**

Perak Museum, in the Federated Malay States, has just received an interesting addition to its stock of curios. At Tapah a young male elephant, not yet accustomed to the methods of civilisation, disputed the railway track with a train.

The animal vigorously butted at the engine and "held up" the train for an hour. The result of this curious duel was, however, never in doubt. The elephant was finally vanquished, and Perak is now the richer for his tusks.



The Dust Nuisance.—A Broad Hint to the Auckland City Council.