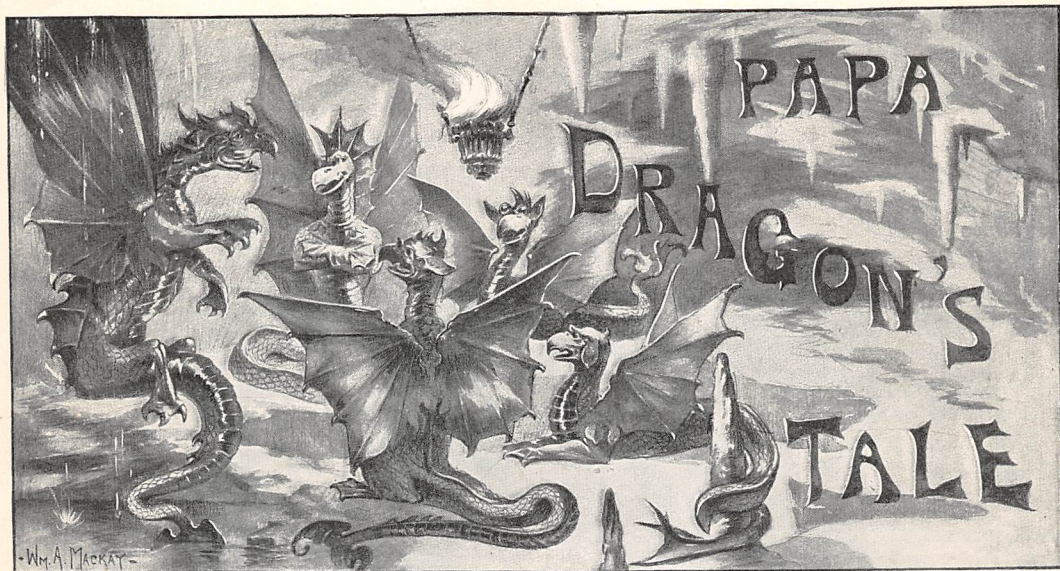




BY TUDOR JENKS.

THE HON. SAMUEL P. DRAGON had begun to show signs of age. His scales, once so brilliantly green, were turning gray; his wings creaked when folded after flight; and his eyes seldom glowed like red-hot coals, but were becoming ashy.

He no longer sallied forth whenever the clank of armor was heard outside of the cave, and, indeed, would not bestir himself unless a knight attempted to enter. Even then he scarcely exerted himself more than to emit a gentle roar and to puff a little flame toward the intruder.

Sammy, the eldest son, was at boarding-school, and could be home only during his vacations; but the other little dragons were now so well grown that Mrs. Dragon was justly proud of them. The very youngest of all had proved that he was a worthy son of the Hon. Samuel P. Dragon; for he had been sent out to market on several different nights, and had succeeded very well—securing fairly plump men. As a reward he now was allowed to sit up a little earlier than sunrise—which made him both proud and sleepy.

Though the little dragons were well grown, having well-hardened scales, and bright, fiery

eyes, and could spout flames nearly as well as their father, they had not lost their fondness for stories.

It happened to be vacation-time, and Samuel Dragon, Jr., was at home. The younger members of the family had been much pleased to see their big brother, and to hear his stories of life at school—of the studies; of the athletic games, where he had won a prize for flying, and another in a tail-whisking contest; and of how he had taken second honors in blowing flames. But at length he became tired of telling his school-boy adventures, and seemed annoyed that the eager youngsters would not let him rest.

"The sun will be up before long," he said to his mother, Scalena Dragon. "Is n't it time for the children to go to bed?"

"Not quite yet," she replied good-naturedly. "But, children, you need n't bother your brother. Remember that he is busy during all the long night hours while at boarding-school, and needs his daylight sleep."

"But, mother," insisted the little ones, "we do love to hear stories, and we have heard your Man Stories over and over again."

"If a story is what you want," said their

father, with much good-nature, "I will tell you one of my adventures—a new one."

"Oh, that will be just scorching!" one of the children exclaimed.

"No slang in this cave!" said their mother, waving a claw reprovingly. "Leave such practices to human children who do not know any better. Try to cultivate high ideals. Be worthy of your favorite hero—of brave St. Dragon who killed George of England!"

This appeal made the children serious, and for a moment none of them spoke. But the eldest, Sammy, said:

"Oh, by the way, mama, one of the dragon professors at school declared that among men there is actually a myth that George killed our St. Dragon!"

"Now, how supremely absurd!" cried Mrs. Dragon; and all the family rattled their wings as they laughed smokily.

When their mirthful glee had become

quieted somewhat, the Hon. Samuel P. Dragon spoke to them in a more serious vein:

"The idea of a knight overcoming a dragon—except, of course, by magic or accident—is

too ridiculous to be worth a crunch of the teeth. But, at the same time, even the wisest dragon may now and then make a mistake. I once was fooled myself."

"I can't believe it!" said Mrs. Dragon, warmly, while flickering flames of sympathy glowed in her loving eyes.

"It is true, nevertheless," said her husband.

"Of course," he hastened to add, "it was when I was yet young and foolish. And still, the trick by which I was deceived was really a clever one."

"Do tell us about that!" besought the little dragons, crawling nearer to him.

"Yes, do!" Mrs. Dragon said. "Come, dear, here is a comfortable flat rock with a cool rivulet trickling over the top. Settle yourself right where it is dampest, and keep chilled. You are not so young as you once were, Samuel, and should have the dampest perches in all the cave."



"ONE DAY, WHEN SHE WAS FEEDING HER GOLDFISH, I SUDDENLY DASHED DOWN."

"Thank you, Scalena," was the affectionate reply, as he took the moist and cool place she had pointed out. "I do appreciate the comforts of life more than I did. Why, formerly

I did not mind being out in the broad sunshine at midday; but now even the morning light makes my oid scales creak."

"Won't you tell us the story, father?" asked the eldest son.

"Certainly; I almost forgot."

When the whole family had coiled themselves among their favorite stalagmites, the Hon. Samuel P. Dragon blew a blast of fire or two to clear his throat, and told the story:

"As I said, I was young in those days, and knew little of the great world. Just how long ago it was I do not pretend to say within a hundred years or so, but it was before I was married. I boarded with a pleasant old dinosaur in a commodious chalky cave with a northeastern exposure. The men upon whom we lived then were not covered with the hard shells, which was much more convenient; it saved the trouble of shelling them when caught, and so we did not have to keep our claws sharp with sandstone-rubbing. The place where we lived was far nearer the sunrise than this, and the men, though well flavored, were not like these. They had beautiful slanting eyes like a dragon's, and a long black braid of hair hung down their backs. Their wooden caves were built of bamboo. You see, they too, like all modern men, were not satisfied with this world as it is, but must cut it into little pieces and make their curious rubbish-heaps to live in."

"How about your adventure, father?" asked Samuel, Jr., fearing that the old dragon would wander from his subject.

"Sammy," said his mother, "let your father tell his story in his own way. I should think

that your teacher would tell you that it is n't polite to interrupt one another as men do."

"I beg pardon," said Sammy, abashed at being reproved before the younger ones, who could not help giggling a little to see the pompous school-boy taken down.

"No harm done," said his kind father, placing one claw affectionately upon his son's saw-toothed spine. "I know that I am apt to be flighty. I will get on with my story. Well, not far from our cave was a large settlement of men. In the midst of them lived one they called their emperor, a very fine plump crea-

ture, in the best of condition. I used to dream of dining upon him, but could never catch him alone; he was always attended by a herd of other men. Finally I gave up the idea, but determined to capture his daughter instead. She, though not so fat as her father, was ready for the table.

"In this I succeeded very neatly. One day, when she was out feeding her goldfish, I suddenly dashed down from a mountain-peak not too distant, picked her up, and winged my way to the cave. A number of arrows were fired at me; but of course they only tickled a little, and I was soon out of reach.

"When I reached the cave, I put the emperor's daughter in the refrigerator, and stationed myself near the door of our home, in readiness to drive away any rascally man or men who might come to take my dinner."

"Oh, papa, did you kill her?" asked one of the younger children, smiling hungrily.

"Of course he did n't!" said Sammy, Jr.,



"AS WE SAILED ALOFT, I DEVOTED MYSELF TO TEARING HIM TO LITTLE BITS." (SEE PAGE 536.)

impatiently. "Why, it would spoil her for eating! Have n't you learned that yet? It's very easy to see you have n't been to school!"

"There, don't be so superior, if you are in your second year," said Scalena Dragon to her son. "Let your father go on with his story."

"No; I like to keep them alive for a while," said the old dragon, "till they get cooled to the proper temperature. Meanwhile, as I said, I waited at the door

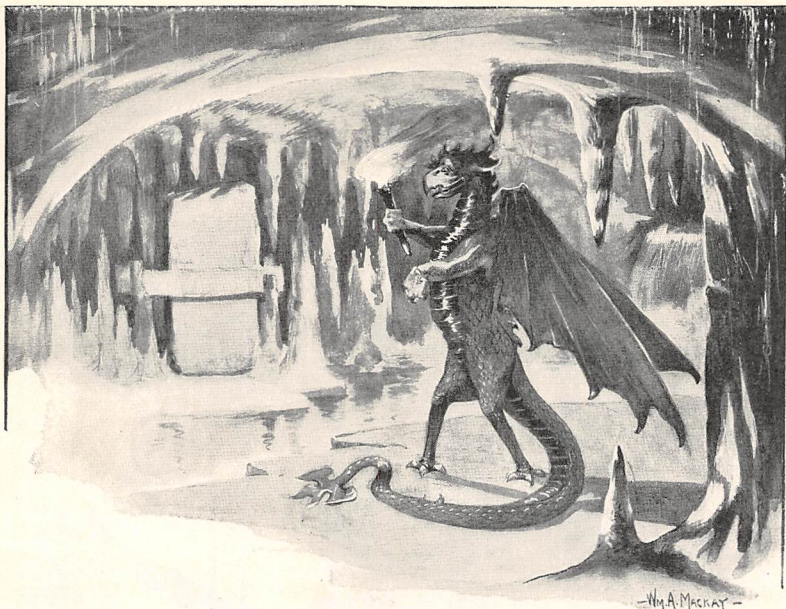
of the cave. I knew that some of the emperor's people would come bothering me at first, and I wished to be ready for them. I expected a whole flock of them with bows and arrows and sharp sticks; but, to my surprise, only one came, and that after a long delay. About nightfall, and just as I was becoming hungry, I saw a man—a very large one, I thought him the largest I ever saw—come boldly to the door of the cave. He was armed only with one of those long pointed sticks that men seem to think are good for fighting dragons."

"Spears, father," said Sammy, Jr.

"I know, I know," said his father, sharply. "I have been a long time out of school, but I know a spear when I see one as well as you do—better, perhaps. Well, this very large man was incased in a thick sort of dress, and wore a queer head-covering."

"Was he a knight?" asked Mrs. Dragon.

"Not exactly, my love," her husband replied; "but he seemed quite as troublesome a creature. Well, of course, as soon as he was within fair clawing distance, I sprang toward him, and buried my claws in his body. To my surprise, he did n't seem to mind this at all. He made no outcry, did not attempt



"THIS TIME SHE DID N'T GET AWAY." (SEE NEXT PAGE.)

to use his weapon, but simply *rose up into the air*. This surprised me still more. I had never seen a man fly, and I did not know that they could fly. But nevertheless I held on, and made up my mind to fight him in the air, if he preferred that to a combat on the ground. Away we went, higher and higher, with increasing speed. As we sailed aloft, I devoted myself to tearing him to little bits. He really made no resistance, and allowed me to do whatever I chose. We shot upward and away so rapidly, however, that by the time I had succeeded in tearing off his thick quilted dress we must have been a long flight from the cave. When I had reached the man's own body, I drove one claw deeply into him, and discovered that—he was *stuffed with straw*."

All the little dragons were so much amused that they rattled their scales and whacked their tails against the rocks; and even Scalena Dragon was forced to spread her jaws in a wide, green smile of amusement.

"Yes, my dears," said father Dragon; "I was tearing a dummy to pieces, and my mouth was filled with burning straw. Of course I at once dropped the figure, and let myself descend to the ground. Then I looked upward, and discovered that the dummy, which I had

set on fire with my breath, was sailing away into the air, attached to a great machine made of paper stretched flat upon sticks, and carried along by the wind."

"Father, was it what the men call a kite?" asked Sammy, Jr., speaking more respectfully than before.

"I believe so, my son. The emperor's people must have made the dummy, attached it to the machine, and then let it come up close to the door of the cave. Of course I made my way home as rapidly as I could. But I was too late. While I was chasing the dummy the people had robbed my refrigerator, and so I had to go supperless to bed. I was a little angry at first; but when I had thought it over, and had seen how cleverly I had been tricked, I could not help laughing at myself. I never told anybody about it before—not even your mother. I never mentioned it, Scalena?"

"Never," said Mrs. Dragon. "It was certainly very ingenious. Those must have been exceedingly bright creatures, for men. They are not often so sagacious."

"No," said the Hon. Samuel P. Dragon. "Those were the cleverest little fellows I have ever seen. They are so wise that they even admire dragons. Did you know that they have a picture of one on their flag?"

"I did n't know it," said Mrs. Dragon. "Did you, Sammy?"

"I guess I may have known it," said Sammy, cautiously. "I think I remember something about it in one of my lessons at school."

"What became of the emperor's daughter?" asked one of the little dragons, who seemed quite depressed because his father had lost his dinner.

"Don't let the story end with a disappointment, father," said Scalena Dragon, "because I'm afraid the children won't sleep well unless you can tell them that it turned out all right in the end."

"Dear child!" said the Hon. Samuel P. Dragon, taking his youngest on his knee, "you can go to sleep happily, love. Your father caught the emperor's daughter another time, and this time she did n't get away. I ate her—years and years ago. And very nice she was, too. It is almost sunrise, darling. The scorcher will soon be here. Run away, children, and sleep till the moon comes out again."

The dragon family slowly rose, and went yawning to bed; but before the last one was asleep, the sun was peeping over the hills, and far away could be heard faint cries of:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo-o!"

