



A Witch Story

A LEAPING fire of pine knots roared up the great chimney and flooded the nursery with its ruddy warmth. Out of doors the wind whistled sharply, rattling the shutters and crashing the naked tree branches spitefully against the house, while Nep, the banished setter, howled dismally from his cold kennel.

"Oh, mammy," cried little Rob, "don't you just know poor Nep wishes he was back in here by the fire? Just listen at him howl!"

"Shucks, chile," said mammy Hannah, looking up from her darning, "dat dawg aint studyin' 'bout no fire. He done seed a witch sailing by, dat ar huccome he out dar toothin' lack a hawn."

"Why, mammy, there aint any witches sure 'nough, mamma says," began little Rob, at the same time enuggling up to the old woman.

"Honey," said she solemnly, gazing over her brass-rimmed spectacles into the child's intent blue eyes, "I aint 'sputin' but whut yo' maw know a sight er things, fust en last, but I done been hear tell er witches en done seed dey gwines on mo' yeahs den you kin mek out to count. En lemme tell you, don't you fool 'long' em, honey, fer jes' sho es you does you gwine fetch up in de middle er some kind er debblment er nother."

The little boy tacitly agreed to that, and mammy Hannah, warming to her subject, went on: "Witches brulases 'round most anywhere, same lack dey marster ole Satan, but dey used to git fa'r oudacious out dar to Mars Virg's lowland place, en whut dem lowland niggers didn't know 'bout witches 'twan't no use tryin' to fine out. Ole Unker Pete say onct dey wuz two mens livin' in Jlnin' houses, en both on em wuz rid by de same witch. You done seed strans er ha'r kinder tied together at de end, aint you, honey?" questioned the old woman.

The little boy fearfully bethought himself of certain ominous looking tangles among his golden curls.

"Wull," declared mammy, "dem air witch sturrups, en whar you fine em right dar de witch bin ridin'. Dish yer witch she tucken rid dem two niggers twell dey didn' had no res' night nor day, seem lack. Howsomdever, de witch she sorter new at de business, en one time de man tucken thowed a quilt over her en kotch her, en whilst she all wrop up dar he lammed loose on her wid a fence rail en leetle mo'n beat her plum to deff.

"She twis' en she wring en she upen holler, 'Oh, Mister Man, lemme off dis time en I wont ride you no mo'! De man aint say nothin', jes kep on beatin', kerblam, kerblam.

"Oh, Mister Man, lemme off en I

THE WALKING FISH AND THE TADPOLE

THIS is a tale of the very old days, when the fishes wore legs and lived as well upon land as in the water. The tadpoles in those days remained always tadpoles, and having no legs at all, lived in the water only. They were meek, wiggly creatures, content for the most part to find a sunny place in shallow water, where they could lie all day in the pleasant warmth, disturbing on one. The fishes, however, were very proud of being able to go about on the land when they wished, and rather looked down on the humble tadpoles, or pollywogs, as they often called them, just as meek little boys to-day are sometimes called sissy-boys.

One day it happened that the fishes, having no other sport, concluded to annoy the tadpoles for fun, and, seated in a row along the bank, they threw sticks and stones at the humble little wigglers, driving them from place to place and laughing at their fright. In the midst of their amusement they did not notice the approach of a band of wood rovers until they were surrounded and unable to get away. The wood rovers were a wandering band of little people, something like brownies, and among them there was a great magician, called Wonder-heart, because of his kindness of heart and the many wonders which it induced him to perform. When he saw what the fishes were doing he was very angry at them indeed, and bethought himself of a proper punishment for them. The rest of this story has been made into a song or chant, which the frogs on warm Spring and Summer nights repeat over and over. It is called "The Triumph of the Tads," and was written by a great poet of the frog people in the very old days. This is the translation

THE TRIUMPH OF THE TADS



When Wonder-heart so long ago,
Beheld the fishes in a row,
Abusing pollywogs below,
He said, "Proud sirs, to humble you
And make you know the wrong from right,
A magic potion will I brew,
And you shall drink of it to-night,
While all the fishes shook with fright,
Long, long ago.

They cried, "Oh, Wonder-heart, we pray
That you will let us go our way—
We'll mend our manners from to-day!"
But neath the trees he built a fire
And o'er it soon a kettle hung,
And as the crackling flames grew higher,
Into it magic herbs he flung,
And then this crooning rhyme he sung,
Long, long ago:

"Long weed, short weed, spindle weed and all—
Legs grow, legs go, stay away till fall.
Tadpoles on fishes' legs hop and skip till when
Wonder-heart, with magic art, brews for them again."



And then at last, so long ago
He stood those fishes in a row
And made them drink the broth, and lo!
No sooner had they tasted when
Their legs began to wobble sore,
And when they reached the stream again
They did not have them any more,
But helpless flopped upon the shore,
Long, long ago.

And all the tadpoles quickly came
To Wonder-heart when called by name,
The cruel fishes' legs to claim,
And put them on and danced about
Along the banks and mossy logs,
And quickly learned to sing and shout:
"No more, no more we're pollywogs!
For now we're frogs! we're frogs! we're frogs!"
Long, long ago



Alas for fish! Poor Wonder-heart
Next month was slain by cruel dart,
And with him died his magic art,
And so the fishes evermore
Must swim, while humble pollywogs
Grow legs in youth, and o'er and o'er
At night go skipping through the bogs
And sing and shout: "We're frogs! we're frogs!
We're frogs! we're frogs! we turned to frogs
Long, long ago!"

Only one fish was ever able to go on land again, this being a kind of perch with peculiar shaped fins. This fish is able to creep on the shore and has been known to make quite long trips overland in search of water, and to climb trees—hunting, perhaps, for its lost legs. It is known as the climbing perch, and its home is in India.

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Of the South.

gwine fetch yer ev'rything you want! De man 'low dat seem sorter reasonable lack, so he turnt her loose. En sho' nuff dat night heah come de witch in de 'pearance on a great big black cat, fa'r loaded down wid pervisions she done stole outen de sto'.

"En she say: 'Whutsumdever you do don't let on how you done catch me, fer ef you do hit wont be good for you.'

"Dat minute heah come de turr man, en de cat she tucken runned under de baid. De two men dey sot dar en talked en smoked dey pipes, en de witch she dar under de baid 'lowin' how she gwine spell de turr man. Fo' he know hit he gun to nod; de cat she roll her eyes at him yit mo'.

"De man he sorter stritch hissself en say, 'Seem lack dat same cat attor me whut runned me turr night,' en he nod ergin. De fust man tucken fergit whut de witch say, en he upen 'low: 'Huh, man, you oughter ketch her en beat her lack I done!' Fo' de words out his mouth good he done drap back in his cheer sound asleep, en fast news he knowed he done fell over in de fire en burnt hissself terrible. De turr man jeck him out de fire en jes fa'r split de wind fer hom wid de cat right attor him."

"Did she catch him, mammy?" asked little Rob in an awe-stricken whisper.

"She did dat, chile," declared mammy with all the positiveness of an actual eye witness, "en de way she rid dat man was scandalous. Last he ax one er dese heah ole Affikins how he gwine git chet on her, en he say, 'Des set mustard seed in de middle er de flo' en turn a sifter over 'em.'

"De man done lack; he say, en dat night heah come de witch, whl-r-r-ri down de chimblly samer'n one er dese heah chigngly swallers. Right dar she hatter stop, enze look lack she bleegeed to pick up dem seed and count dem holes in dat sifter bottom. De seeds dey so little en round dey roll off in de cracks, en fo' she git em up de fust rooster done crow. Den she count, en de she count ever which erway—ten, ten, double ten, fifty—fo' she git thoo wid dat sifter nur rooster done crowed en day done broke. She runned to de chimblly en she call, 'Mr. Debl dis en Mr. Debl dat,' but 'twant no use. Jes lack she stand dar she stay, en de man tucken kotch her en call in de turrs, en dey burnt her for a witch."

Rob drew a long breath as Nep began howling again, and mammy ended with the declaration, "Dat's de truff, chile, hit so is."

That night when Rob's mother came in from the Thursday Circle, where she had delivered a very able paper on "Mediaeval Superstition," she wondered at finding the sleeping child with his head under not only all the covers but the pillow and bolster as well.