

Jessie always took their bamboo cage into her own room at dusk for greater security ; and one night, just after we had all separated to go to bed, I was very much frightened at my poor little sister suddenly bursting into my room, as pale as a ghost and perfectly speechless with terror ; she looked so horrified that my alarm was quite as great as hers, though I did not know what was the matter. She really could not speak, though she tried to do so, but seized my arm and dragged me towards her room, which, as I have told you, was next to mine, but with no door between. At first I thought Jessie must have gone suddenly mad, for everything there looked just as usual, nor could I see any cause for all this agitation. She did not, however, let my arm go, but pulled me towards a recess where the doves' cage stood on a low table. There, indeed, I saw a horrible sight ; a huge yellow snake, with loathsome black spots all over it, had forced its way in through the slender, elastic bamboo bars of the cage, and lay coiled up at the bottom, with its flat head raised, its forked tongue sticking out, and its small, cruel eyes fixed on the only surviving dove. It had already swallowed one, and the end of the survivor was very near. Poor little "Selim" was on the lowest perch swaying backwards and forwards, gazing at the snake ; at last he sank slowly down, just as if he had fainted, and in an instant had almost disappeared among the coils of the horrid snake's body. I never saw anything so rapid as the way the reptile crushed the dear little helpless dove the moment it dropped within its reach. Jessie gave such a shriek that I feared the snake would be roused and perhaps escape, but he was too intent on his supper to mind us, so I took courage, and proposed to go for our old Portuguese butler, who I thought would know what to do. Jessie still clung to me, sobbing, and we found the old man's room, roused him up, and whilst he was dressing we remembered our schoolboy brother, who would be certain to enjoy a scrimmage at any hour of the day or night, and, in answer to our knocks at his door, he soon appeared, as quickly dressed as if he had gone to bed with half his clothes on !

When we returned with this reinforcement to Jessie's room, the dove was dead, but the snake had not yet quite swallowed it ; and here I must tell you how curiously it had prepared the poor little plump bird to go down its narrow throat. Those dreadful squeezes among its coils had broken all the dove's bones, and the snake had carefully licked its feathers the reverse way, so that instead of being a fat, snowy ball, it was of a great length, and so drawn out that it was

quite thin ; the snake was leisurely proceeding to swallow it, and we could see by the bulges exactly where the other dove was in its horrid body. The old butler first cut off the bamboos which formed a sort of dome to the cage, and then he and Harry prepared to kill the half-gorged snake, but before they struck the first blow Jessie and I went into my room, as we could not bear to see it.

In a few moments Harry triumphantly announced that it was all over, but he seemed rather disappointed at the snake not showing any fight. It was not venomous,—none of the large snakes in Jamaica are so, being only dangerous to the poultry-yard, and particularly fond of newly-hatched ducks and chickens, or even a baby-turkey. There is a very small snake, only two feet long, called the "whip snake" from its resemblance to the lash of a driving whip, which is said to give a poisonous bite, and is apt to make its way into cellars, as it is fond of a cold, damp place. I never heard, however, of any one being bitten even by this reptile.

I killed a very large snake once all by myself, and, though it was quite by accident, I felt as proud as if I had performed a great feat of strength or valour. I was dressed for riding and had my whip in my hand, but being very thirsty I went into the bath-room to see if the water in the great earthenware Spanish jars was any cooler than that in my bedroom. The walls of this bath-room were made of jalousies, which could be left open all night so as to allow the cool air from the mountains to get in and make the water in the big cedar tubs fresh and nice for our morning bath. Whilst I was drinking some deliciously cold water very slowly and with great enjoyment, a large snake suddenly thrust its head through the open jalousies and began greedily drinking out of the very jar from which I had just taken a tumblerful of water. It was so thirsty it did not perceive me at first, but in a moment it raised its head and hissed at me. I thought this so impertinent that, without thinking I should hurt it in the least, I gave it a smart tap on the head with my little riding-whip. The snake shrank back, and I heard a heavy fall on the grass outside. Of course I immediately looked out of the window to see where it was going, but to my surprise it lay quite still, so I called Harry to back me up in case of danger, and we went to examine it nearer. It was actually quite dead. Harry was as much astonished as I was at my little blow having had such an effect, and he immediately proceeded to measure my victim, triumphantly proclaiming it to be over six feet long.

We used often to find the skins of these