BEASTS
THUMB-NAIL STUDIES IN PETS



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BEASTS
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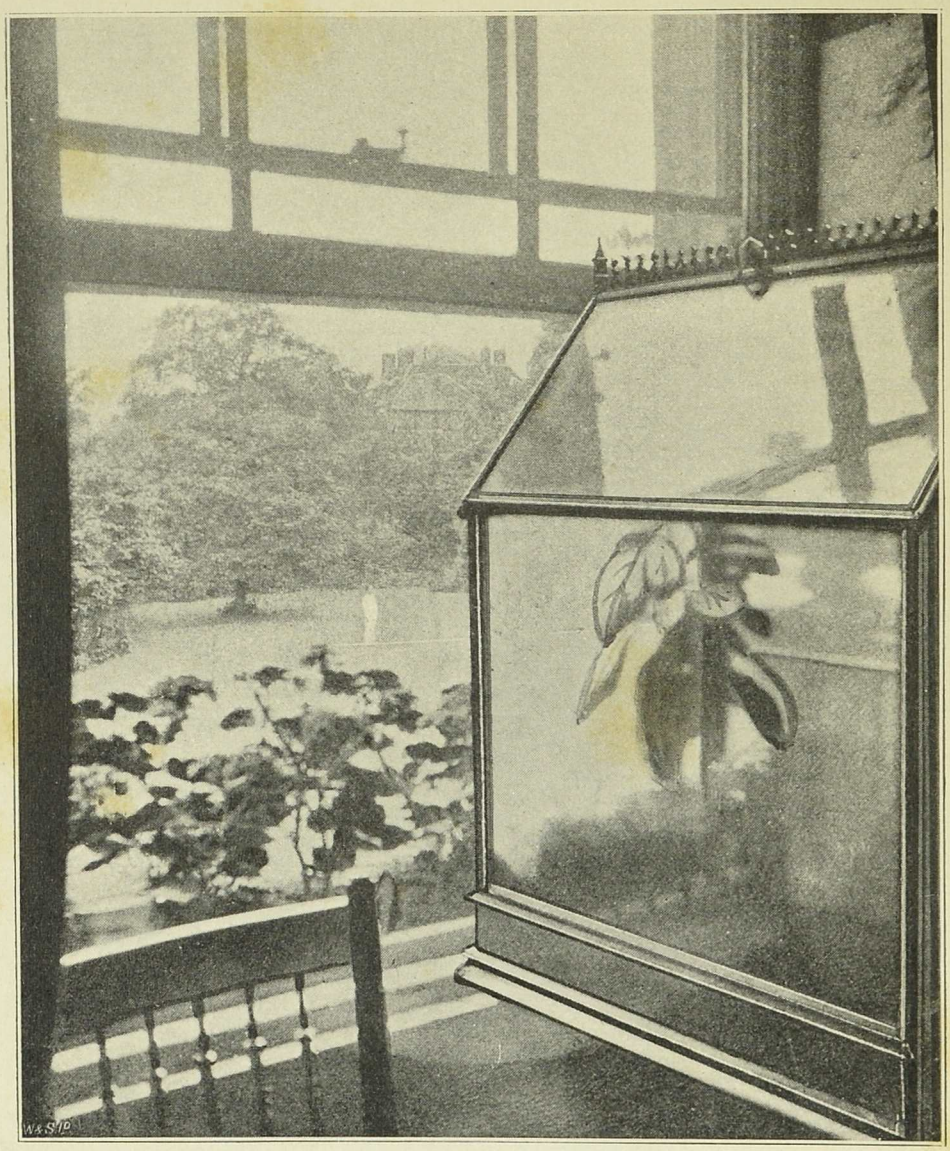
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BEASTS

THUMB-NAIL STUDIES IN PETS

"With regard to the great human fallacy expressed in the phrase 'the dumb animals,' no man saw through this more clearly than Thoreau, not even St. Francis of Assisi, not even Cowper, nor Burns, nor Coleridge, nor Bisset, the wonderful animal-trainer of Perth. . . . Neither thought nor emotion can really be expressed at all. The voice cannot do it, as we see by comparing one language with another. . . . Soul cannot communicate with soul, save by signs made by the body; and when you can once establish a *Lingua Franca* between yourself and a 'lower animal,' interchange of feeling and even thought is as easy with them as it is with men. Nay, with some temperaments, and in some moods, the communication is far, far closer."—*Watts-Dunton*



Frontispiece.

BEASTS

THUMB-NAIL STUDIES IN PETS

BY

WARDLAW KENNEDY

London

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1899

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TO MY SISTER

M. E. K.

MY EARLIEST ACCOMPLICE

AND LATEST COLLABORATOR

PREFACE

Most of these chapters (originally written for a school paper) have appeared in the "Public School Magazine," but they have been considerably added to and furnished with more and, in many cases, improved illustrations from the ingenious pen of Mr. J. E. Spicer.

I should not myself have thought them worthy of republication, but my opinion has been overruled by those who should know better than myself what is likely to be read with interest by a wider public.

It was my (unformulated) opinion, I believe, as a boy, that whatever was to be known about animals was to be found in books. The difficulty

lay only in getting books big enough and good enough. The torrent of print upon this, as on other subjects, that the present generation is called upon to breast, may have at least the advantage that what is evidently produced with such ease and rapidity is less likely to engender that stifling illusion of finality.

It was long, I think, before it occurred to me that I might myself learn something direct from Nature that had not been hitherto recorded. Not that I imagine myself to have contributed anything new of importance about these animals, but even such a trivial, perhaps frivolous, record as this, if conscientiously kept, may have a certain value if it helps to dissipate the mischievous notion that natural history is a subject that can be "got up" from text-books or museums.

Facts of structure and descent are, if we aim at completeness, necessary, but they should come second, not first. For "knowledge of men" we

do not look to books nor to the hospital dissecting-room. An animal is no longer an animal when the life is out of it, but a mass of tissues and vessels, a stuffed skin or a skeleton, the study of which may be interesting, but is only indirectly the study of animals. The "gunner" or collector may still cherish the delusion that he is a naturalist when he is killing "specimens" for his private collection and destroying for himself and others the possibility of observing and studying their life; but it is a class which we may hope is diminishing. To the real knowledge of animals it is in the power of the humblest observer to add something; his eyes or his field-glass are the only apparatus he needs.

"*Il n'y a rien qui s'arrange aussi facilement que les faits*," said Talleyrand, and it may be thought that my facts have been "arranged," with a view to picturesqueness and effect. Such is not the case. If the book had been written

from memory, the various incidents of the lives of my *protégés* would no doubt have grouped themselves unconsciously in my mind as pictures ; and the result, if picturesque, would have been altogether futile in respect of advancing any one's knowledge of our humble cousins. In works of "Dichtung und Wahrheit" a sceptical world may be pardoned for presuming that the "Dichtung" is apt to predominate. But if this little work has any merit at all, it is that whatsoever is here related has been taken down by me on the spot or immediately after its occurrence. Many things I refrained from noting because of their singularity and because I was unwilling to trust to that most delusive of authorities, "the evidence of one's own senses." What I recorded was what I had noticed more than once, or what appeared so clear that it seemed to stand in no possible need of verification. To frogs and pigs, snakes, lizards, and rats, tortoises and "mengeese"

I can only apologise if I have in any way misrepresented their actions. "I never read a book so bad," says Pliny, "but I drew some profit from it," and from the public I can only hope that "people who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like."

HAILEYBURY,
May, 1899.

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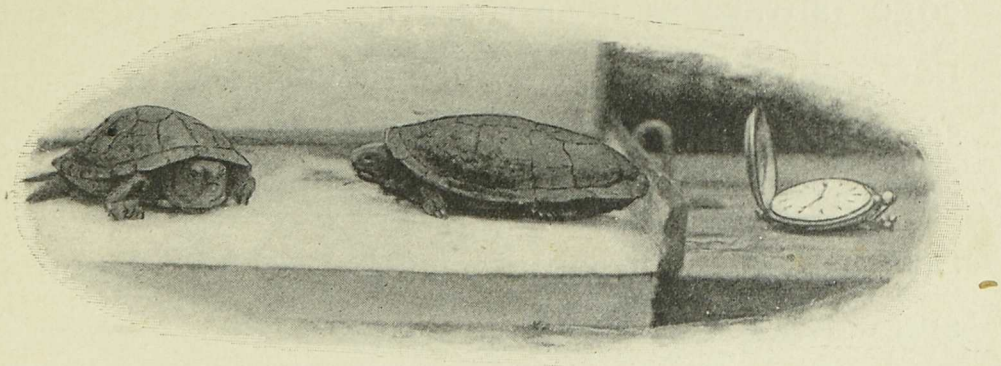
Birds and their enemies.

BEASTS

CHAPTER I

THE HAPPY FAMILY

And they ought to be happy, for they have nothing in this world to do but enjoy themselves, and are surrounded by every luxury that the heart of frog could desire or the head of newt dream



of. Look at that little water tortoise in his bath, with his nose above the water for the sake of fresh air. Now he sees me coming, and, scrambling out of the water, flattens his nose against the glass (Query : Can a tortoise flatten his nose ?)

in expectation of a worm. There you are then. Now, clumsy! Why don't you take it by one end and gulp it straight down? He takes it by the middle, and then is terribly irritated by the ends twiddling round at the sides of his mouth, and paws and scrapes with his feeble little feet to keep them off. Occasionally he breaks off one end in this way and gets the rest down more easily. But not infrequently he shoves it out of his mouth altogether and can't find it again. For worm has got under his body to the bottom of the saucer, or has walked out of the water altogether and over the edge. If he is quick he will get past the salamanders that lie under the edge (always as near the water as possible and never in it), and the podgy toads that have scooped out holes under the saucer; and so get into the roots of the turf, where he may spend many a pleasant damp year before he is found and eaten.

The wily worm.

We often remark how wonderfully animals are adapted to their surroundings, and we say truly. But we forget how imperfect they are in many of their arrangements and habits (I have even heard it asserted that we ourselves are not quite

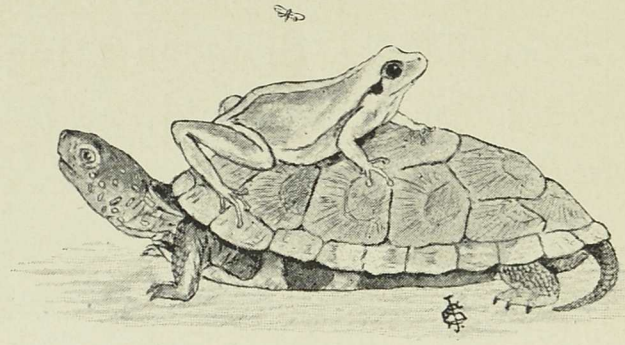
Nature red in tooth and claw.

perfect, which is absurd), and that scores of all kinds die or are killed for every one that survives. If it were not so, we should soon have to wade through several inches of frogs to get across the heath ; our hasty course across the quadrangle would be marked by a thousand mangled and bleeding toads; our Sunday hats would be occupied (during the week) by mice, and rats would devour our precious dictionaries and our favourite passages in the classics. Compared with these trials it would be a small thing that, but for this imperfection, there could have been no evolution at all—that no gentle reader could have arisen to peruse these pages which no ingenious author could have come into the world to write.

The frustrated frog.

It is not the tortoise only that is clumsy. He has got down his three worms somehow, and now he is heading for the other end of his home, by the window, where the sun may be expected soon. A green tree-frog just went for a fly, and, missing him, alighted on the tortoise's back. Tortoise only pauses for a moment, and frog gets a good long ride before he has quite realised that he has not caught

the fly, (2) recovered from the shock to his feelings caused by this discovery, (3) decided where it will be most advisable to go next, and (4) gone there.



A daring adventure,

A green tree-frog may seem an insipid enough little beast. But, if not witty himself, he may at least be the cause why wit is, or at least amusement, in others. One of mine got away through the window, and, making his way across a wooded heath for about a quarter of a mile, established himself by a pond (that has ever since borne his name). Finding himself alone and desolate he raised a hideous uproar of quacking every evening for a week, to call the attention of his friends to his whereabouts. The noise could be heard from a quarter to half a mile away. It was thought by the adjacent village to be a great frog. A letter appeared in

the local paper comparing the noise to that of a "scared duck." "Crowds assemble nightly to see the originator of the horrid rasping noise, but so far unsuccessfully." Another wrote suggesting that it was a natterjack. On hearing that it climbed trees and puffed out its throat when quacking, it occurred to me that it was no other than my poor little "escape." Proceeding to the spot one evening, I found the village crowd (and police-man) assembled, with nets of all shapes and sizes wherewith to catch it when it came down for its evening swim. One man had been up since four in the morning in the hope of catching sight of it. I told them what it was. A man asked me if it had wings, as he had seen *something like them* on its shoulders. I heard two women declaring that it *had* wings—and a tail. ("Behold a legend growing up under your eyes!") Leaving them for a time to the pleasures of the chase, I returned after an hour, and found a small but eager group with a lantern, and the disquieter of the village peace safe in a bottle.

With a humiliating conclusion.

It had been caught with a bag-net on a long stick in the middle of the pond. It must have been disappointing to learn that, having only

given eighteenpence for it, I was unable to offer the large reward that they seemed to expect. When brought home and returned to the fern-case, he celebrated the event with such a continuous and piercing quacking that a neighbour came to ask the cause of all the noise. He was rather proud of his voice and required but small occasion for its display. The noise of much talking in the room or the scraping of a fiddle was generally enough to set him off, and on one occasion he had a great vocal contest with a nightingale that was giving a brilliant recital a short distance from the window, which had to be shut before frog would stop.

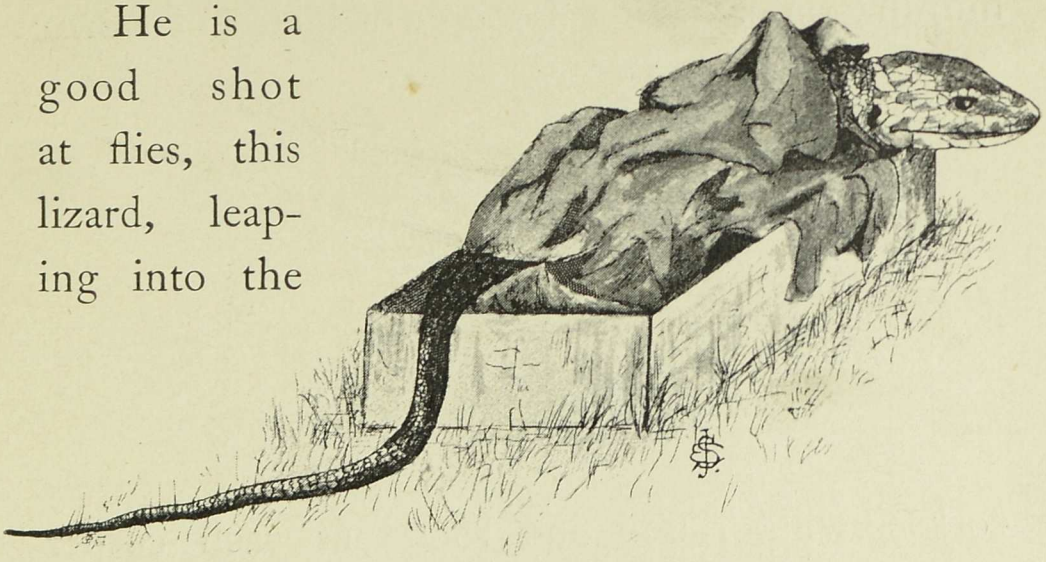
One whom the music of his own vain tongue Doth ravish like enchanting harmony.

The luxurious lizard.

Look at that green Jersey lizard just getting out of bed. He has always hitherto slept under the turf ; but none of your dirty damp turf for him now. In a voyage of exploration he lately discovered a tin full of red flannel, in which a half-torpid bat had lately been introduced. He climbed up every day for the pleasure of lying on this red flannel ; then he took to sleeping on it —an absurd object, his tail dangling over the side of the tin, and his nose (like Wordsworth's) "an idle promontory projecting into a desert

air." Finally he discovered (stimulated probably by having caught a severe cold in his tail from this manner of spending the night) that it was possible to get right into it by descending nose first among the folds. The result of this was seen next morning in the appearance of one inch of tail sticking up out of the flannel, and the expelled bat hanging up near the top of the case.

He is a good shot at flies, this lizard, leaping into the

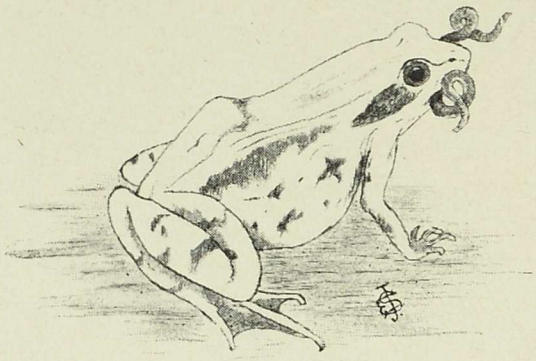


air after them and often bringing them down, as well as stalking them in the grass and pouncing on them suddenly. Well, I give this lizard (who is eight inches long) a common lob-worm (*lumbricus terrestris*—I am nothing if not scientific). Does he walk up to its head end which is making off, and catching hold there, take it down easily and naturally? Not a bit.

The stupid idiot takes the worm by the middle, and gives it a series of violent shakes, hoping in that way either to jerk it down his throat or to shake the troublesome ends off. He *may* get it down somehow, sooner or later, but it will probably be later, whereas with a frog or a toad it would be sooner.

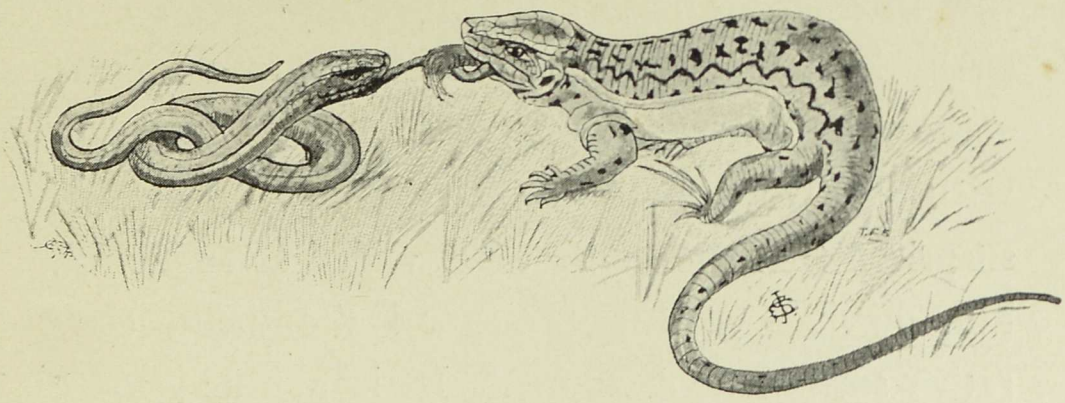
Lizard v. *slow-worm.*

No one feels more keenly than a frog the humiliation of having a couple of inches of worm



corkscrewing round and round at each corner of your mouth. He gets, in fact, into a perfect frenzy about it. But then he uses his paws to stuff the wriggling nuisance in; and, though there is a regrettable amount of temper shown, yet he certainly does get it down somehow in double quick time. But this the lizard often fails to do; for, while he is brandishing the poor worm about in that insane manner, a slow-worm has raised his

inquisitive nose through the grass. Taking in the situation at a glance and sliding forth, he raises his head, turns it a bit down from the neck, cocks it on one side, and with a pounce



of surprising vigour, grips it in his horny jaws. From that moment there is no doubt as to the issue. Lizard shakes his head violently and tugs at the worm, pushing forward with his legs. Slow-worm merely contracts his body, and pulls slowly, steadily, surely as fate, and if he does not pull it all out, as he usually does, corkscrews round and round till he has broken off a good large piece. I have seen a slow-worm take hold of half an inch of worm that still protruded from a lizard's mouth, and pull the "whole bilin'" out of his stomach.

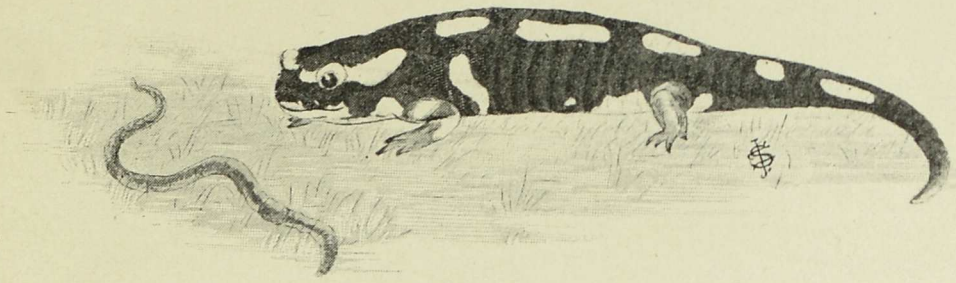
A tug of war.

But it is when slow-worm meets slow-worm that the real tug-of-war comes. The contest may last for an hour or more. Things are most satisfactory for both when each gets one end of the worm, and, slowly advancing, they meet in the middle. Then, being nearly matched in strength, it is only a matter of a few turns of the corkscrew, and worm's better half parts company with its worse. Both slow-worms are much surprised that the contest has ended so suddenly, but, having each got a good mouthful, they retire smiling and happy. It is a much more complicated business when the two grip the worm in the middle and side by side. Time would fail me to tell of the pushings and pullings, the turnings and twistings that will be necessary before either stupid beast or both manage to get hold of the whole or a share. For it is only when he was about to grasp the worm very near the end, and thus has a tempting head or tail waving in front of his eyes, that one will have the sense to change his first intention and take it down end-wise.

The sapient salamander.

Talk of clumsy feeders! Was there ever anything to beat a salamander? They had a

discussion some time ago in "Hardwick's Science Gossip" as to how to induce him to feed. How they catch their food in a state of nature, and why they are not exterminated, I cannot tell. Give one a worm. He stares vacantly at it, pauses a little to rouse into activity what he is pleased to call his mind, then advances warily and tentatively, deliberating the while whether this is really a worm which he sees



before him, and, if so, whether worms are things that he is accustomed to eat. Having decided this in the affirmative, he cranes forward his neck, and cocks his head first on one side and then on the other, while he passes to the consideration of the further question whether it is best to seize it in the middle or at one of the ends, and, if the latter, then at which end. Finally the whole toilsome argument is concluded, and he pounces on the worm. Got it?

My dear sir, the worm had left the place before the second head of the argument was reached, and the doddering old fool finds himself with a blade of grass in his mouth. It takes him quite four minutes to realise this chilling fact; then he retires gracefully and dissembles until, in the fulness of time, another worm heaves in sight, when he repeats the process, with a similar result. Then there are greedy slow-worms



prowling around, and I have seen one pounce on a worm at the same time as a salamander has pounced, and find himself with both the worm and the salamander's head in his mouth. Tableau! Slow-worm backs water, drawing Salamander with him, and the latter only struggles loose by means of such unparalleled exertions as leave him a limp and flaccid mass for the next six months.

Thinking that they would starve if left to

their own exertions, I used to hold the worm in front of them, with a forceps, till they had got hold, or put them in a box with some worms for a night, where the worms could not get away. A salamander in these circumstances ate an inch off both ends of a large lob-worm, and then died, apparently from sheer confusion of mind and total inability to decide which end it would be best to go on at. But perhaps I was troubling myself unnecessarily. My last three got on very well without any assistance (except having the stock of worms kept up) for three or four years, and though two died last winter, the third turned up in the spring in a state of health that can only be called uproarious.

Even a salamander's placid temper can be ruffled. I have seen one catch a small frog, which was trying to get hold of the same worm as himself, by the leg, and give him a severe shaking. So, too, I have found a chameleon with a grass-snake in his mouth, which he was shaking violently, both of them hissing furiously the while. He may have had strong provocation, but for all his stony manner I became inclined to suspect the equanimity of the chameleon,

when I saw him snatch off a piece of red flannel that I had put on him with the best intentions, and, with angry hisses, shake and mangle it for a considerable time.

Fiat justitia ruat coelum.

They are generally very peaceably inclined—these beasts. True, I have seen two green frogs sitting half up and slapping one another with



their silly little hands. But the friction in this case was certainly justifiable. They had been sitting side by side on a leaf, when a bluebottle rose on their horizon at no great distance. Each wanted to jump first for it; each was determined that he would bring the universe in ruins about his ears rather than let the other have it. The

difference of opinion was acute; there comes a time in the history of the most long-suffering frog when he must either assert himself or live for ever disgraced; things had reached a crisis, and no course was open but an appeal to arms—during which the bluebottle left and rose on some other frog's horizon.

Once too, and only once, has a frog lost his temper with a green lizard. And no wonder. It was getting wintry, and food was scarce. I had put in a moth to be scrambled for. A green frog had stalked it with skill and dexterity and brought it down with a long shot. Having fallen on the turf, it was soon accosted by the lizard, who ran up on seeing a moth in a frog's mouth, thinking that as there seemed too much for one there was probably enough for two. With shameless effrontery he took hold of the surplusage of moth, wrenched the whole thing out of frog's mouth and proceeded to bolt it. No frog of decent parentage and virtuous upbringing could be expected to stand this. He went up to the lizard, and slapped his cheeks and his eyes and the crown of his head, and even opened his mouth and made little snaps at him. The moth,

however, was soon among the faded memories of the past.

Excepting such occasional ebullitions as this, they not only do not fight—they hardly condescend to notice one another. Deeply conscious as they are (like Her Majesty's judges) of one another's shortcomings, they walk over each other and stick their feet in each other's eyes, in a way only to be equalled by blatant humans of the Stryver pattern, whom we see so often shouldering their way through life to the general discomfort of their neighbours and the intense satisfaction of themselves.

What manner o' thing is your crocodile?

It was no use, however, affecting not to notice Pharaoh,[1] the crocodile, who was put in among them in the afternoons for the sake of the sun; and indeed there was a good deal of ill-feeling among them on that subject. But then a crocodile of 11¾ inches, in a case 18 inches by

[1] He was represented to me as a crocodile brought in the egg from the Nile by Mr. Thomas Atkins, and hatched over a spirit lamp; and I have let stand the original appellation, by which he was, in consequence, always known. But I discovered afterwards that he was a Mississippi alligator. In an alligator the fourth lower tooth from the front fits into a pit in the lower jaw; in a crocodile it merely lies in a groove, and is therefore visible.

12, takes up so much room and is so much in the way. One can hardly imagine the occupants of a "four-study," at school, tamely acquiescing in the constant presence of a six-foot crocodile among them—and yet this would be much the same thing. Well, they all came up, sniffed at



him, and examined him minutely, running over his back and head. A small lizard took up a worm to eat on his back and insisted on finishing it there, though Pharaoh tried to rub him off by a backward movement of his arm. They felt him with their tongues, licking even his eyes when

wide open. One small lizard (from the Heath), after casting on him an eye of scorn—as who should say that he didn't go much on crocodiles—*he* didn't— charged up to his right elbow, which stuck out obtrusively, and bit it with all the strength of his infinitesimal teeth. The croc. winced and turned away, all the troop of inquisitive lizards flying in terror before him; but, like a good-humoured giant, he was unwilling to retaliate, and Jack the Giant Killer, feeling that he had done enough for fame (he was the only lizard on the Heath who had ever bitten a crocodile), took to his heels with the rest. It became the swagger thing to show how little you cared for a crocodile. A lizard would catch a fly and take it up on his back to eat it; a green frog would flop down (like Mrs. Cruncher) on his head and stick there, in spite of all croc.'s efforts to shake him off; and, when he splashed into the saucer and lay there, with head and tail sticking out, it was the universal practice, and, indeed, thought rather good form, to use his body for a bridge to cross on, instead of going round.

The futile feed.

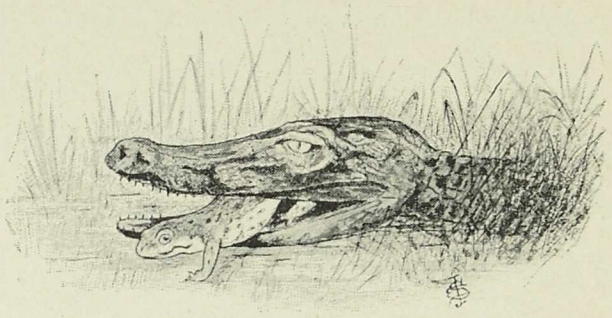
Crocodiles are said to use their tails to strike

pigs and such like into the water, when they come to drink in the Nile. Pharaoh never used to do this, partly, perhaps, because he never saw a pig and had never been near the Nile. But he used to practise the stroke by himself sometimes, when he thought no one was looking. He cocked up his tail in the air, and strongly wheeled and whisked it, giving himself a slap in the face and awakening pleasurable anticipations in his bad little soul. May he rest in peace! His stomach was empty when I opened him at the end of the summer, and his heart was full. Many people have empty stomachs and full hearts. The wonder was that his didn't burst, after all the indignities that were heaped upon him. To be asked to eat fish and newts and frogs, forsooth, almost before he had cut his teeth! The fact is that I had not realised what was expected of me, which was neither more nor less than to chew up his food for him in my own mouth, as the Esquimaux mothers do for their babies and as crocodiles do for theirs. But he knew what was expected of *him*, and snapped them up in his mouth; but, after his jaws were tired with chewing, he opened his mouth wide and newt

walked out with a twinkle in his eye and the ruddy glow of health on his—stomach. Talk about Jonah after that!

A degrading diversion.

He condescended at last to eat, got down an earth-worm occasionally (average time consumed in this operation was forty minutes, for the thing stuck in his teeth and he always forgot to open the trapdoor at the back of his throat); but, if he had a weakness, it was for *Limnæa stagnalis*,

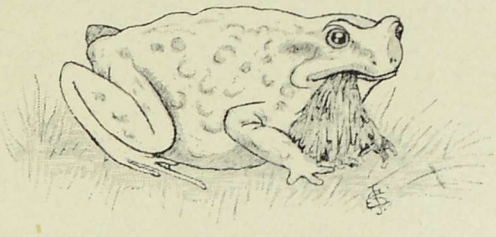


the common fresh-water whelk. He sometimes took it at once; but generally set it aside for some days (as long, in fact, as he thought I could stand it) till it had acquired the requisite altitude. Then indeed he bolted it and rolled his stony eyes and smacked his wicked lips with a deep inward joy. Indeed, I question if human nature is capable of sinking lower than to gratify the coarse palate of a slow-worm, to pamper the

jaded appetite of a snake, or to cater for the degraded tastes of a crocodile.

They will not play the game.

It is a provoking thing that beasts will not do the thing written down for them. No ; even the best text-books they will sometimes set altogether at nought. Thus a toad the other day cast his skin. Now, he should have rolled it up in a pill with his fore-paws and swallowed it at a gulp. But when I saw him, he had a great rag of it hanging out of his mouth and was taking it



down slowly and disgustfully. He swallowed it because it was in all the books, and he felt that the public had claims on him which he could not but recognise ; but as to the manner of it, there he would *not* be dictated to—there he would have his own way.

Another toad, of still more rebellious spirit took his skin off and left it on the grass. None of your dirty old skins for him. He slunk off and would have nothing whatever to say to it.

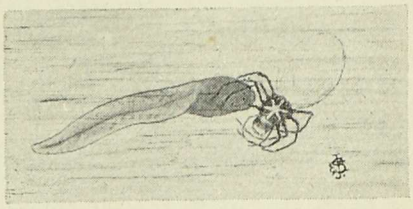
Now, a large, warty newt, who never eats his skin in the books, I found, in the aquarium, in the act of consuming it ; and it was evidently considered a delicacy, for a small newt came up and snatching part of it away, ate it himself. Frogs and toads should certainly not eat carrion,[1] but they could not be relied upon to obey the rule. A big toad, for instance, took a large worm lately dead, and then another that was *very* dead, though he swallowed the latter slowly and with evident disgust. Water-tortoises should confine themselves to animal food, but I have seen one—otherwise fond of cold mutton—eat the leaves and stalk of a water buttercup. Land-tortoises, on the other hand, are vegetarians, but I noticed one, when on a tour round the room, come upon a piece of cold mutton (abandoned by an armadillo), and devour it greedily, and the same thing has happened since. Again the common lizard (*zootoca vivipara*) has

[1] (1) Thus, turning to Bell's "British Reptiles," I read of the toad, "Its food consists of insects and worms, of almost every kind. It refuses food which is not living, and indeed, will only take it at the moment when it is in motion : such at least is the result of my own observations upon the habits of this animal, which have been neither few nor brief."

no business to lay eggs; it produces its young alive. One of them did, however, lay three blackish, skinny eggs, about a quarter of an inch long; and after a quarter of an hour's exposure to the sun, the young bit through them and walked out. They were of a uniform bronze colour and about an inch long. Their mother, Jemima by name, was apparently so surprised that she bit off the end of the tail of one of them, to make sure of its nature, or because the laying of an unexpected egg made it necessary thus to redress the balance of the material world.

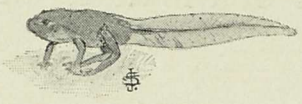
Jemima, her unmotherly conduct.

Tadpoles are generally, it is true, but not exclusively, vegetarian. I saw one make a vigorous attack on a water-spider (*argyronetra*) in my aquarium, and eat a bit out of him. As to the spider, he was quite justified in reaching out from his nest to try and close his legs on the tadpoles when they whisked past, but he never seemed able to catch one. One such spider, instead of coming to the surface to get air for his nest, went and helped himself, bubble



by bubble, to the air out of an adjacent nest, its downtrodden owner (as I took him to be) standing by and looking on helplessly all the time. Tadpoles develop legs in a few weeks, and lose their tails and become frogs. Then why should some tadpoles, who were put in my aquarium at Easter, remain tadpoles and nothing more till the end of December—when, having to go away, I lost sight of them? Moreover, when a tadpole has grown his legs, but quite failed to get rid of any part of his tail, it is surely both unbecoming and irregular to come out of the water and try to jump about, thus merely covering himself with ridicule for his anomalous condition. It is enough to disgust one with any animal—this barefaced inattention to rules.

A tadpole that tapers.



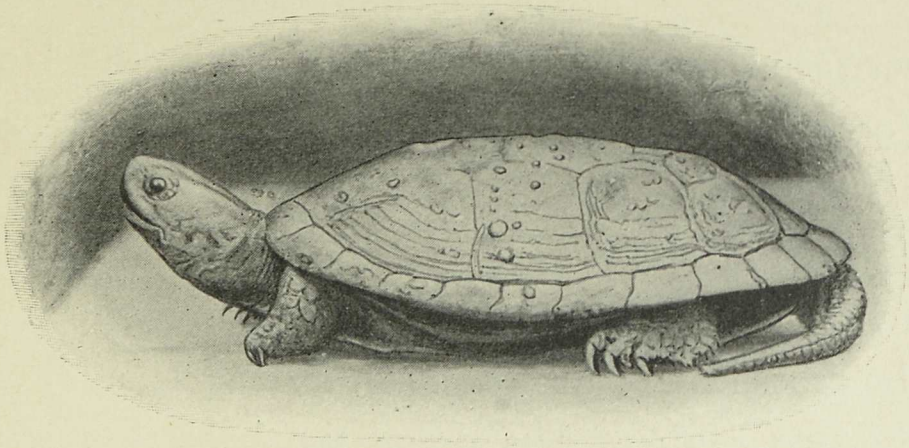
The catcher caught.

"What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!" A spider caught a fly in his web outside my window, and took hold of its tail, with intent to make a long tail short. I knocked them both into a bottle and handed them in to the happy family. Spider tried to run, but a lizard caught and ate him. His brother did the same for the fly. The right of translation is

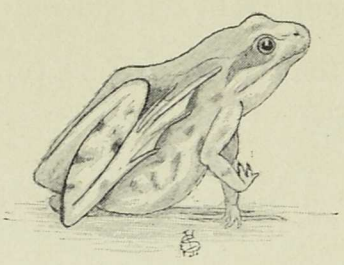
reserved ; but I have not secured the copyright of the story, and it is at the service of writers of leading articles on the state of Europe and composers of sermons on the ways of mankind. If a text be wanted, I should suggest Mark Twain's, "Let us be thankful for the fools. But for them the rest of us could not succeed."

They make mistakes, these beasts, and their errors of judgment are numerous. I have seen a green frog aim and jump at a bit of moth's wing on the glass and show great disappointment on finding that there was no body attached. He has gone for a small frog, too, under the impression that it was an insect. I found a newt, in an aquarium, that had got hold of the leg of a tiny water tortoise, which he thought would be good to eat. He had not considered the patent im-

Nothing that is so, is so.



possibility of getting round a beast of that shape, and he had to be pulled off. A frog will greedily tuck in a moth (such as a Yellow Underwing) that is much too large for his interior, and sit



gasping after it and squeaking and solemnly stroking down his bloated sides with his hind legs. I found a coronella once on the road between Lymington and Beaulieu, in the New Forest. *Coronella lævis* (the "smooth snake") has only been found in Hants, Sussex, Dorset, Essex, and Hertfordshire. It is about the size of a viper, but is easily distinguished from him by the crown mark on his head, instead of a V, and the two rows of dots down the back, instead of a string of lozenges. It is said to have been the snake that fastened on St. Paul's hand, being the only snake found in Malta. It is quite harmless, but to a rustic everything like a snake is venomous. I could never find out his proper food,[1] but one summer evening he caught hold of the

A false alarm.

[1] (1) It is ignored in Bell's "British Reptiles." "Like its congeners," says the new "Royal Natural History," "this snake is chiefly terrestrial in its habits; in disposition it is fierce, and its prey consists of other snakes and lizards."

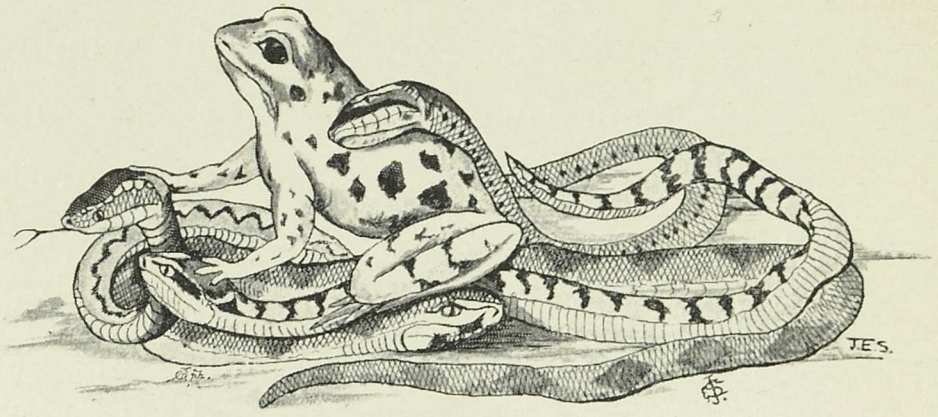
head of a slow-worm almost as wide and long as himself. For five mortal hours (6.30—11.30 P.M.) did he wrestle with his prey, and then, having got him half down his body and finding that there was positively no more room inside, he had to retire from a false position, and leave the slow-worm upon the grass. If this is a specimen of his judgment, it is not strange that he should have remained a local and rare animal. He did not live to the end of the summer.

Full inside!

As to glass, few of them ever get over the conviction that you must be able to walk through a thing that you can see through. The lizards will scrabble at it for hours, and the frogs will sit eying, with fearsome gaze, a snake who is glaring at them from an adjacent case. Even a bat has more than once come in at the window and hawked round and round the case, not understanding why he cannot catch the moths and flies that he sees inside.

This chapter is like an epic poem or a Greek frieze—it has no necessary beginning or end. But, as it must tail off somewhere, let it do so with these two pictures, of which I make a present to the Royal Academicians, as erewhile I

made one to the publicists. Pharaoh had taken up his position over a crevice in which a salamander was wont to seek shade and damp. The salamander presently edged himself up, and leaving his lower half in the hole, stood with his right arm round Pharaoh's neck. The singular group attracted a frog, who walked up and stared at them long and hard. I wish I could have photographed the group. Still better, perhaps ; I beheld a large frog (given to the snakes to eat) with his hind foot on one snake's head and his fore feet on the heads of two others, while a fourth snake rested his head peacefully and lovingly on the frog's own back. Curtain !



CHAPTER II

"Let's talk of Worms."—SHAKESPEARE.

As I was about to say, although there is an amount of crass stupidity about most reptiles that is only equalled by—well, though there is a vast amount of crass stupidity about most reptiles, yet it is curiously blended with a low cunning ; and some of them exhibit at times a sparkling vivacity and charm of manner that is very winsome.

The skittish lizard.

Thus, a big Jersey lizard will go the round of the vivarium with stealthy step and a playful twinkle in his eye, and, as he comes across another lizard of his kind, will cock his head on one side, as if to examine and commend some peculiarly beautiful bit of marking, and, suddenly giving him a great bite in a tender spot, will pass on sadly (to operate on the next), with the air of

one who not only has not done it, but wouldn't think of doing it, and doesn't see why he should be blamed for everything that goes wrong. Or he adopts a grave air, as of one performing a solemn duty, painful indeed, but absolutely necessary for the recall of his fellows to the path of rectitude. When working on these lines he makes no bones about it, but snaps openly at the first portion of his brother's frame that comes handy. No end of fun may be got out of this game. The whole crew may be set careering round the vivarium, and when they pause they must keep a sharp eye on the tormentor, and sit, trembling and pavid, with their little hearts beating and their little fore-legs waggling up and down in a helpless and deprecatory manner—their commonest way of expressing great mental agitation. Wretched bully? Not a bit. It is all done out of sheer high spirits and enjoyment of life. Then another lizard will climb up the indiarubber plant, all among the green frogs, and go to sleep for the night there, dangling perilously over a leaf. Was he made like that? Is he comfortable? Do green lizards, as a matter of fact, in books, sleep among green frogs in indiarubber plants?

Not at all. He simply does it to annoy, because he knows it teases. He is very much in the way of the tree-frogs, and his sharp little claws scratch



their delicate skins. *And he knows it.* He altogether objects to a lot of stupid little frogs giving themselves such airs—sticking their caps,

so to speak, on the back of their heads—just because they live in a tree and he on the ground. So he goes up that tree and gives them a thoroughly uncomfortable night.

A lizard's views on eating.

A pleasant little beast the lizard, whether he of Jersey or he of the Heath. You can accustom him to be handled by taking him out at night or in dull weather, when he is not too lively. So tamable is he that he will soon come and take a moth or worm out of your hand. Not that he goes much on worms, and very clumsy he is in eating them. They are very filling but very coarse. Indeed, there is nothing he does not prefer to them, although he prefers them to nothing—and that is something. Then only does he truly enjoy a meal when he catches it for himself on the wing. Even that does not matter so much, so long as it has wings on which he might catch it if it were. In that case, whatever it is, it catches it. A cockchafer, presented to the family to make a pet of, they devoted a whole morning to, and, when it was over, one wing-case was all that was left of it—left of that cockchafer. An open box, full of bluebottle chrysalises, was placed within the precincts, not for

immediate but for future consumption. How were the lizards to know when the bluebottles would come out, or whether they would come out at all? They had nobody's word for it but mine. So they took matters into their own hands and ate the chrysalises, one of which, having stuck to a stone, caused an infinity of trouble and clatter against the glass before he could be eaten. They tried small slugs occasionally, but were so disgusted with the slime that it left on their mouths—though they did their best to wipe it off, this way and that, on the grass—that they gave it up. Besides, it produced a good deal of friction with the slow-worms, who doted on slugs and were unable to catch flies. Even a slow-worm finds a good deal of annoyance in the slime of a slug, and prefers a small one that he can get down whole.

His leg is but so so, and yet 'tis well.

There are few things nimbler than a lizard, but a grasshopper may be a match for him. A lizard caught a grasshopper, and when he had eaten one hind-leg (hoping thereby to disable him) the grasshopper took a great lopsided hop with the *other* hind-leg, and the lizard saw him no more. A slow-worm, of all creatures in

the world, made a similar attempt on a grasshopper, who naturally left him the leg he had grabbed, and removed the rest of himself elsewhere.

Lizards have no sense of reverence. A little lizard intently watched a big one devouring a worm till the whole of it had disappeared. But



as big lizard gave a final gulp of satisfaction a small piece of the worm protruded. Little lizard snatched at this, pulled most of the worm out again, and, with considerable tugging, secured half of it for himself.

"Scandalous esurient phantasms" that they are, they will sometimes, of course, like the frogs,

try swallowing things that it would have been wiser to have left alone. When a lizard of very moderate proportions appropriated to his own use a large buff-tip moth, one can only draw a veil over what took place before the transaction was complete.

Accustomed to such filling and stuffy meals as these, they will naturally like a drink now and then. I have seen one take a long pull at a saucer, even on a cold day at the end of October. Nor have they any particular fear of water, considered as a bath. If a tortoise is wallowing therein they will use him as a stepping-stone, but otherwise they will walk straight in (which is more than I can say for a frog, which sidles or backs in like a timid child off a bathing machine), and swim across to save going round.

They have a blessed faculty of recovering from injuries that would probably be fatal to other vertebrates. When one was rescued from some rustics, with a broken arm, he ran merrily about with it trailing by a thread, and, after it came off, he was the most indefatigable climber of the lot. Their legs will grow again if broken. I have not seen this myself, but one

who had to part with his tail grew quite half an inch of a new one in six weeks: at first it was a smooth black cone, but it afterwards blossomed into scales.

I have tried to make out, with rather uncertain results, how far these little beasts are affected by the stings of noxious insects. Lizards certainly seemed frightened out of their wits at the wasp-like flies that pretend to sting but cannot. On the other hand a green Jersey lizard was in no way daunted by a hornet. He took it head first and chewed it for a long time and with great deliberation, frequently putting it out, and then snapping it up again. It seemed to agree with him very well. But then a green lizard's stomach must be made of leather when he can devour a cockchafer. Nothing comes amiss to him from a hornet to an earthworm, and that, too, when worm has been dead some hours. A natterjack toad took a wasp, but was apparently stung, as he put him out hastily and shrank away in fear when he walked past his nose. A few hours afterwards wasp again came in front of him ; he leaned forward at point to seize it, but, on seeing what it was, backed out of

Dura lacertarum ilia!

the way in a great hurry. A green frog certainly seemed to be killed by the sting of a wasp that he ate, while another seemed unharmed. Possibly it depends on which end you take first.

The slow-worm and the slug.

I was saying that a slow-worm preferred a *small* slug. Your big slug is a terrible puzzle to him. If taken full in the face he is not perhaps so bad, as he tends to walk down your throat, though both parties are badly crowded in the process. If taken in the flank, the skin is so terribly tough and slimy that it is a work of many weary hours, unless friends come to the rescue, and, by pulling different ways, cause him to—but why enlarge on the painful scene? Besides, there are reasons against being helped by friends, for the odds are that they will walk away with the quarry altogether and leave you with slime in your mouth, emptiness in your stomach, and bitterness in your heart. If, again, he is taken in the rear, the case is almost desperate, for the slug puts out his horns and remembers a pressing engagement elsewhere. You may hold on, if you like, and follow on, but the slug takes no notice and leads you a terrible dance. And it is always in his power to take to

climbing, and then you are up a tree; at least he is, and it comes to the same thing. No; the most you can hope for, in that case, is to detach a portion, and that the least satisfactory portion, of his person, and abandon the rest.

The slow-worm and the quick worm.

There is a want of decision about a slow-worm that somewhat mars the perfect beauty of his character. He will slither up to a worm and lick it, and think how nice it will be in his mouth. But, unless decidedly hungry, he will let the golden moment pass without catching hold. In fact it is only the slow worm that the slow-worm catches; the quick worm gets away, and remains quick when the slow worm is dead.

There is, after all, I shall be told, a good deal of monotony in the entertainment to be derived from slow-worms; who put their heads out in the morning and grab the wriggling worm or slippery slug, and, after basking in the sun for the afternoon, disappear beneath until an internal voice calls "time," and they issue forth again to seek wherewith to fill the aching void.

Of sport wise and otherwise.

You forget (in form-rooms and such places it is frequently forgotten) that such beasts have to be fed, that they have to be fed on worms, and

that worms have to be caught. Worms! Delicious word! What rapturous associations of nights well spent amid the manly pleasures of the chase does it not recall! Talk about sport! I have nothing whatever to say against the other (low) forms of sport (so-called), in which some (inferior) men (pretend to) take delight. Not a syllable shall pass my lips in disparagement of the gentlemen (*sic*) who spend their mornings in trudging after the ungainly partridge through the full-flavoured cabbage or disgusting turnip; or those who, knee deep in the mud of a wood, expect when the common or domesticated pheasant, exhausted by the blows of the *beaters*, shall arrive to fall an easy victim to the ungenerous gun. Far be it from me to reflect on the conduct of the man (for I suppose I must call him so) who demeans himself to sprawl amidst the reeds in a punt, and, with his murderous punt-gun, mangle the wary widgeon or the timorous teal. Wild horses should not tear from me a sigh or a scoff at the poor, bloated aristocrat who, in the midst of scenes where "every prospect pleases and only man is vile," thinks no scorn to spend a good wholesome

summer day grovelling on his stomach in the heather (for he wants the pluck to meet his enemy face to face), and potting, like a miserable *franc tireur*, from behind a bush (there are no trees in Scotland) at the lordly stag. He, despising such dirty tricks, and suspecting no skulking foe, stalks afar off, majestic, before his train of wives, and sniffs the air. But the other, bloated one that he is, lets off his lethal weapon. The ball flies and the stag bites the dust ; around him his blameless wives let fall the copious tear. Neither rack nor bastinado should induce me to say what I think of a pack of fellows in pink (pink ? *red*, sir, *blood-red*), who band themselves together to take the life of the trustful hare or harmless, necessary fox, and, devoid of common honesty enough to trust their own legs, take their very horses and dogs into the foul conspiracy.

Give him a worm.

All these are entirely legitimate and admirable forms of sport, and I have nothing whatever to say against them. All I say is, *give me a worm*. For *genuine* sport, for a contest in which the race is to the swift and the battle to the strong, in which human intelligence and resource finds a foeman worthy of his steel (forceps), he has not

his equal. Late, very late, you must go out with your lantern, if you wish large bags; with extreme caution you must tread the grass. He, holding on to his hole by his tail and seeking for some tasty morsel with which to regale himself, stretches his lithe form far and wide over the plain. But at the smallest vibration of the earth he retires backward into his hole, with the speed of lightning, grieving, if aught wormy e'er grieves, over the loss of a dinner, but joying at the discomfiture of the foe. "The smallest worm will turn, being trodden on," but the largest long before. Go delicately, then, as you creep up to him, with an unconcerned and easy air, as if his movements did not interest you in the least, and pretend to be looking the other way (and you have this advantage over him that he is stone blind), that he too may feel easy and unconcerned in his dear heart within his slimy breast. Otherwise, though the worm is an odd worm, as Shakespeare says, he is more than likely to be even with *you*. Now stoop down, and bring your forceps over his back, near the hinder end, that if, perchance, he begin to retire, you may still cut off his retreat—and his tail. Do not be in a

The sagacious sportsman and the wily worm.

hurry. Do not fondly think that, because you are within an inch of him, you may safely grab. By how much you are nimbler than a hippopotamus, by so much a worm is nimbler than you; and you must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind. Nothing in nature, or out of it, is equal to the speed with which he gets into his hole. A flash of lightning beside it is like the slowest train to Liverpool Street; electricity is infinitely tedious, and the flight of a bullet like the flight of a long lesson, in the lower school, to one who knows nothing about it and cares less. Only when the prongs of your forceps are level with his sides will a prudent man grab, and then he must do all he knows, and has learnt from salmon fishing, to twitch his prey from the hole without breaking it, and so land it wriggling in the struggling mass of wormanity in his tin. I have known worms that have forgotten themselves so far as to leave go of their holes with their tails in their eagerness to get hold of some dainty morsel just out of reach. But these are giddy young things who will throw away the most precious advantages for the sake of the pleasure of the moment. I

have known others who, when alarmed, will make two steps of it, retreating but half their length at first, and pausing before the final plunge. These, too, are they whose hearts are set too much on the fleshpots of Egypt; who dally with danger, and think that it may be a false alarm and there may still be a chance of another bite. Fools! who see not (for they have no eyes) the glittering forceps hovering over them. It falls remorseless, and the rash worm dangles wriggling in the air. Occasionally, again, some Romeo and Juliet will be leaning out of contiguous burrows, reclining on each other's shoulders and holding amicable converse. "Earth hath not anything to show more fair." It is a triumph of the sportsman's art to collar them both with one *grand coup*. Friends in life, friends in death, they regret too late the absorbing charms of intellectual conversation. But the ordinary worm is not so. He is—

"Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer";

and if you can catch him in any quantity you may flatter yourself that life can have few tasks before you which are beyond the reach of your powers.

Of tail-snapping.

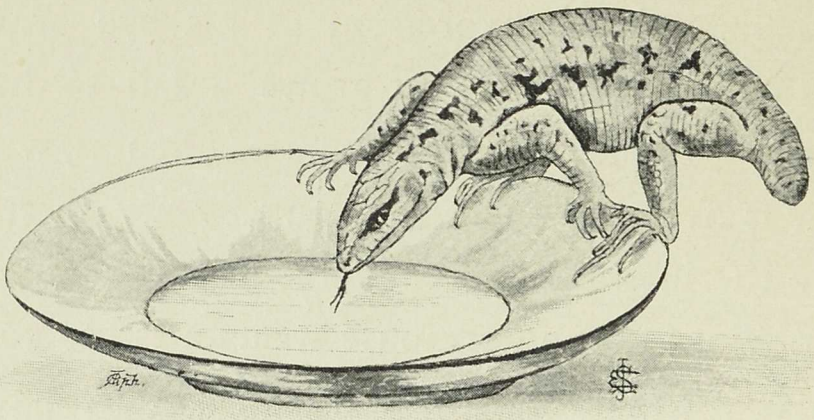
That habit of the slow-worm and other lizards (for I need not remind you that he is a lizard, having the rudiments of four legs under his skin, and, unlike snakes, having eyelids and non-expansible jaws), of snapping off their tails, I cannot pass by without a word of remark, and even reprehension, for it is a proceeding characterised by the utmost duplicity. If you catch them at all roughly, especially by the tail, they will make it suddenly rigid, and then, with a jerk, snap off perhaps an inch, generally several inches. This portion wriggles, and even pretends to make progress for some time ; and, while the unwary or ignorant sportsman is holding on and congratulating himself on his haul, the real Simon Pure is far on his way to a safe retreat. Better lose tail than life, or even liberty. I caught a slow-worm in the Roman Road, and then, as I believed, caught another. It was only the tail of number one. I sat down and timed it, and it lived, and even seemed to enjoy life, for twenty-five minutes. Now, it is all very well to pretend to make light of a tail, and to be rather glad than otherwise to be rid of an encumbrance. A tail is a very useful thing, and the lizard that

loses it loses no time in getting another, though it can never be restored in all its pristine length and beauty. One in my possession spent the whole of last summer in growing a new tail, and a poor thing it was when all was done.

The praise of tails.

Tails are of divers uses to divers animals. A horse or a cow flicks the flies off with his tail. A dog uses it to convey an idea of his emotions to the human race, which he has found too stupid to understand the expression of his eye or the sound of his voice. A cat grows a tail to have something to play with in hours of idleness, when dinner is over and there is a long, weary interval before the interests and excitements of the night. It is obvious that a dormouse wears a tail to cover his nose with and keep it warm in winter. That absurd caricature of a tail that a pig is so proud of can obviously have no other object than to relieve, or perhaps to heighten, by contrast, the otherwise somewhat blunt and truncated effect of his latter end. A snake? Well, a snake has a tail because he must end up somehow, and it is easier to end in a tail than in anything else. As to a squirrel, *he* grows a tail to sit under on hot summer days, or, as some believe, out of pure

spiritual pride. The fox cultivates his brush with the greatest assiduity, that, when cut off and taken home (at the cost of one sovereign to the huntsman), it may form a handsome ornament over the chimney-piece. A guinea-pig, it is true, has none; but everybody knows that thereby hangs a tale; for that, when the tails were given out, he was eating a cabbage and forgot to come



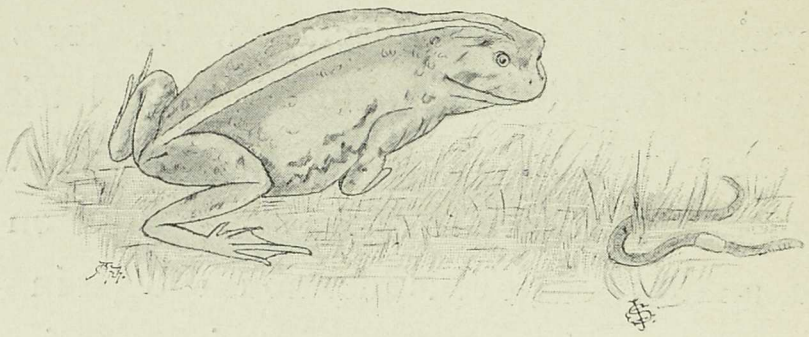
for one. So thereby does not hang a tail. What would a rat be without a tail? Whether he dips it in oil or treacle, and licks it, I am not prepared absolutely to assert, but can well believe, for none of your boasted dogs can touch a rat for artful dodginess and general fertility of resource. But as a balancing pole in perilous journeys across narrow ledges and rafters, or as a grasper in

climbing, his tail is invaluable. The lizard uses it in the same way. A tailless lizard leaning over a pond or saucer to drink, without a weight behind to prevent his tumbling in, is a most pitiable and contemptible object.

The angry toad.

I have said that a lizard is but an awkward hand at a worm. The same must be said of a toad. A toad, on being introduced to a worm, throws out his tongue and expects to draw it back with the worm sticking to it as a fly does. Being disappointed in this expectation he loses his temper, throws himself on the worm and tries to gulp it up anyhow. This he nearly does, but by this time the worm has got a good hold on the grass, and, as toad opens his mouth to get in some more, worm seizes the opportunity to slip out. Toad gets nearly purple with rage, and dashes himself upon the worm, now here, now there, turning undignified somersaults by mistake ; the light of battle flashes in his eye and the lowest depths of his nature are moved. Sometimes he succeeds, oftener he fails to gulp up the offending prey and stuff it into his mouth with his hands. To see this comedy at its best it is necessary to get a natterjack toad (easily distinguished from

his commoner brother by a yellow line down his back). With his finely-strung nervous system and mercurial temperament, the extreme testiness of his temper and his lamentable want of self-control, he presents the most striking, if a painful, contrast to the bland dignity of his retiring foe. But the natterjack will betray his emotions even in a state of apparent quiescence. I watched one with his eyes on a fly, which it would be unsportsmanlike

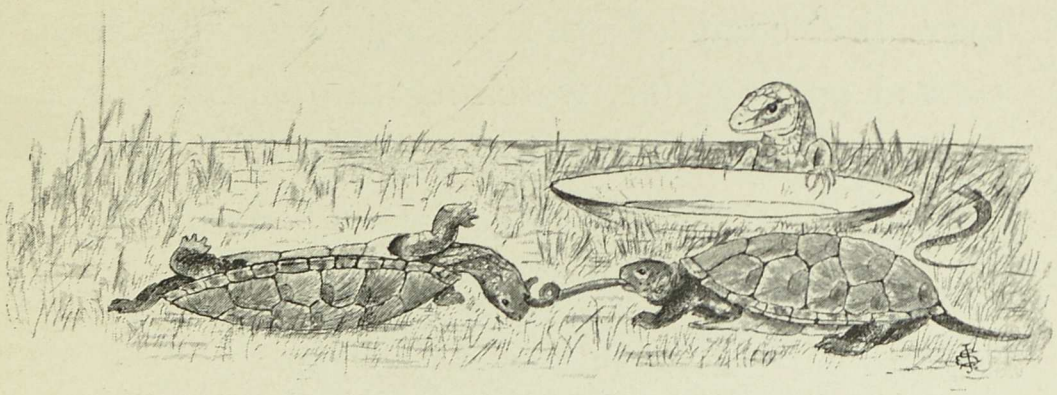


to jump at before it moved. He stood stock still, but one of his hind toes worked up and down, like those of a Hindu when he is trying to conceal his real thoughts by glozing words.

Nor is it possible to deny that the manners of the common water-tortoise exhibit a want of refinement that borders on vulgarity. Regardless of the feelings of the worm, the tortoise will rarely take him straight down, but, gripping him

in the middle, he adds insult to injury by tearing and scratching off the squirming ends till he has left only a manageable portion to swallow. Two tortoises, having caught hold of the two ends (few worms have more) of the same worm, will start off, at the top of their speed, to the other end of their abode. Not, as appears at first sight, to invite tortoise number three to a game

The rude tortoises.



at skipping-rope, but because each, believing himself the swifter, hopes, in the end, to pull the worm from the other. Being, however, quite equally matched in that respect, they are only stopped by the sudden and violent contact of their noses with the glass. As they turn right about face they get sadly mixed, and the worm too, only more so. Off they go, full speed, back to the other end ; and, plunging into the water,

one of them is probably turned over on his back, still holding on, however, with desperate tenacity to the worm. Many other complications arise (which the worm can hardly enjoy so much as he seems to) before the matter is finally arranged and the worm disappears from the scene. This sort of thing is not likely to raise the reputation of tortoises among other animals, and should be carefully avoided when a little lizard is craning over the edge of the saucer, with his head cocked on one side, watching the course of the struggle with intense but somewhat contemptuous interest. It may be very good fun for a worm, but it is hard on the green frog, who has come down to bathe, that a tortoise should grab him by the foot. But the frog had treated him with no more respect or apprehension than if he had been a stone, and it was necessary to teach him a lesson. He let go, indeed, when beaten about the head, but he had already inflicted a mortal wound. I found him afterwards tearing up and devouring the dead body, as he would do also to a dead newt.

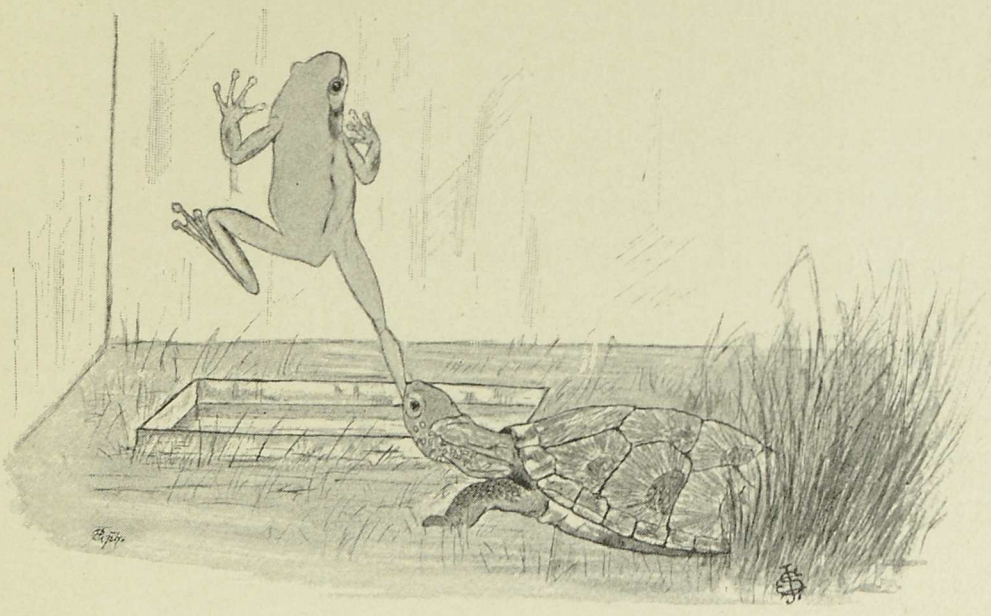
And the critical lizard.

We call him tortoise because he taught us.

No ; life is not all beer and skittles for these small beasts. We live in a vale, as has been

feelingly remarked, and we must take the consequences of the situation. There are many dangers to be avoided, and many childish and causeless terrors to be outgrown. It is foolish, for instance, of a frog, on observing a snake regarding him with fond eyes through the glass, from an adjacent case, to sit rooted to the spot

The frightened frog



with horror. It is unwise of a chameleon, in the same circumstances, to open his mouth and hiss viciously, quivering with excitement. It is uncalled for, though perhaps excusable, in a lizard, when a bat brushes past him in hot pursuit of a fly, to sit back and hiss at a beast who wouldn't touch him with the end of a barge-pole. It is rather hard, again, on a bluebottle, who

The choleric chameleon.

The both some bat.

The blighted bluebottle.

has not been able to get his second wing out of his chrysalis, and has to run about trailing the chrysalis behind, to be snapped up by a lizard and devoured ere yet he has had an opportunity of tasting the joys of a complete and perfect existence. It was trying, very trying, for

The domestic dormouse.

a dormouse with a young family (a triplet) of her own, to have foisted on her the charge first of three, then of another three, foster-children, taken from their nests (not by me) without their mothers. The cheerfulness with which she undertook the threefold responsibility, and the strict impartiality with which the nine babies were administered, was beyond all praise. One of them, after travelling safely, by parcels post, to Gloucester, has since done the greatest credit to its foster-mother.

The miserable

It is but poor fun, if a mole, to be shut up in a packing-case, and have your worms brought to you, instead of having to dig for them. You may, no doubt, make a kind of burrow, and lie on some moss at the top, as being drier; and you may, for five weeks or so, enjoy your health and your meals, if brought reg'lar. But 'Odds worms and slugs! Your liver is bound to go wrong in the end, if you get no exercise; and then where

are you? It is hardly necessary to say now that neither in a box nor anywhere else does a mole construct that elaborate "fortress" pictured in Wood's "Homes Without Hands," and so many other books, and which many a country boy has, no doubt, searched for in vain. That turns out to have been the offspring of the imagination of M. Le Court, a French refugee at the end of last century, the mole's real fortress being a much simpler construction. Mine was content with one vertical shaft opening near its nest. When I gave him a worm he fussed about a little with it, then plunged down the shaft, then emerged head first and dragged the worm down for consumption. You may again, if a newt and hungry, begin at the end of a lob-worm, several times your own length; and, having eaten down it for some way, have the mortification to find that there is no more room inside, and have to retire (dis) gracefully out of the business and pretend that he is not the kind of worm you took him for. In conclusion, I am bound to say that a couple of vipers had something to complain of, when, after their fangs were extracted, they were offered for dinner a fresh-caught and skittish mouse, which bit them both through the head,

and misrepresented mole

The nasty newt.

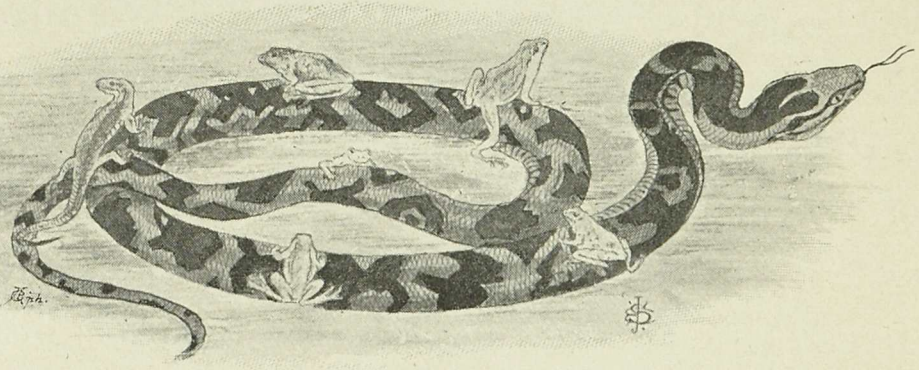
The victimised vipers.

so that they had to leave us without their dinner.

All these things are trying to a little beast, and somewhat embitter existence. But such trifles are soon forgotten (the vipers never give it a thought now) amid the varied pleasures of domesticated existence. You can forgive and forget much when you get a young crocodile to play with now and then, big enough to chaff about his clumsiness and not big enough to eat you for it. And then a python! Who shall tell the joys of getting on the back of a python, more than six feet long, to sit there, as on a roundabout at a fair, frogs and lizards and all in a row, and be carried round the whole show in a pleasant, gliding motion, with nothing in the world to pay for being taken on, and no chance whatever of being shaken off? Who can deny that life on these terms is, after all, well worth living?

The clumsy crocodile.

And the playful python.



CHAPTER III

"Here comes a pair of very strange beasts."—SHAKESPEARE.

I WAS speaking of that grisly beast, the Indian python, and how he, all unworthy, was occasionally admitted to the company and sunshine of the upper circle—the tree-frogs, lizards, salamanders, and others. But this had its disadvantages, and was infrequent. Being 6ft. 7in. long, and thick in proportion, he was greatly crowded in a fern-case, and greatly crowded the others. He could only sit in a dense coil, and his one form of exercise was to revolve continually on his own axis, whereby he never got any "forrader," and was overwhelmed with a sense of the futility of all serpentine endeavour. But when he gave up trying he had to endure the new humiliation of being careered over by light-hearted lizards, and squatted on by flabby-footed frogs.

"If I'm not so large as you,
You are not so small as I,
And not half so spry;"

as the squirrel said to the mountain. Such was the burden of the song that was dinned into his ears, and his stupid dignity did not half like it.

The said dignity can hardly have been due to "pride of intellect," for intellectually—I will confess it at once—he was little better than a fool—a drivelling, blethering idiot. The only point on which he was justified in giving himself airs was that of personal beauty. Certainly, when he cast his skin and came out in all the splendour of marbled greys and browns, and the wonderful sheen of the violet bloom that covers a snake's new skin, he was a fine thing to look at as he rambled in his leisurely way about the room, looking for nothing and finding it. And here a wonder came to light, which I do not remember noticing in the books. A snake in the grass, or on any ordinary ground, progresses in a sinuous "serpentine" course, as if he thought (and he is quite capable of it) that the shortest distance between any two points was the longest way round. It is really, no doubt, because, in the absence of legs (which it is needless to say that his ancestors possessed, but gradually came to dispense with), he is compelled to avoid all

The sinuous serpent.

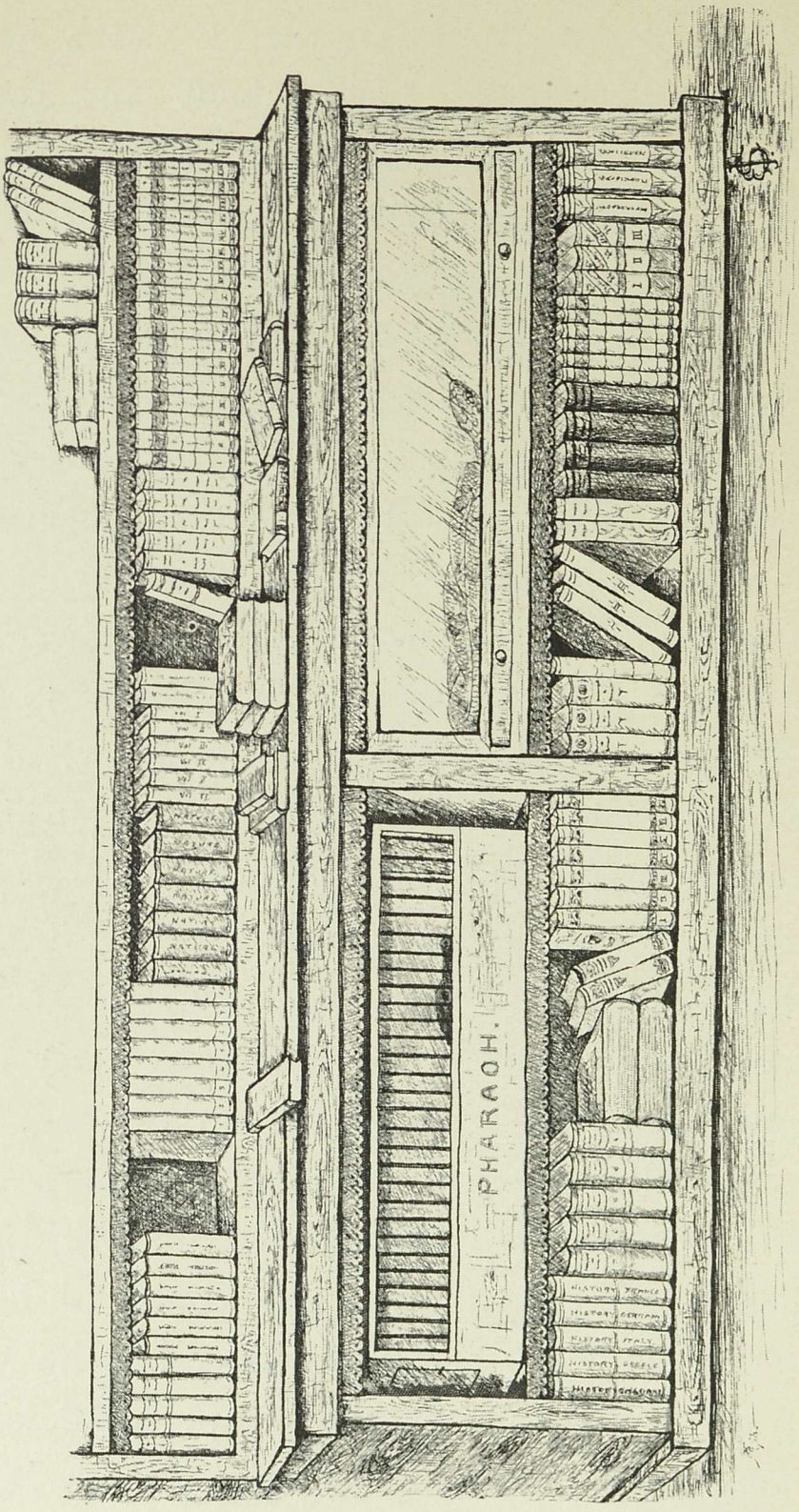
obstructions and to avail himself of the least inequalities of the ground to help him in hitching himself along. And he, too, commonly moved thus. But sometimes, when he found a clear stretch of smooth carpet before him, which offered no inducement whatever to go in one direction rather than another, he may have been at first as much puzzled as the donkey who found himself at an exactly equal distance from two haystacks, but he solved the problem by travelling straight forwards in a bee-line. How he looked over this operation will be apparent to any one who has seen a caterpillar that has just remembered a pressing engagement at some point straight in front of him. The effect from above is the same; but on observing that the caterpillar pulls himself along by six legs, while the snake has not "the shadow of a leg to stand upon," but must advance, like an army, on its belly, you will admit that the latter makes much the abler move. His ribs, in fact, take the place of legs. Each pair is connected with the spine by a ball-and-socket joint, so that the lower edges of a number of them can be pushed forward together to get a hold on the ground. But this action is much assisted by the formation of the skin on the under surface in

broad plate or band scales, corresponding with the pairs of the ribs, and with free and neatly-fringed hinder edges. If the ribs serve the purpose of legs, these plates may be compared to feet. If you will go down on all-fours and try to move along on the *backs* of your hands and feet, by shoving yourself along with the tips of your fingers and toes, you will see (and feel) exactly how it is done. A providential attack of "plumbago" prevents my making the experiment myself at this moment, but I feel confident that, if you try this mode of progression once, you will never think it necessary to try it again.

A peculiar progression.

And so my friend, by bringing forward one batch of ribs with attached scales and then another, went flowing along the floor—like linked sweetness long drawn out—till he came to some obstruction that caused him to drop again into the orthodox sinuosity. In these attempts to keep himself straight, which, like those of some other people, were very short-lived, there seemed a golden opportunity for taking his measure (a most difficult operation with your ordinary snake); but at the least interruption he lost his head and I my chance.

I do not wish to imply that I had a huge constrictor habitually lying about my room and causing frequent deaths from fright among servants and visitors. Every care was taken to provide him with a safe and comfortable home in which to pass most of his days. In fact, I must plead guilty (like others who have been brought up on pictures of boa-constrictors involving substantial prize oxen in their folds) to having been a little nervous at first and having taken somewhat extravagant precautions. The crocodile's house was to let, certainly, for the crocodile was no more. His was a peaceful and a painless end. He had fed well enough in the summer, and seemed to enjoy life well enough so long as it was warm. He became strong enough to tackle live worms of considerable size, and even live minnows. Shrimps, too, he was rather fond of, and once, but with great difficulty, got down a dead grasshopper. His life was spent largely in slumber—though tempered with little spurts of activity—and the crocodile who can sleep unmoved on the table while a fiddle is scraping hard by for an hour is not a beast


PHARAOH.

to be lightly spoken of. Even some of the grass-snakes were moved by that (though it was night), and reared up, reclining on each other's shoulders, one of them coming up and leaning on the door of their case to hear better. A tolerable measure of crocodilian content seemed to express itself in a complacent little croaking, but a precocious caution was apparent in the fact that, while he kept out the light from the window by shutting one eye, he kept that towards the room wide open. Occasionally, too, he enjoyed a walk on the lawn, where he cocked up his head and "took notice" if a bird struck up a song, or made gay little snaps at twigs that were thrown at him. But as the autumn went on *he* went back, and refused even the most decayed and offensive snail. I did my best to keep up his temperature and his spirits by filling a stone ginger-beer bottle with boiling water the last thing at night and standing it in his bath.[1] This left the water by the morning at 62 degrees F., a good deal warmer than the air,

[1] The head of the croc. in the picture opposite is too large: the python's proportions are well shown: on pp. 54 and 69 he has been drawn too small.

and I always found him standing in it; but I have since learnt, by observing Mr. Tyrrell's little crocs. at the back of the Zoo Reptile House, that they need a much higher temperature to pull them through the winter. I forced open his mouth and filled it with baby-foods, essence of beef and what not, but his motto was, like Mr. Balfour's, "I simply won't!" and the food was still in his mouth twenty-four hours later. It came to his spending his time by the fire in a cigar-box full of red flannel; but he showed an increasing disposition to turn over on his back, as if weary of this world, until he did so for the last time, and his place knew him no more. I was overwhelmed with grief and condolences and elegiac verses.

The crocodile chucks.

Here, for instance, is an excellent sonnet :—

He came, a baby, from the storied land
Of palm and sphinx—ah, brothers of the Nile,
That all unthinking wooed his infant smile,
Shall not his fate one natural tear command,
Whose heavy-lidded eyes a stranger hand
Closed, in a clime of vapour and of fog—
Closed, never more to watch the vagrant frog,
And humble cousins of the lizard band?
Say, was it pride or kingly pining vain

That vexed his soul, so young, so innocent ?
Or chafed the king, in one small chamber pent :
A bath his Nile, a cage his whole domain ?
Or did he, like that prince incontinent,
Die of a lamprey in dyspeptic pain ? [1]

And here is—

THE LAMENT OF THE LAST OF THE PHARAOHS.

Oh ! why was I ruthlessly wrenched from the egg
On your cruel and comfortless isle ?
Why not left to be born 'midst the warm genial sands
Of my native and natative Nile ?

Why did not my first feeble frightened glance round
In search of my mother's fond smile,
Which disclosed the fierce grin on the faces of men,
Show a way of escape to the Nile ?

Oh ! why was I forced to eat shrimps and fresh fish,
Worms and bluebottles, everything vile,
While the sweet-scented food that my fancy desired
Was wasting in heaps in the Nile ?

Why was *I* passed about as a plaything for boys,
Who with loathing my shape did revile,
When I might have been sporting with those of my kind
Beloved and admired in the Nile ?

Why did *you* pinch and push me and pull me about
In a cruel and barbarous style ?
Oh ! why *did* not I grow to be thirty feet long,
And have breakfast with you in the Nile ?

---

[1] H. C. F. M.

Oh ! why was I plunged in a saucer of milk,
Enough to stir any one's bile,
And half-boiled by the fire to compel me to drink ?
I'd have drunk quick enough from the Nile.

And whenever I strove from the thoughts of my woes
In sweet slumber my mind to beguile,
Oh ! why did you wake me so ruthlessly up
From my dreams of my home by the Nile ?

When at last by main force and Brand's Essence of Beef,
Which for humans perhaps may be highl-
-Y nutritious you strove my poor spirit to keep,
Can you wonder it fled to the Nile ?

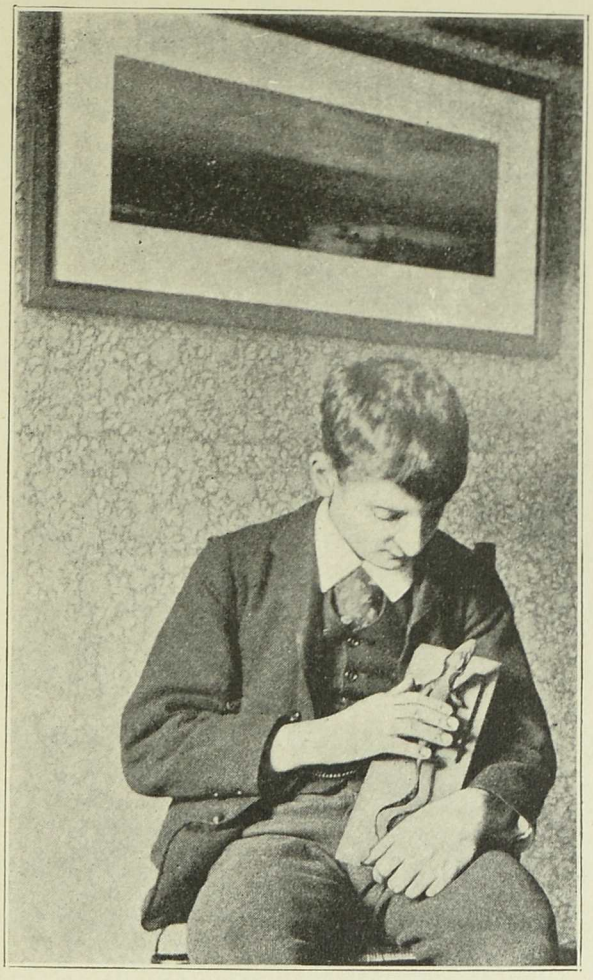
Shed no crocodile's tears o'er the mortal remains
You tormented for one little while ;
For my spirit is free where no naturalists be,
The last home of old crocs. by the Nile.[1]

His little stuffed carcase is before me as I write, and may be seen on the opposite page, but is hardly as like him at his best as his photograph, or as the water-colour for which he gave a number of sittings to a lady, to whose house he was conveyed every morning in a little paper bag.

So, as I said, the crocodile's house was to let, but I mistrusted the power of its wire-front to restrain the wandering propensities of a bulky python. Besides, it was wanted for a pair of white rats, and they would hardly have agreed ;

[1] C. H.

or rather the rats would have agreed only too well with the python for their own peace of mind. So a solid abode for him was made, a yard long, with zinc tray, doors at each end, and



a thick plate-glass front to draw out. Then, having procured a thick pair of gardener's gloves (I smile at these superfluous precautions, but you must handle snakes for some time before you feel

A timid snakist.

quite at home with them), I sat down and prepared for the worst. There, then, the python spent most of his time, on the shelf of a book-case (first floor front). If you inquire of his habits, I am pained to say that he had none. What he was pleased to call his brain was altogether insufficient to acquire such things, unless, indeed, you call it a habit to eat too much one day a week and sleep the other six, or until pulled out for exercise. His weekly meal presented a difficulty. I was loath to give him live animals, and he was loather to eat dead ones. He had no objection to a fresh-killed rat if still warm, but these are not always to be had for the asking in a well-regulated household. At cold rat he distinctly drew the line; you might as well have offered him cold mutton. So it came to getting him a young rabbit a week from a keeper, which went against the grain to one who prefers live animals to stuffed, especially when a snake does the stuffing. Their sufferings, at any rate, were of the briefest. They showed no such fear of him as a frog does of a grass-snake, and when he went for them with a sudden and unexpected dash, they were too much stunned to struggle, and, as

A gross and disgusting feeder.

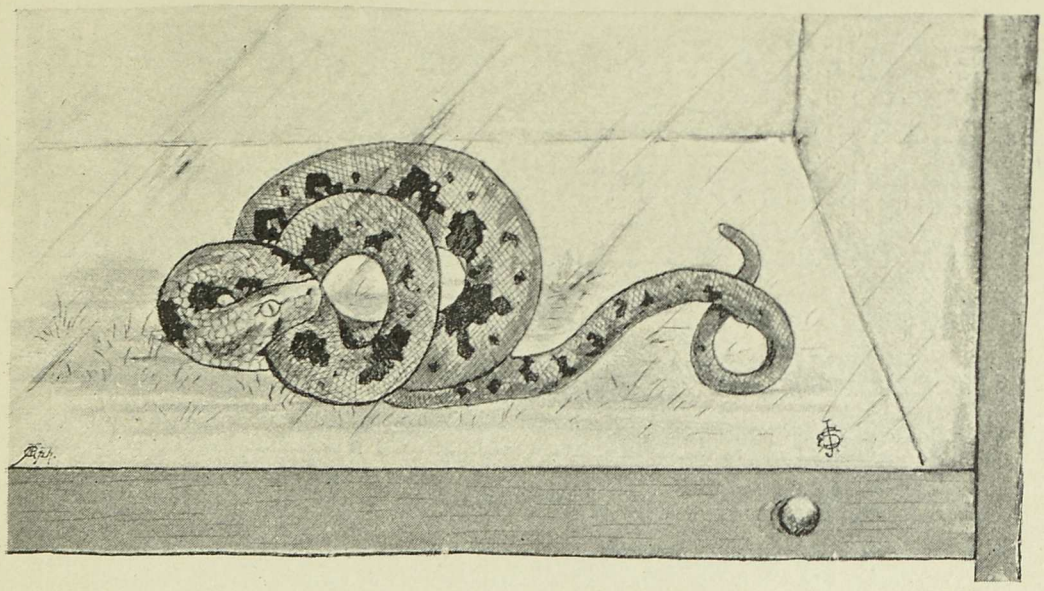
they were too small to be worth constricting they were soon bolted. The python only once surprised me by an unwonted vigilance. Coiled round the back of my chair, he was looking over my shoulder, when the white rat, unsuspicious, was taking his usual course up to the tea-table, *via* the arm-chair, with intent to carry off a biscuit for home consumption. Python made a mighty dash at him without losing hold of my chair (thereby adding insult to injury), but fortunately missed, and the rat remembered that he had promised to come home early that night. But attempts like these to prove that he was a beast with an individuality of his own, and not a mere automatic muscle, were few and far between. His general intelligence may be gauged by his frequent attempts to devour his railway rug, on the ground that, both it and a rabbit being soft and hairy, they must be equally good for purposes of nutrition. It will be remembered that a snake at the Zoo devoured the whole of his rug, under that same impression, and only after being beaten for half an hour disgorged it, in the form of a long flannel sausage. My

A mean advantage.

gentleman never got quite so far, owing to his being constantly under supervision, but I often found his mouth quite full of rug on its way down. It took some time to disentangle it from all the little reflexed teeth. I once tried to facilitate matters by holding up the rug and letting him hang with his whole weight by his teeth. But he held on like a bull-dog, and the operation had to be performed in detail as before. But his crowning exploit was undoubtedly a resolute and *bona-fide* attempt to eat *himself*. Nine very young white rats had been brought me on the last night of the term, with an urgent request to dispose of them somehow, as they could not be taken home. There was but one way, and they were handed in to the python. Five disappeared that night, the other four had made themselves quite at home by the next morning. Regardless of their doom, the little victims played about him, admired his markings, looked into his eyes, and showed no signs of fear, even when he opened his jaws and scooped them one by one into the Cacus-cavern of his throat. They had scarcely time to wonder where they might be going now, before they had passed the gloomy

A selfish meal.

portal, and all was over. When number four had got about nine inches down, the brute happened to turn his head and observed the lump in his throat on its passage. This, thought he, must be a live animal, and must be eaten like the others. So he grabbed at it, and, getting his teeth well into his own scales, proceeded to work



out the problem of getting himself all into his own mouth. His head, pointing forward, formed a ring with his neck, and he was much puzzled to find that, however much he gaped and stretched his jaws, he could get no more in. He was never so annoyed in his life. I drew him out on to the floor and endeavoured to edge his teeth gradually out of his scales without

getting my own fingers within his inclusive grip. But it was not till the late rat had, in the course of nature, slipped further down, and his mouthful seemed less satisfactory, and all the pleasures of this world but fleeting delusions and Turkish Delight, that he allowed me at last to disengage his teeth and "save him from himself." I have heard of a fabulous animal that used to devour his own paws in mere absence of mind ; but this, I think, is an absolute record in stupidity, even among snakes, and the ancients must have been sadly to seek when they took them for a type of wisdom. Well, he had long deserved death for his crimes, and his well-earned fate came in little more than six months. I had taken him to an annual exhibition in December, and he was allowed to walk about the floor, and had even to submit to children putting their dolls on his back for a ride. But it was cold; there was a draught from under the door, and a chill settled on his lungs—his lung, rather, for a snake has but one, and when that is out of order he has nothing else to fall back upon. So he refused food, and, shortly afterwards, "all that mighty heart was lying still." I do not recommend his

More stupid than any beast in the field.

kind as pets, on account of the nature of their food, but I would remind the reader that from a beast of his size there is no danger to a "human," unless he foolishly lets it get round his throat (which it might easily save him the trouble of using for the future), or unless he lets his hand get in the way when the snake goes for his prey; the said hand would be a poor, lacerated object before it got free, if it did so at all without cutting off the snake's head. Such constrictors live mostly on peccaries and smaller animals, occasionally taking small deer, which have been known to avenge themselves in death by getting their horns through the body of their murderer. A constrictor needs to be of extra large size (the Anaconda of thirty feet is said to be the record) before he will go for anything as large as a man. In that case *it is said* that a native will betake himself to a tree and run round and round it (laughing in what would be his sleeve, if he had one) till the pursuer has wound himself tight round the trunk, when native goes home to dinner. Constrictors do not poison; venomous snakes, like the cobra and rattlesnake, are much smaller; they convey poison through their grooved

teeth, or "fangs," at the moment of biting. The reason that all snakes are considered poisonous is, no doubt, the popular belief that the wicked-looking forked tongue (which is used purely as a feeler) is an organ with which they *sting*.

When the snakes are away the rats will play, and the python was far from being missed by the white rat, who now had the field all to himself and enjoyed three or four years of uninterrupted prosperity. As for his spouse, she had been dismissed. When a rat produces ten young olive branches on one Sunday, five more on the fifth Sunday after, and *fourteen more* three weeks after that, it is time to put one's foot down—though not on the fourteen. Rat also occupied the "first floor front" of a flat in Book-case Mansions, and his house, having been built for a crocodile, was a palace for a rat. White rats suffer greatly from being confused by the mob with white mice. But while the mice are unsavoury, and not conspicuous for intelligence, the rats are the cleanest and most inoffensive of animals, and first class in the matter of intelligence and

One must draw the line somewhere.

A very superior article.

affection. The leading feature in the character of this rat was his keen sense of the lessons to be learnt from sluggards, ants, and the like, and his consuming passion for stealing and storing everything that might be of use in fending off want and penury in his old age. As soon as his door was opened, he would scramble down from his shelf and go on a voyage of discovery round the room. He soon learned that, though the cupboard was usually closed, there was often tea going on at a central table, which could be easily approached by way of an armchair. Thither he would make his way, and, helping himself to a biscuit, scuttle back home, toss it in and come for another. This would go on until he had taken a whole plateful of biscuits, none of which he had any intention of eating within a measurable time. I never knew him stop this game of his own accord. He would have cleared the whole table of every fragment of comestible, and laid up enough provision not only for his own life, but for his descendants unto the third and fourth generation. But as he was a solitary widower, and likely to remain so, this extreme solicitude for posterity seemed

Go to the rat, thou sluggard!

Old age insurance.

uncalled for, as I often gently, but firmly, pointed out to him, enforcing my remarks, if necessary, by putting him to bed in disgrace. The difficulty in the operation for him, and the sport for others, was at the last stage of the journey. His shelf being just too high to reach with a spring, he had to jump first on to the top of the ground-floor books, (not, you may imagine, my first editions and Rivière bindings), and then wriggle round on to his own shelf. In this critical operation he not infrequently dropped the spoil, especially when it was a slice of cake or a hunk of bread so large that he could hardly hold it and had to shove it across the floor. He was perseverance itself, and would try a dozen times before giving it up, but, if he finally decided that it was impossible, he would sit down on the floor and gnaw it in pieces, which he would then take up and put to bed one by one. And then your wise men say that animals have instinct but not reason! Latterly it seemed to occur to him that, though he had done pretty well in the way of providing food for posterity down, say, to the year 1999, he had neglected the no less

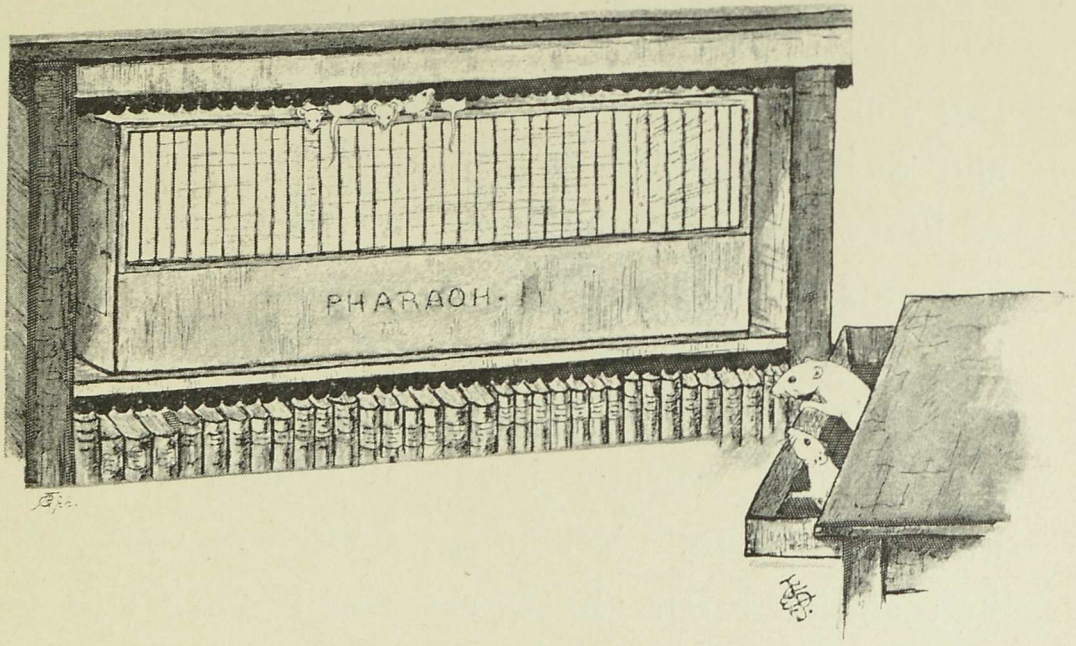
important question of warmth, which he therefore proceeded to tackle with characteristic vigour. Observing that the fire was kept up by constant recourse to the scuttle, and readily grasping the fact of the potential energy of coal, he began to make a collection of that useful substance, wisely refraining from troubling himself about the further question of how to light a fire. That, at any rate, posterity might well find out for itself. He was doing his part if he provided the means. Backwards and forwards he went, day after day, between the scuttle and his house, with lumps of coal in his mouth, though their size frequently caused him difficulty in getting round the corner, and they could not be gnawed in pieces like the bread. Finally, he acquired a stock about a foot square and four or five inches deep, and him, too, I had to save from himself—for he had left himself hardly any room to sleep in—by declaring coal contraband and peremptorily forbidding its conveyance. His inexhaustible activity, when contrasted with his neighbour the python, reminded me of the examination-paper answer to the question of the difference between kinetic

and potential energy—"Kinetic energy is the power of doing work; potential energy is the power of doing without work." He was an observant and thoughtful animal, and took notice of every novelty. He was sitting on my knee when two bats in the vivarium began to "have words" with one another. Rat got on the table and leaned over intently towards the corner to locate the noise aright; then, coming down, he ran across the room, climbed up, and, standing on his hind legs, flattened his nose against the glass till he had grasped the whole situation, and stowed away in his capacious brain this new experience of the temper of the bats for future use. He noticed, too, that, though rats were expected to lap their milk like cats, there were other and better ways of taking it when you were thirsty and in a hurry, and would sometimes scoop it up in his hand, and so convey it to his mouth. He was sometimes affected (as were all his family in his family days) by one of those mysterious influences which affect rats, like some other animals, but to which our own senses give us no clue. A curious spell seemed to hold them motionless and expectant

Es ist immer gut etwas zu wissen.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—

for a whole evening, in singular contrast to their usual habit of careering about the room in search of food and amusement. I have generally thought it to be the moaning and sighing of the wind that kept them so awe-struck, but once, at least, they spent one of these



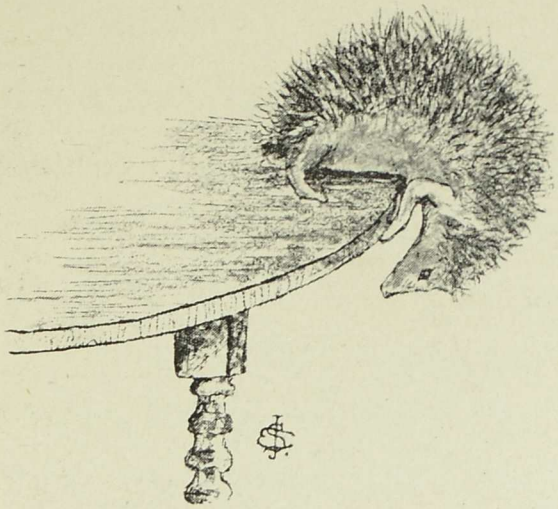
evenings of preternatural stillness, when there was not a breath of wind to be heard. And it was no individual scare nor bilious attack, for while the parents passed the evening in a half-opened drawer, occasionally putting their noses out, their young family of six remained equally quiescent on the top of their cage. They

might have been holding a *séance*, and the shadowy forms of all the rats of other days been flitting across their shuddering gaze.

Well, the rat's day came at last. He became very affectionate and even sentimental in his old age. I thought he had left me for good when he walked over the edge of the window-box one night, and disappeared in the ivy, but, after some rattling of the sugar-basin and a bag of biscuits (both of them sounds which he knew and loved), his pink nose appeared over the edge of the other window-box, and the prodigal returned. When "age, with his stealing steps, had clawed him in his clutch," all worldly interests seemed to fall away from him. When his door was opened, he scampered straight across the room, walked up me, and nestling on my breast under my coat, spent the whole evening there without moving. He developed a large tumour under the skin of his chest, which, no doubt, sapped his vitals, though it seemed to cause no pain. The doctor who was called in had no cure to propose, but, being interested in the case, wished to send it, when dead, to St. Thomas's

Hospital, but happened to be away when, soon after, the decease occurred. *We shall all follow, cousin.*

Of the hedgehog who took his place there is little to relate. He went to sleep (in a badly over-eaten condition) in October, and slept in a box under my bed till the 24th of March, when I heard him stirring, and dragged the struggling



savage into day. He was very thin, and looked very dazed and stupid, when at last he opened his eyes and consented to drink a saucer of milk. He was very tame, soon ceased to roll up, and would stand still to be stroked down and have his nose scratched. It was pretty, too, methought, to see him take a header off the table, where he resented being placed. He tucked his nose

under the edge of the table and threw a somersault so as to arrive on his recumbent spines, which broke his fall like a cushion. But there comes a time in the history of the most hardened beast-fancier when he declines, for good reasons, to keep a hedgehog in his sitting-room for the summer ; so we had to part company.

Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen!

CHAPTER IV

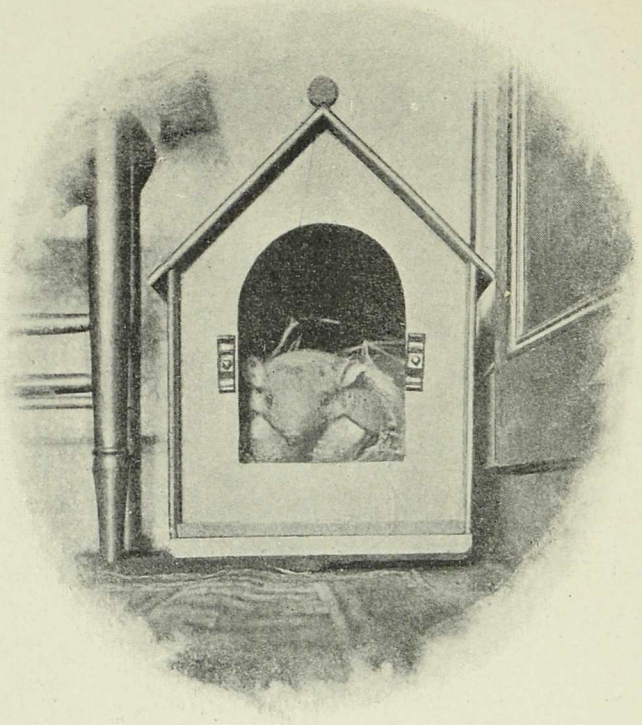
"In fierce tempest is he coming,
In thunder and in earthquake, like a Jove."—SHAKESPEARE.

Two more beasts only, of any importance, shall the reader be troubled with; one was an armadillo (*Dasypus villosus*), from South America, and the other an Indian mongoose.

Every one knows the appearance of that freak of nature, the armadillo. I was disappointed in my expectation that he would roll up in a ball like the pill wood-louse, appropriately christened *Armadillidium vulgare*. That habit, it seems is confined to the genus *Tolypeutes*. But my opinion of him was not quite so much at fault as Sir Walter Raleigh's, who made his acquaintance in Guiana. "It seemeth to be all barred over with small plates like to a rhinoceros, with a white horn growing in his hinder parts, like unto a hunting horn, which they use to

wind instead of a trumpet." What a grievous slander upon an armadillo his tail!

The armadillo, who was fourteen or fifteen inches long, came, need I say, from Jamrach's; but where he would go to before I got him



down into the country it was difficult to guess. I under-estimated his strength as much as I over-estimated the python's. In his first house of call he tore in pieces a stout hamper with his great claws, and, when I put him in a wire-fronted box, he daffed the wires aside and bid

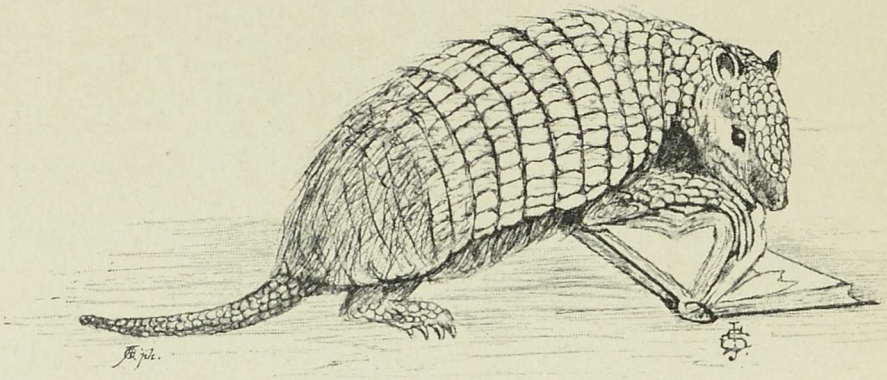
A portentous cub.

himself pass. No ordinary box could hold him. He turned on his back, put his elephantine hind feet against one side and shoved with his back against the other, and soon that box was no box but a wreck. He was, in truth, what the Rev. Dr. Bentley called Mr. Alexander Pope, "a portentous cub." And was this the beast of whom it was remarked to Mr. Darwin by a Gaucho, as he sharpened his knife on the back of one, "they are so quiet"? Finally, a box was procured so stout that nothing short of an elephant could break it, and in it he made many a journey to and from town, and in it, years afterwards, he breathed his last.

Little did I think that to that stormy and riotous youth, swayed (as the wind rocks a poplar) by a thousand gusts of tempestuous passion, would succeed that even, gracious temper of his riper years, those fairy footfalls, as he pattered round the room (they echo yet in the vacant chambers of my memory), that modest, downcast gaze, or the nuzzling of that tender (if clammy) nose against my feet.

He was christened Sennacherib, but this was soon contracted to "Pig." Perhaps "Prig"

would have been more to the point, for he inevitably suggested the definition of that creature as "*an animal overfed for his size.*" He, too, made trial of Pharaoh the crocodile's house. But on returning from an afternoon's absence at a funeral, I found the said house in a more or less fragmentary condition. He had been having a "wake" on his own account. On the floor lay

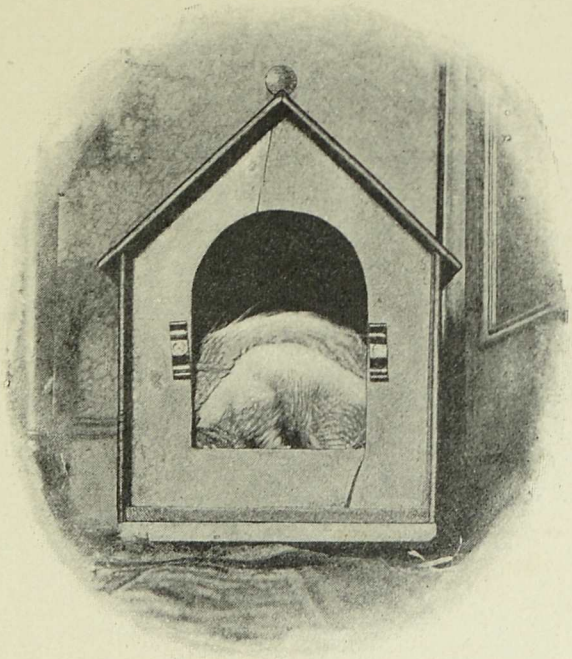


scattered the ground row of books, and there sat Pig, upon the ruins of Carthage, tearing the books out of their covers, just to see how they had been put on. So a kennel was made for him, lined with tin (or it would not have been a kennel long), and he took up his residence in a corner of the room. He was a most convenient beast for a busy man, for out of the twenty-four hours he was always willing to sleep twenty-three,

'Tis a good dulness, and give it way.

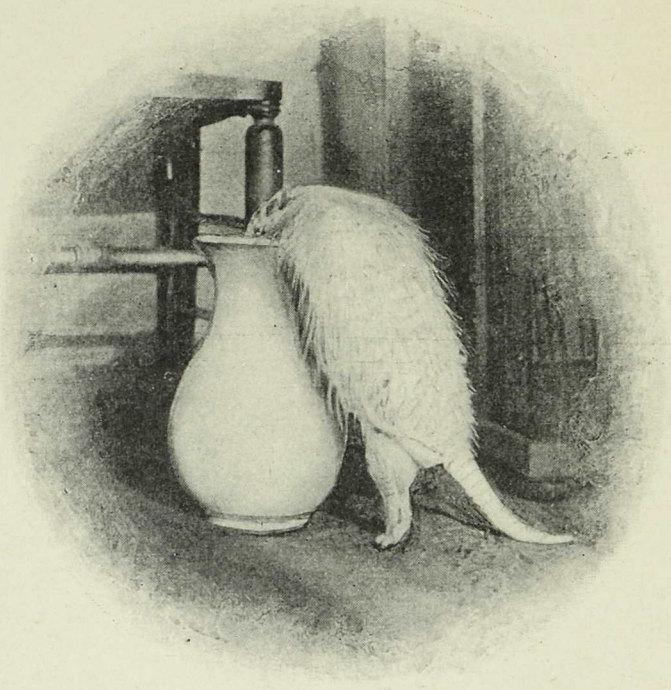
if only he might disport himself for the twenty-fourth. Even for that he had frequently to be woke up and urged to take exercise, if so be he might counteract the fatty degeneration to which his gross and succulent habit of body inclined him. As to food, he was not particular. He

Sleeping to engross his idle body.



would take apples and oranges, first breaking them up with his claws, and would occasionally pick up the nuts destined for the nut-hatches and crunch them with his teeth. But his ordinary food was bread and milk, or a slice of cold mutton, and, unlike Oliver, he never "asked for

more." As for water, he soon found out how to help himself. He would have been glad, no doubt, of rats and mice occasionally. The white rat got down on the floor accidentally when Pig was trundling round. Pig came, saw, and very nearly conquered. He went for the rat like a



cannon-ball (and he could propel his stodgy person with amazing rapidity when he saw just cause), and got him up in a corner. Rat was up on his hind legs, holding out his paws in a deprecating manner, and praying that the wall might open and swallow him, when, with extra-

ordinary presence of mind (for which I have never yet received the Humane Society's medal), I hurried to the rescue and snatched him from the jaws of death. Even this had hardly been if Pig had been given to snapping at things, and not rather to beginning by beating down opposition with his formidable claws. *Unrequited heroism.*

Soon he learnt to come to his name, though he was a little confused in his notions of locality if there were a number of people in the room—of boots, I should say, for, in Pig's view of things, people were but long-drawn and superfluous appendages to boots, which were about all of them that his apoplectic neck would conveniently allow within his purview. But to mark his quick perception of sound—his amazing grasp of the full meaning of that blessed monosyllable "Pig"—it was necessary to be alone with him at dead of night. There are many degrees of quiet. There is the quiet of the small hours in Central London. It might pass for quiet if you had never lived anywhere else. Grade number two is the nocturnal quiet of an "eligible suburban residence." This is immense after Central London—the impalpable but prodigious hum is so much fainter, but there

is even more screeching and grinding of goods trains than in number one. Grade number three, that of the country proper, far from town, is the only quiet worthy of the name, and that, too, must be late at night, if there are five hundred voices about during the day. Now, to train an animal properly, there is not only need for a certain amount of time and an unlimited amount of patience, but your progress will be twice as rapid with a sensitive beast, if you can obtain also the profoundest silence, when every word may produce its unimpeded effect on the ear. Late at night one had only to whisper the magic monosyllable "Pig," as he went bowling round the room, and he stopped sharp, as if cannoned off a cushion, and made a bee-line for your feet, where he snuffled and pottered, and was your obedient, humble servant, and what the Sennacherib did you call him for if you didn't mean to do anything for him? His indignation rose to fury if you took him up and put him on his back and tickled his flabby stomach. He could hardly right himself more easily than a tortoise, and his snortings and wheezings (one was thankful not to understand Armadillese) made one fear a fit, and

So quiet and so sweet a style.

turn him round again, when, like other fat and choleric gentlemen, he forgot his rage and forgave you at once.

With all the solidity of his bodily and mental constitution, he was subject to frantic and preposterous panics on hearing incomprehensible noises. It was a favourite, if brutal, game to drop the poker in the fender when he was as far as possible from home. *Nec mora.* In the same instant he had pointed his snout for home, and let himself fly, like a bolt from the blue. There was a whirl and a scuffle, as those confounded table or chair legs interposed, and a dull thud announced that he was through the door and safe in his kennel. That is, if he had aimed straight. Sometimes he did not, and ran full tilt into the side of the kennel, which resulted in a momentary collapse, and a Pig *à la* Catharine-wheel, till he was fair and square inside. When this was repeated too often, Pig began to smell a rat and declined to play the game. Then a new noise was invented, which effectually worked the oracle, till it, too, grew stale. I could never altogether reason him out of these unmanly fears.

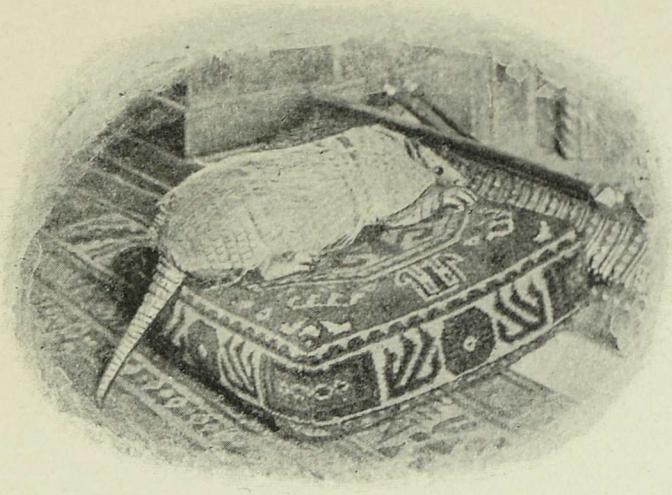
And then it started like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons.

Talking of smelling a rat, he had also a rare

nose for a mouse. I have seen a mouse run across the room and vanish under a bookcase. Pig came swinging by soon after and checked instantly at the scent, which he followed up straight and swiftly to the hole, at which he beat and scrabbled for some time. He had an excellent memory, had Pig. Early in October I had a fire for the first time that autumn, and probably for the first time in his experience. He was much pleased with it, and basked in its grateful warmth. Next day there was no fire, and Pig, coming out and standing up against the fender, was surprised and shocked at the bankruptcy of the grate, and its "no effects." After trying it several times, he went under the grate to look further into this thing. As that was equally vain, he had to console himself by munching the little fallen pieces of coal, his view, no doubt, being that, as the coals had produced such a pleasing result when they were outside *him*, it must certainly be still more delightful if he could get outside *them*. The actual effect upon his mind and his stomach he never betrayed.

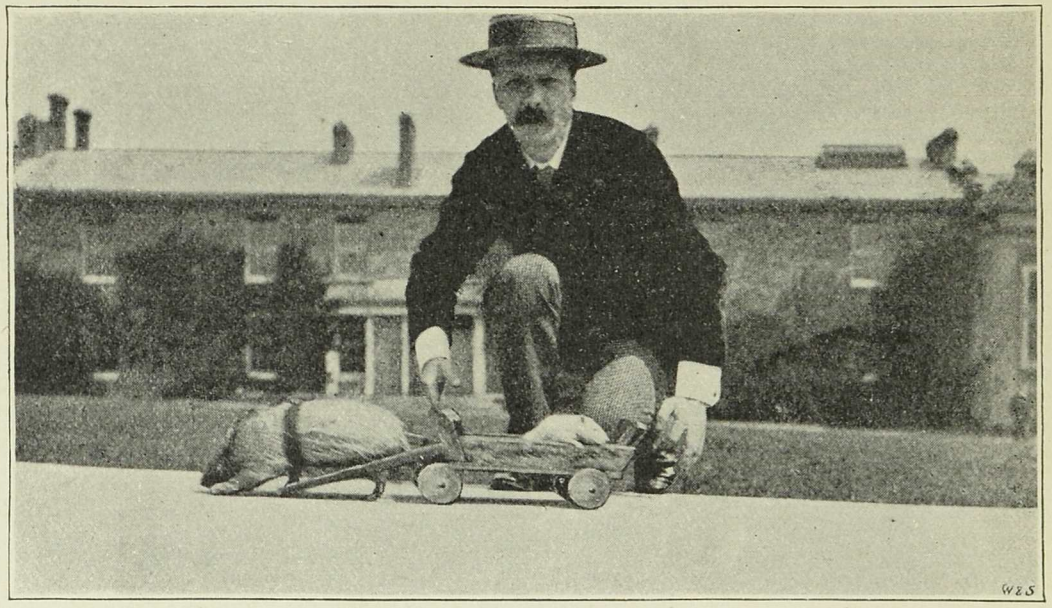
He dearly loved warmth, and would lie by the fire, in a blissful attitude, often with his chin

on the fender, worshipping the flames, like a heathen Parsee. Or he would spread himself out flat in a patch of sunshine, stretching his four legs, revelling in the glare and presenting unrivalled opportunities for a kodak. He was sometimes taken to the garden, but one had to stand over him all the time, so hugely did he enjoy the sweet smell of earth, and so swiftly did he throw



it up and bury himself in his burrow. Give an armadillo a little start in that way and it takes several men digging many hours for all they are worth to catch up with him. He was on safer ground (at least I was) when he took his walks abroad on an asphalte path. It was there that he was subjected to the extreme indignity of drawing a toy-cart with the white rat inside. The harness

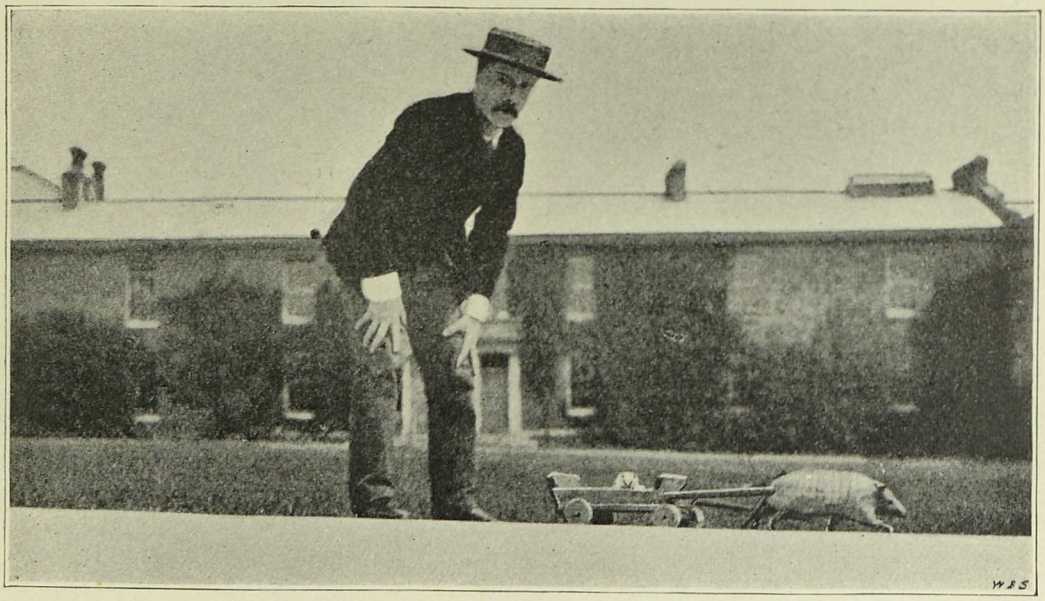
was a difficulty—he was so supple as to wriggle out of everything. But at last it was contrived, of broad elastic. Then he was started off, to the no small alarm of the rat, who was anxious to jump out, but was not sure if it was safe. Pig had no idea at all of going straight up the path, but wanted to get on the grass. A serious



difference of opinion thus arose between us. A kodak lay ready on the grass, the distance was measured, but he declined to remain in focus. Some one else was "to press the button"; I had to "do the rest," and there was plenty to do. After many struggles he was successfully snapped; and when I took him out of harness and put him

in the cart, he leant over the shafts and was much puzzled to know why the thing would not go now, when it had followed him everywhere before. His death was sudden and unexplained. I found him dead in his box at the end of an intensely hot summer afternoon, but whether that the ventilation that had served him so long was in-

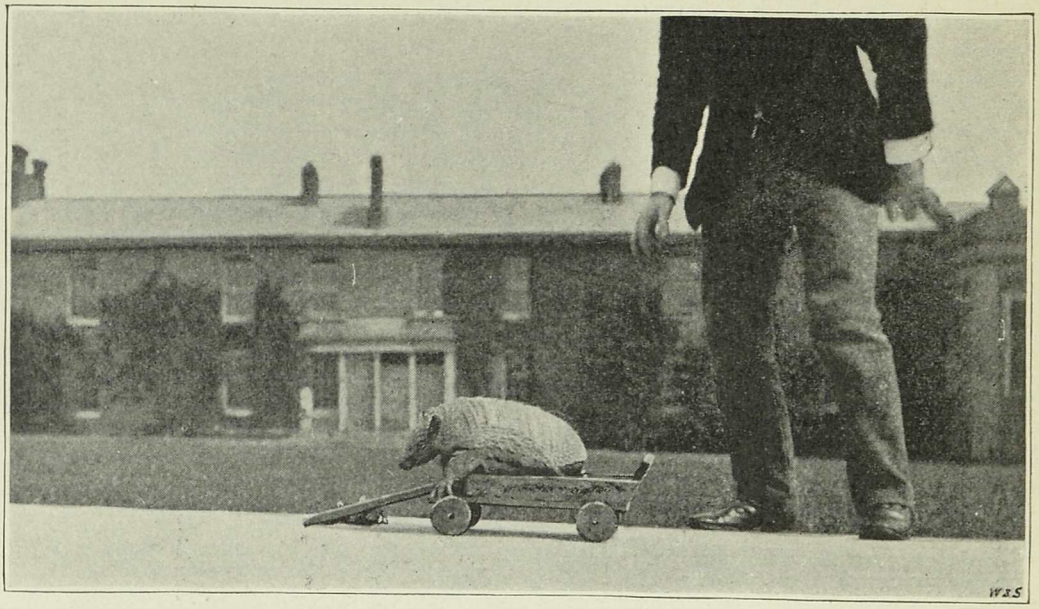
What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh keep in a little life?



sufficient in such weather, or that apoplexy was the inevitable result of his plethoric habit of body and his insufficient exercise, I could not tell. He had formed a large circle of friends and admirers, and died lamented by all, and "more to be wept over by none than by me." If his decease did not "eclipse the gaiety of nations" it certainly "im-

poverished the public stock of harmless pleasure." His successor proved too unruly for anything. His one object in life was to tear down my curtains and scratch holes in my carpets. He had no accomplishments, no manners, nothing that recalled the polished breeding, the finished versa-

I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant.



tility of his predecessor. So I generously lent him to the Zoo, where he acquired the reputation of being the most ill-tempered pig and the worst bully that the Armadillo House had yet seen. His character grew so black that I ceased to call upon him, but I heard lately that he was dead.

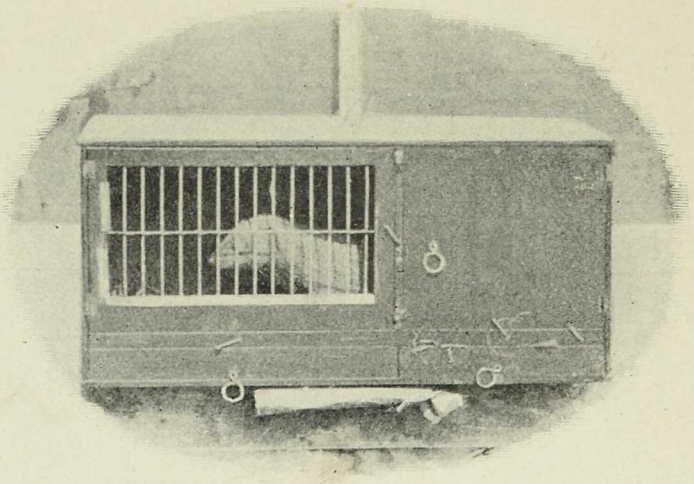
CHAPTER V

"A most acute juvenal ; voluble and free of grace."—
SHAKESPEARE.

As to the mongoose, he is with us till this day; has been so, in fact, only since last Jubilee week. A previous experiment had turned out too wild and shy to be tamed in the time at my disposal, and I was glad to hear from Jamrach that he could at last offer me one already tame. For they have been very hard to get, and since Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Book" was written every tame "Rikki-Tikki" has been snapped up at once. He was not long in making friends, and began at once to walk after me on his hind legs or climb up till I gave him such meats and drinks as his soul desired. Indeed, his sociability proves almost the only weak point in an otherwise blameless and beautiful character ; for he deems it an indignity, as did the Rikki of the "Jungle Book,"

Methinks it is like a weasel. It is backed like a weasel.

to be kept in a cage, and cries like a cat to be taken out whenever he is awake and sees me in the room. If the request is unnoticed, his voice rises to shrill and vociferous expressions of astonishment and blank dismay. Still more delay, and he flies into a paroxysm of rage, like a spoilt child, and tears up his bedding, and casts it to the uttermost corner of his cage. If this still

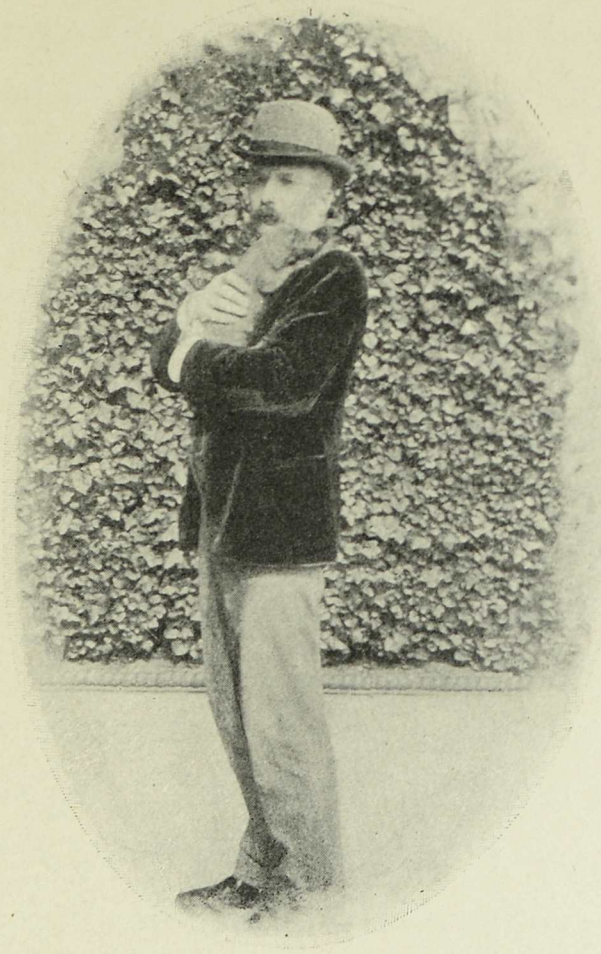


does not serve, his voice will sink to a wail of despair that would melt flint ; but as soon as he is lifted out, all is forgotten and forgiven ; he lays his head on my cheek and coos and croons soft nothings in my ear.

My rage is gone, and I am struck with sorrow.

He is the only animal that consistently does what is set down for him in the books. The motto of the mongoose is, " Run and find

out!" This, like everything else in Rudyard Kipling's story, describes him to the life. His object in getting out of his cage is by



no means to get more food. Like any other Christian gentleman, he eats to live, not lives to eat. The eating is done once for all, as

Note.—For these and for others of the best of the photographs I have to thank Mr. G. S. Eastment.

soon as possible, to get rid of all gross pre-occupations, and leave the coast and brain clear for the intellectual energising of the later hours of the day. At first he got a moderate slice of cold mutton, but it being represented to me that this was too heating for a beast of his mercurial temperament, with no out-door exercise, I have given him bread-and-milk, generally with an admixture of prepared yolk of eggs (from tins), which he has reconciled himself to eat by the assurance that late at night he will find some scraps of meat in my pocket, if he comes and looks for it. He never fails to do so and rummages my pocket till all hope of finding more has expired. Not that he has quite attained to a dog's level of obedience in coming when he is called, or that high degree of sense acquired by the little girl's hoop: "It is so sensible, mother, it goes where I want it to." He will neither go nor come where I want him to, unless it happens to suit his own convenience. Being more accustomed than your mere dog to look at all sides of a question before making up his mind, he will pause and consider what it is you want him for. If your

attitude or gesture lead him to suppose that you mean to catch him and put him back in his cage, he will see you "further" (and by no means nearer) before he comes to you, and will lead you a rare chase if you try to catch him. If you entice him with a piece of meat in your left hand, while your right is ready to grab, you will catch him—once. But never again will he forget that suspicious discrepancy of sentiment



between your two hands. While cautiously advancing to the meat, he will be keeping an eye upon your right hand, and if the position of the fingers can be even distantly construed as indicating a grasping spirit, he will give you one meaning look, make one skip in the air, and go the other way.

The better part of valour is discretion.

His real interests in life are those of any other well-educated and thoroughly inquisitive foreigner, on finding himself in a new country,

among "new men, strange faces, other minds." He must make himself acquainted with all the ins and outs of the furniture, the various contents of cupboards and the character of the pictures, so far as they can be seen by standing on tiptoe on sideboards or bookcases. If slippers are lying about, he must carefully explore the toes with his paws or head; if a parcel is opened, he must stand by and dive into the contents as they come to light. If a plant is growing in a pot, he must scratch up the earth to see how the roots are getting on; if there are cut flowers in a jar, he must plunge his head among them to see what they are standing in; if there is an open match-box or a tray of pipe-ashes they must all be scooped out with his hand and spread about the table. If a stranger comes in, his boots and ankles must be sniffed at, and a



Go and see what Rikki's doing, and tell him he mustn't.

Ex pede Herculem.

judgment formed from them, on approved Rikkian principles, of the probable character of the person attached. And he is very discriminating in his treatment of strangers, noting each face separately and earnestly, and hardly taking a step without looking round at each individual in turn, to guard against possible hostile movements. He is on terms of easy familiarity with boys, of reverential awe with the men he knows best, frigid and distant to those he knows least, and a confirmed hater of women. They are such an odd shape and wear such extraordinary and rococo clothes, and their bright colours—they do so terrify him, it "gives him quite a turn," and is the only sight that inspires him with genuine panic.

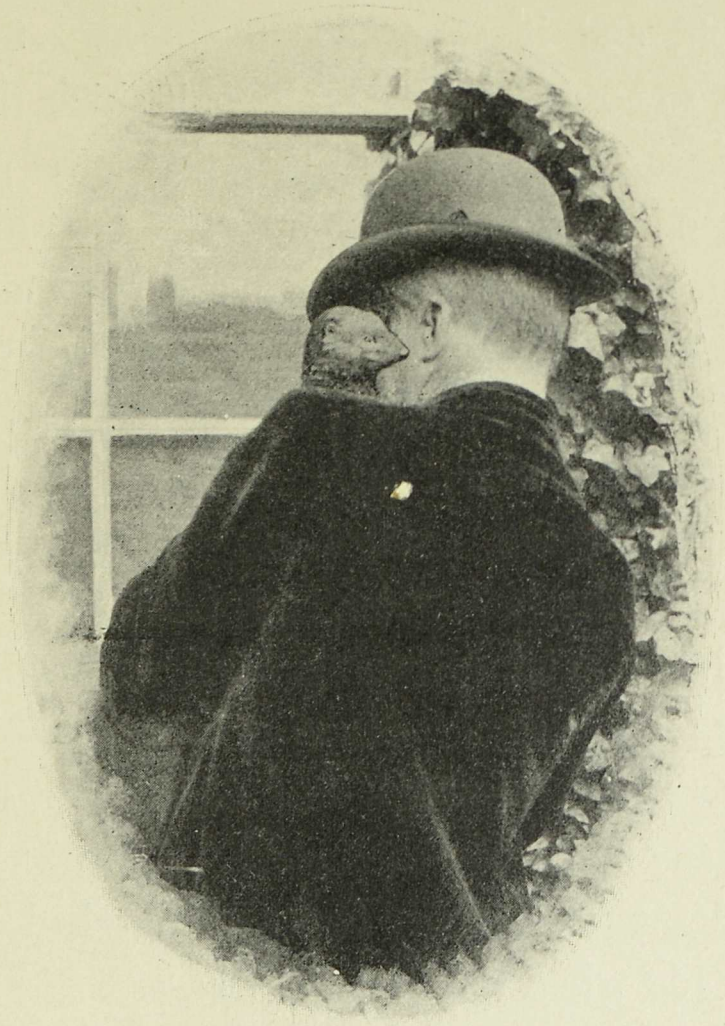
The fire—which seemed a thing quite new to him—invited a strict investigation, but his ardour in this direction was rudely checked after his nose had come in contact with a few hot coals.

But it was, perhaps, in his readiness to fall in with the great Game Craze, that he best showed the adaptability of his nature. This amiable desire to do a thing because a large number of other people do it, he noted at once as a feature

of the English mind, and he hastened to conciliate public opinion. He would have started cricket if I had furnished him with the appliances, and as soon as I presented him with a "squash" ball, he started football. He made no attempt at any pedantic adherence to the rules either of Rugby or "soccer;" but, selecting those features that seemed most within his powers, he practised them assiduously. These were the kick-off, the pass, and the scrum. The game began by taking the ball between his fore-paws and passing it dexterously to his hind feet, with which he then kicked off backwards with all his might. Often the kick did not come off, but, when he was on his day, one would hear the ball go bouncing merrily against the walls. At the moment of kicking off he would turn his head sharply to see where it went, fly after it, and, clasping it to his breast, roll over and over with it; this, of course, was the scrum. But, to be quite up to date, he could not neglect golf when brought to his notice. Adapting himself readily to the want of drivers and niblics, he combined it with football by rolling up a corner of a rug with his hind feet, and, placing the ball thereon with

An all-round athlete.

the same, enjoyed the joint delights of a kick-off and a tee-off. But that in all this there was something of an affectation of precocity, and that he



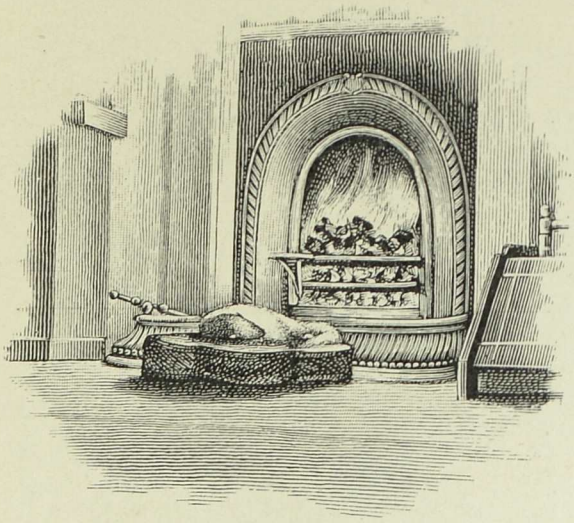
had hardly arrived at the age for scientific games, seemed plain from the readiness with which he deserted them for the baby toys that he was now provided with. A doll proved of considerable

interest as long as it had any clothes that could be torn off; a large rubber ball, with a monkey sitting on it, which squeaked when you pressed it, afforded some sport till he bit the monkey's head off, and it squeaked no more. So did sundry toy rabbits in real rabbit-skin, though these were rather too hard to produce the proper feeling of illusion. But what struck him as particularly fascinating were a blue and a white cat, with bells round their necks, and, above all, a monkey, with long and inviting legs and arms, all of shoddy without and sawdust within. The monkey he made endless play with, dancing round it like a terrier, provoking it with every insult, and springing back to avoid the expected retaliation. None of these palled till they were bitten through in a dozen places, and, with many a vicious shake, their (sawdust) life-blood drenched the gory floor. They had a new lease of life when restuffed with rags.

I am a woodland fellow, Sir, that always loved a great fire.

When let out he goes straight to the fender, and, "bottle-brushing" his fur, stands there till well roasted; then, remembering his loved ones, he springs to the desk where they lie, and, bringing down cats and monkeys one by one, sets

them in a row in the fender to toast, until such time as his transports of affection drive him to chuck them out on the floor and enjoy a real good "rag." And it is rags they are now, *et praeterea nihil*; the mere ghost and shadow of the plump beasts they were. He has lately been provided with toys in great variety—a rattle, clock-



work mice, eerie Japanese insects, climbing monkeys, and paper snakes of an accordion-pleat pattern, but it is only the last that can compare in his affections with his earlier and simpler amusements. In fact, a long Japanese paper snake (from Liberty's) was his first and dearest love. He bit it through the head, and then bit off its tail. Having thus rendered it comparatively

harmless, he bit it through the middle, with violent shakes to each half. Every night he bit it into smaller and smaller portions, till it was reduced to two large handfuls of fragments.



These were strewn on the floor every evening, and, until they got so contemptibly small as to diminish his fervour, he esteemed it his duty to go round to each morsel and give it a thorough

shaking to make sure that it had not come to life again.

When he is weary of his toys, he climbs up to the window to see what may be seen in the garden. If tennis is going on, he is only too happy to spend hours there, watching every stroke with the keenest interest. If a cat passes, or a dog, or a milkman, or any other of the lower animals, he is all eyes and ears, and would dearly like to jump down and play with them; but if a horse comes he is wild with excitement—he never saw anything so lovely. If it would only look up at the window and talk to him! But that is the bitter drop in his cup; he can never attract their attention, and has to see them depart as they came, and never, never can learn what they, too, have "run and found out" about this funny world. His own view is that—

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings;"

but what is the use if you are cooped up in two rooms and none of the beasts that have the run of the world will ever come up and tell you all about it?

If, on the other hand, when the room has been properly investigated and the toys exhausted, there is nothing to see in the garden, he hurries to each window in turn, peering this way and that, to make sure ; and then, indeed, the vanity of this world breaks over him like a flood, and he lifts up his voice and wails aloud. Dropping to the floor, he loafs aimlessly round with despairing cries, till it occurs to him that even I am better than nothing and may possibly have some consolation to offer. So, leaping on my knees, he curls himself up and goes to sleep. If I am writing, he will take a languid interest in the motion of the pen, occasionally tapping it with his paw to see what happens (as he has been doing over this chapter), or, coming up on the desk, will try to get his hand in the ink-bottle to scoop out its contents, as he once succeeded in doing. But he prefers me very much in an armchair, where he can stretch himself on my knees at full length, or play with my watch-chain, or stretch his arm on an exploring expedition up my cuff, or try to pull out my handkerchief, or scoop the ash off the bowl of my pipe, or wander up my chest and take my nose thoughtfully in his mouth

Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale.

to test its material. Then, with front and hind legs stretched out to their full extent, he falls so sound asleep that he hangs limp, and apparently lifeless, over my hand when I carry him to bed and tuck him in for the night.

This is but a lame account of a beast of such varied accomplishments, but no one can expect, in so short a time, to explore all the possibilities of such a rich and versatile nature.

CHAPTER VI

"Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time."—
SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN all's said and done, it is the common fate of uncommon "pets" to come to uncommon ends. The appliances of an elaborate civilization too often prove so many death-traps to these unsophisticated little savages thus brought, very much against their will, within the charmed circle, and with never a sister, a cousin, or an aunt of sufficient experience and sufficient friendliness to "go and see what they are doing and tell them they mustn't." The brighter and more intelligent they are, the more likely are they to fall victims to their curiosity, and meet with a tragic fate. And when this does not happen they not infrequently prove so little adaptable to their new circumstances as to become burdensome to their owners, and require

to be "put out of pain," or offered to the Zoo, or be pilloried for a price or its equivalent in the valuable columns of "Exchange and Mart."

Nothing can we call our own but death.

Even as I write, the blind Fury has been upon me, with her abhorréd shears, and Rikki has been cut off in the very flower of his days. He must have caught a chill when being conveyed to his quarters for the Christmas holidays ; for he lost all his spirits, could hardly run without panting, and cared only to lie by the fire or on my knee, to which he could scarcely jump without help. It was a bad case of inflammation of the lungs, and the doctor gave me little hope. When he was seized with convulsions and was in evident pain, I had to anticipate the end with chloroform.

Manibus date lilia plenis.

"Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neque ultra
Esse sinent."

Potto.

I was intimately acquainted with a potto, or kinkajou, who was certainly very playful and fascinating. He was the size of a small cat, and at first had a cage to match in a lady's boudoir. But he was not infrequently let out for a run, and, his high spirits being incompatible with the continued existence of bric-a-brac, he was sometimes sent down to the kitchen, where he had high

jinks with the dog and cat. They were all on the friendliest terms, and chased one another round the room, though, when "Pig" arrived for his holidays, the horror and consternation of Potto knew no bounds. His cage was enlarged, and eventually reached almost to the ceiling, and was fitted with every facility for climbing and amusing himself. Even this measure of freedom did not satisfy him, and he let himself out in the night and tore up all the photographs and books he could lay his hands on, including the end of an exciting novel—not yet read. The night was the time of his highest activity, and the noise that he made with his antics and his wild endeavours to break down the front of his cage could be heard all over the house. Outside the house, too, it was plain, and when three several policemen had woke up everybody in the dead of night to satisfy themselves that there were no burglars at work picking locks or filing bars, a request had to be made at the station that the men on that beat should be instructed as to the exact nature of the noise.

The expansion of the Empire.

A filibustering expedition.

Potto now made a further encroachment. A rope ladder was suspended to the ceiling in the

middle of the room, where he might disport himself when tired of his ample cage. The bric-a-brac and whatever was essentially "unpottoesque" disappeared from the room, and it was given up to him as a possession for ever. The process lasted three years, but the inevitable end came at last. Choice had to be made between Potto and the room he occupied. Exit Potto to the Zoo, pending his transfer to a new owner. Re-enter to the boudoir bric-a-brac, order, peace.

The annexation of the Hinterland.

Decline and Fall.



The coati-mundi.

Again, a coatimundi was given to another lady. Sitting up on his haunches, or swarming up a chair or table leg, hand over hand, he had all the charm and unconscious humour that you would expect from a tiny bear with an elongated, mobile snout, and an extensive tail. He was fairly contented, too, unless you kept him too long in his cage, when he "signified the same in the usual manner." But his tail (his proudest boast next to his snout) soon

He's a bear indeed that lives like a lamb.

A tail that ends badly.

declined from its original beauty, and approximated more and more to the tail of a rat. In less than a year he was seized with a mysterious complaint, supposed by the doctor to be peritonitis, and he followed his tail into oblivion.

A very gentle beast and of a good conscience.

Marmozets I have had not a few. Nothing in the world could be prettier or more charming than their dainty little ways, as they leap from chair to chair, or sit on your shoulder, or gambol with the kitten on the hearth. But they are terribly delicate. A beast can hardly be very companionable who must be kept in the kitchen for warmth, and even then you will not bring them—any more than chameleons—through the winter; that has hardly ever been done, even at the Monkey House in the Zoo.



To descend to more homely beasts, I have kept bats (as I have already mentioned) for a month or so; the common little "flitter-mouse" (*Scotophilus pipistrellus*), and the long-eared kind (*Plecotus auritus*), with those wonderful ears that he folds over so exquisitely into the form of

ram's horns. The latter kind were in the habit of sleeping with only one ear folded up, and the other fully extended, and mounted, I suppose, as a sentinel on guard. Bats insist on coming into my room on summer evenings, and I have occasionally detained them for a few weeks. For a time they get on well enough. They hang up by their hind feet all day, and you can feed them at night by handing them moths, when they sit up on their haunches, with wings half extended, and wrastle with the enemy like a terrier with a rat. You can keep them alive this way, but it is obviously unnatural, if you consider the ceaseless activity of their nights in a state of freedom. They get cold and clammy after a time. If you would keep them healthy, shut the windows close (they will sniff the air and creep through a very small chink), throw them up (or let them launch from the edge of a table—though these two species, at any rate, can spring from the flat), and let them have an hour's exercise round the room. They can be caught again in a butterfly net. But the best hospitality you can show them is to give them a drink of milk (hold them by the wings at the

What pleasure, Sir, find we in life, to lock it from action and adventure?

edge of the saucer—even if they do bite, their teeth are mostly too tiny to hurt), which so pleases them that they quite forget the awkwardness of the situation, and then let them go again.

The tortoise his grievances.

Even your land tortoise (*Testudo graeca*), so often bought from barrows in the street, would be the better for more consideration than he usually gets. He wants lettuce (for choice) or dandelion, but can make clover serve, or vine, or anything young and succulent. I have seen him take a long draught of water, but very rarely. It is hard to expect him to eat grass or cabbage, which he thinks extremely little of, and then blame him for going on the flower-beds and cropping the seedlings. If you leave him in the garden much beyond the end of September, he will burrow for the winter, after which he may turn up again in April or May, but the chances are greatly against his living through an English winter, and he has probably merely saved you the trouble of burying him. Take him in at the beginning of winter, and stow him away anywhere, till warm weather comes round again. But if you keep him in a kitchen or any warm room, thereby putting him off his natural

hibernation, and keeping him more or less lively against his will, he will expect at least the option of an occasional meal—bread-and-milk if nothing better can be had. I kept one in this way for eighteen years. His carapace was smooth, and about eight or nine inches long, but I have never been able to identify his species. The common Greek tortoise of the shops I could never induce to live more than a few years. These are not to be confused with the flat-backed, thin-legged water-tortoise, whose food is almost exclusively animal, and who may be fed with worms or small pieces of raw meat served in a saucer of water.

O thou monster Ignorance, how deformed dost thou look!

It is a singular instance of the persistence of popular beliefs, in defiance of common-sense, that land tortoises are still put in kitchens, in order "to eat the black-beetles." Imagine the strain on the feelings of the volatile cockroach who should have to stand waiting for a tortoise to hobble up, and extend for him his deliberate jaws! You might as well deposit Tom Pinch among a couple of hundred boys in a schoolroom, and expect him to keep them in order. The public are, perhaps, of the opinion of the famous booking-clerk, who

announced, on reference to regulations, that "a cat's a dog, and a rabbit's a dog, and a squirrel in a cage is a parrot, but a tortoise—why, a tortoise is a insec," and "insecs" no doubt frequently eat one another. But I prefer to suppose that it must have arisen from a confusion in the cockney mind between a tortoise and a hedgehog (who is death on, and to, black-beetles), on the ground that they are about the same size, and more or less the same shape—there is certainly no other resemblance. But what can you expect when you have heard a rustic tell you that a newt spits fire, that a viper is quite different from an adder, and that the slow-worm is more poisonous than either? Compared with these, the inexpugnable superstition of the salamander's love of heat, is respectable and even venerable. He wears the colours of the *san benito*, the black and yellow garment in which the Spanish Inquisition clothed its victims, as a hint of the fires, present and future, which were reserved for their occupation. In consequence, I suppose, of these same colours Aristotle asserted (or repeated) that a salamander will put the fire out. "That it is possible,"[1] says

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.

[1] Historia Animalium, v. 17.

he, "for animals with some constitutions not to be burnt the salamander makes evident, for this beast, as they say, when it walks through the fire, puts it out." Pliny rather improves on this. It is an "animal with the form of a lizard, with star-like spots, which are never produced except in heavy showers, and fail in fine weather. So extreme is its chilliness that it extinguishes a fire with its touch, just like ice. If the milky slaver which is vomited from its mouth comes in contact with any part of the human body, all the hairs drop off, and the part that is touched assumes the hue of an eruption."[1] Elsewhere he calls it the worst of all poisonous animals, for, while the others kill individuals, the salamander can kill multitudes: if it walks up a tree the fruit becomes poisonous, as the water does if it falls into a well. The flesh of the frog-fish is an excellent remedy; the tortoise also is an excellent antidote. He was, no doubt, shaken in his opinion on the fire question when he put one in the fire, and found that it was burnt to powder. But the superstition was quite proof against such a trumpery experiment. Aristotle and Pliny were almost the sole

[1] Historia Naturalis, x. 86.

authorities on natural history for the men of the Middle Ages, to whom it would have been a preposterous notion that to understand Nature you must study Nature, rather than see what other people have said about her ; and the picturesque belief, surviving all the shocks of investigation and science for the million, has endured even to the last year of this "so-called nineteenth century." It may be fined away into the question whether the beast does not like very warm places, but in one form or another it rises to the lips of all the uninitiated, old or young, when first brought face to face with this clammy amphibian. For, like our own newts, he began life as a tadpole, and though not, in mature years, like our newts, spending his time mostly in the water, lives under stones and in other damp corners, and will be found, when wanted, under the saucer in your vivarium, if you will kindly leave a way of access, and sufficient room there to accommodate his podgy body.

Talking of newts, it is cruel to keep either newts or frogs in water, without a piece of wood or cork on which they may step out when they please, to rest their muscles or take a survey of

the great world. They like a change and a walk occasionally, and at night will go considerable distances on exploring expeditions for "fresh woods and pastures new." So, too, will your water-beetles go off (why else should they have wings?), and they must be covered at night if you want to retain them. So, too, for the matter of that, will the earwigs abandon your curtains and the cool translucent caverns of your sponge. Possibly you will not be much grieved. But the poor thing suffers a good deal from our stupid misunderstanding of its name, which indicates merely that its wing is of the shape of an ear. You might do worse, when you have a hundred years or so to spare, than try to fold up its wings (without the help of its own forceps), so as to go fair and square beneath its wing-cases.

The maligned earwig.

It is a far cry from marmozets to earwigs, and I fear I have digressed from the subject of the care needed in the keeping of strange pets. To the other considerations mentioned under that head I would only add a reminder of the omnipresent cat and dog. They will have in many cases to be provided against—in some, perhaps, to be provided for. And you may abolish them as

often as you like—they will always find their way back to every well-constituted household.

> "Let Hercules himself do what he may
> The cat will mew, and dog will have his day."

Though, according to Mr. Barker's young hopeful, "The dog is the commonest of all living brutes," and the "house-cat" nothing but "a 4-legged quadruped, the legs as usuerl being at the corners," I should be sorry to include the consideration of cats and dogs in a volume with the ambiguous title of "Beasts." But, as I let myself down as far as the earwig, let me not make my bow before raising myself to the "height of this great argument," and paying a tribute to these the most faithful of our friends, who, after all trials and experiments, have proved the "pets" fittest to survive, and have linked themselves inextricably with the fortunes of our race. Of the dog, at any rate, may be said what Carlyle said of books: "It is lawful for the solitary wight to express the love he feels for those companions so steadfast and unpresuming, that go or come without reluctance, and that, when his fellow-animals are proud or stupid or peevish, are ever

I do wish thou wert a dog that I might love thee something.

ready to cheer the languor of his soul, and gild the barrenness of life."

Wherever and however the original dog was domesticated, whether derived from wolves or from jackals or from both together; whether, again, "the origin has been a single one—that is to say, whether all domestic dogs were derived from one particular species of wolf or from a single species of jackal, or whether they are a product of the crossing of two or more distinct races independently derived from as many wild stocks,"[1] he has long ago taken man to his heart, and accredited him, as has been suggested, the representative of the pack with which he, once gregarious, now isolated, was accustomed to do all things in common. Relying on the moral support of his master, he will assume as independent a manner as you like, when he goes abroad to transact his private business in the fields or the streets. But his base of operations is the home, and a "lost dog" is a poor feckless, distraught object. In fact we are told by Mr. Walsh (in the *North American Review*) that the dog (of which the Esquimaux breed represents the

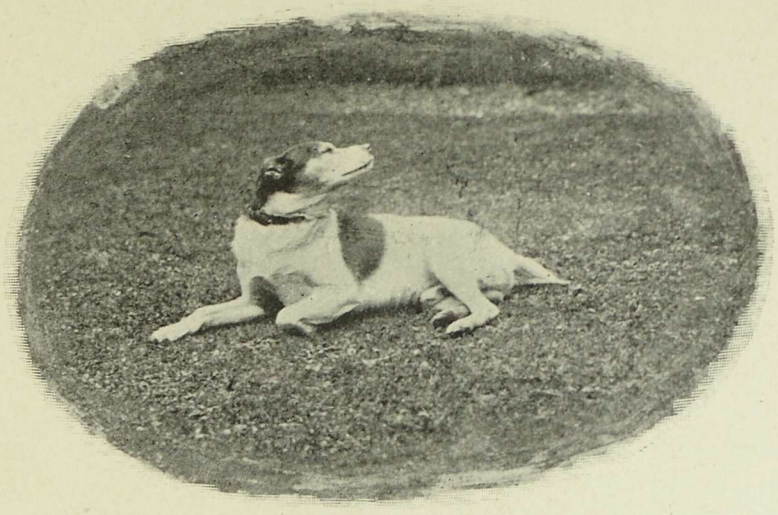
[1] Lydekker.

aboriginal type) has practically no virtues but those which he has acquired by his companionship with man—though one might answer that it was virtue enough to be able so marvellously to profit by that companionship—and that, if left to himself, he would sink both morally and physically to his original level. "It is claimed by science that if all our dogs—the greyhound, mastiff, spaniel, terrier, and collie—were turned adrift in a country where they would be entirely exempt from all the restraints and associations of man, all typical identity would gradually be lost, and they would assimilate one to another in form and colour. The slim, rounded tails would become thick and bushy, the ears would grow short, erect, and pointed, the bodies would be covered with a thick bristling hair, and the colour would become uniformly tawny, grey, or brindled. A composite feral tribe of dogs would result that is best represented to-day in North America by the mongrel Indian dog."

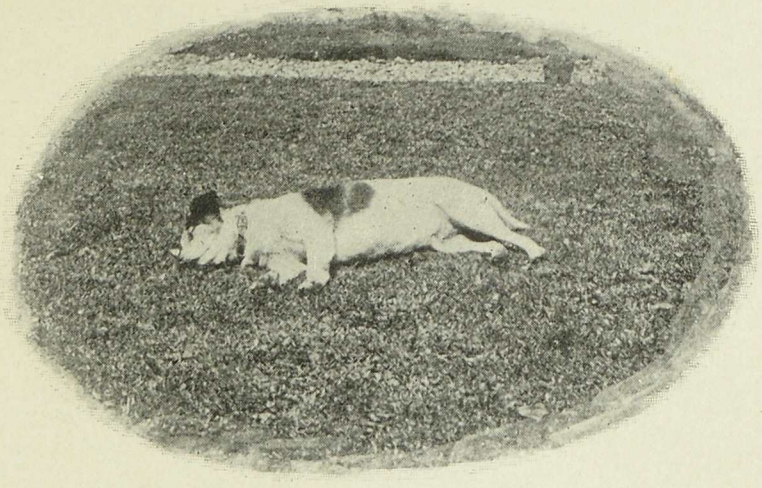
With the other diverse canines of a London street he will be indifferent, or chilling, or on terms of desperate enmity. To others, again, he may extend acquaintanceship, or friendship, or



Cats ! Martin.



Where ?



Rot !

even ardent devotion. He will even pick up a few of the more intimate to go his rounds with him, on the faint pretence of hunting along with the pack, but always with a mental reservation in behalf of the real pack, his master. Sometimes, indeed, he may temporarily forget his allegiance, like other good servants, and suffer himself to be led astray by bad companions. But, like other honest men, when they try their hand at crime, he is liable to bungle, and run straight into the arms of the law. Otherwise one could not explain the folly of *Martin Tupper*, who, after forgetting himself so far as to absent himself from home, with a gang of like-minded young bucks, for some days, walked straight, with his friends, into the yard of the police station, to see the men drilling, when he might have known that one of them was no less than the caretaker of our house, who would inevitably grab him and walk him off home. But much may be forgiven to a dog who can not only stand on his hind legs, but can walk backwards on them, apparently for ever, and then come dancing, with feet together, to the promised biscuit, right across the room, without losing his balance.

He's a good dog and a fair dog; can there be more said? he is good and fair.

But I forgot that I was not going to speak of dogs. How disgustfully would Martin daff the thought aside, if he discovered that he was being in any way classed with the contemptible and irreclaimable vermin (for so he considers them all) that I have spoken of.

The harmless, necessary cat.

Nor shall I do more than merely suggest the subject of cats, and their "feline amenities." That the scheme of things might be rounded and complete, the cat has attached herself to the house, as the dog has to its master. Not that puss either will put her head in the noose of any of our rough and ready rules and formulas. If she is in general devoted to places rather than persons, she will also occasionally conceive an affection for an individual that reminds one of the obsequious, not to say grovelling, devotion to man, of her cousin the puma, *el amigo del cristiano*, as set forth in that delightful book, Mr. Hudson's "Naturalist in La Plata."

But this is the exception: as a rule she regards the human kind with indifference, or, at the most, with toleration, and cares not who knows it. An animal who has acquired the habit of constructing four walls and a roof to keep

out the weather, and of keeping a fire burning perpetually in one corner at least of his house, is plainly an animal to be encouraged by a creature that sets personal comfort before all things. Cosy quarters are necessary in which to while away the long hours until she can betake herself to the real business and sport of life, under cover of the night. A regular supply of food is also an advantage ; for, under our miserably sophisticated civilisation, the most sporting beast is apt to return from the chase with terribly empty bags. More often than not, in fact, she is so well provided for that she loses altogether the habit of a sportsman.

But the dull human must not presume on these considerations to expect affection, or even gratitude, in return. Let it be enough for him that his comfort is indefinitely increased by the perpetual spectacle of pure, unadulterated selfishness, bent upon making itself comfortable at all hazards. For comfort radiates in tender pulsations over the circle in which puss has established herself ; her fluent and buxom outlines are a standing rebuke to restlessness ; the mellifluous resonance of her purring is a perpetual invitation

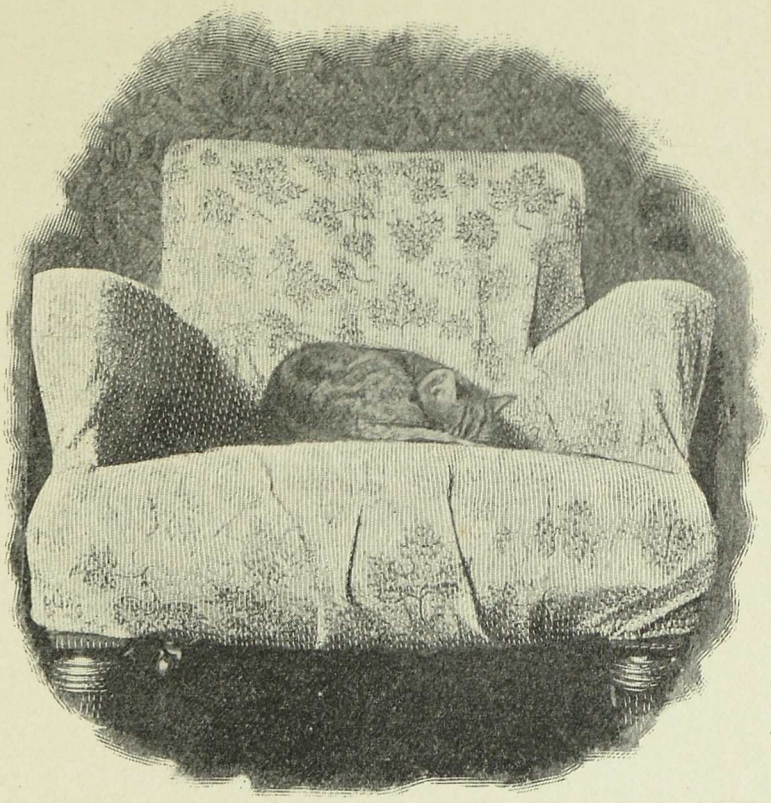
The praise of selfishness.

to repose. Her unobtrusive *bonhomie* might well be a lesson to those fussy altruists whose unintermittent efforts to make their neighbours comfortable suffer neither themselves nor their victims to enjoy a moment's repose. It is an ennobling reflection that one of the best ways of making other people comfortable is to be comfortable yourself, or at any rate to seem so.

Cottles, perhaps, pushed this feline disdain to an extreme. In his hands, toleration verged upon intolerance. You might caress him, but you left him cold ; if you stroked him he cared not for it—nay, he turned and stared at you in amazement that an apparently sensible being could possibly be so foolish. Such were his feelings ; and, in case of misunderstanding, it was ever his use to select the big armchair for his siesta. It was the most comfortable seat in the room—it was only reasonable, therefore, to suppose that it was set for him ; if not, it should have been. But when the cook put a blue ribbon round his neck and called him "Tiny," he went near to having a fit, and seemed overwhelmed in a "quagmire of disgust." Perhaps—who knows ?—it was from that moment that we must date the decline which

overshadowed his later years. He ceased to clean himself, the red tabby coat grew steadily darker, till such time as he threw off his old coat and the dirt together, like a London plane-tree. His eyes became affected ; he went to pieces. But not even for his obsequies would he be beholden to the human race. When the " vet." arrived to administer prussic acid, Cottles had withdrawn himself into obscurity, and died impenitent. Requies*cat*.

Care killed a cat.



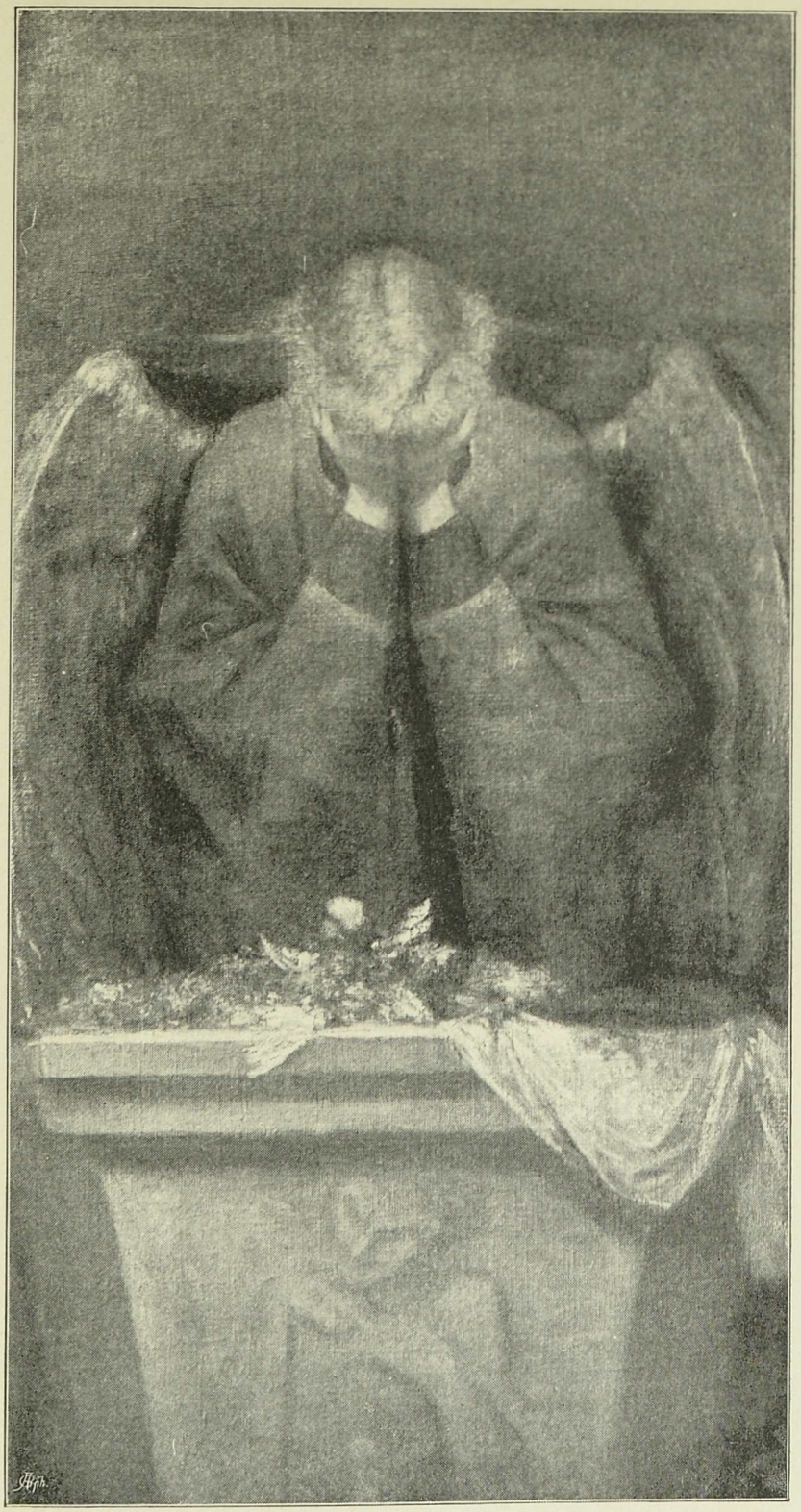
CHAPTER VII

BIRDS AND THEIR ENEMIES

Ye gentle birdes! the world's faire ornament,
And heaven's glorie.—SPENSER.

IT will, perhaps, be thought that an account of "animals I have known" should include some mention of birds. They are more frequently kept in captivity than any other animals, and they interest a greater number of people. And that interest has been greatly intensified since we have learnt something of their origin and know that they are descended from those same feeble and futile "reptiles," of whose life and conversation I have already said so much, and who are, to all appearance, their exact opposites in the animal world.

Reptiles are of the earth earthy, whether you regard the nimble little lizard, whose too feeble legs are sufficient only for spurts and sprints, or the squatting frog, or the cowering toad,



Photograph by Frederick Hollyer.

The Shuddering Angel (G. F. Watts).

or the laboriously waddling crocodile, or the sluggish tortoise, dragging a whole fortification on his back, and living his life so slowly that he has been known to take 200 years to get through it; or the grovelling snake, who has abandoned the use of legs altogether, as if to draw closer yet to the dust. "As the bird is the clothed power of the air," says Ruskin,[1] "so this is the clothed power of the dust; as the bird is the symbol of the spirit of life, so this of the grasp and sting of death."

And yet it is one of the greatest of the marvels that Evolution has revealed to us, that it was from these same grovelling reptiles that birds had their origin; that, in the fossil records of life, one step takes us from the earth-bound lizard to the soaring bird. Fossil birds, like the *Hesperornis* had been found, possessed of teeth, which hinted at a reptilian origin; and Pterodactyls (some of the Cretaceous specimens being 20 feet in expanse of wing) were evidently flying reptiles, though they flew only with a membrane, like that of a bat, stretched between the body and the bones of its legs, arms, and fingers; but it was

[1] "Queen of the Air."

not till 1861 that, in the Jurassic strata of Bavaria, the oldest real bird of all was found—the *Archæopteryx*—the most reptile-like of birds, or the most bird-like of reptiles—that at one bound clears the gulf between them. What his flight was like we cannot tell—possibly not much more than a flitting from tree to tree; certainly his descendants have vastly improved on him. Even now, there are a few birds, like the penguin, that cannot fly in the air at all, but only in the water; and others, like the ostrich, the rhea, the cassowary, and the emu, that can at most use their wings, when they have them, to help themselves along as they run. But before man and his gun, these, except the ostrich, who is bred for his feathers, are fast going to join the giant moa (*Dinornis ingens*), who has not long become extinct.

But is there anything more wonderful in the story of animals than this change from the reptile to the bird?

For "birds," says Professor Thomson,[1] "represent among animals the climax of activity, an index to which may be found in their high temperature, from 2°—14° Fahr. higher than that

[1] "The Study of Animal Life," p. 265.

of mammals. In many other ways they rank high, for whether we consider the muscles which move the wings in flight, the skeleton which so marvellously combines strength with lightness, the breathing powers perfected and economized by a set of balloons around the lungs, or the heart which drives and receives the warm blood, we recognize that birds share with mammals the position of the highest animals. And while it is true that the brains of birds are not wrinkled with thought like those of mammals, and that the close connection between mother and offspring characteristic of most mammals is absent in birds, it may be urged by those who know their joyousness that birds feel more if they think less, while the patience and solicitude connected with nest-making and brooding testifies to the strength of their parental love. Usually living in varied and beautiful surroundings, birds have keen eyes and sharp ears, tutored to a sense of beauty, as we may surely conclude from their cradles and love-songs. They love much and joyously, and live a life remarkably free and restless, qualities symbolized by the voice of the air in their throat, and by the sunshine of their plumes. There is more than zoological truth," he concludes, "in saying that in the bird 'the breath or spirit is more full than in any other creature, and the earth-power least,' or in thinking of birds as the purest embodiments of Athene of the air."

"The bird," says Ruskin, "is little more than a drift of the air brought into form by plumes; the air is in all its quills, it breathes through its whole frame and flesh, and glows with air in its flying, like a blown flame: it rests upon the air, subdues it, surpasses it, out-races it;

—*is* the air, conscious of itself, conquering itself, ruling itself." [1]

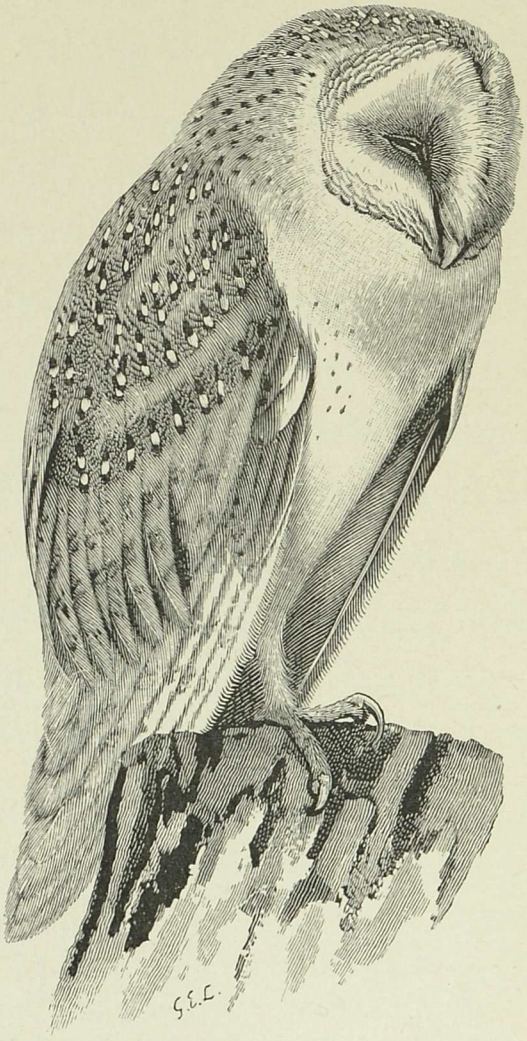
But the wonders and beauties of bird-life are innumerable—the structure of their plumage and their wings, their powers of flight, their personal beauty and love-antics, their architectural genius, their songs, their migration—"an ever-present conundrum to be everlastingly given up." But it does not follow that birds are to be recommended for keeping in cages, where, indeed, their most interesting characteristics cannot be studied at all. No one ever stated the cage question better than our own Chaucer, gracious lover, as he was, of all simple, natural pleasures :—

> Take any brid, and put it in a cage,
> And do all thin entente, and thy corage,
> To foster it tendrely with mete and drinke
> Of alle deintees that thou canst bethinke,
> And kepe it al so clenely as thou may ;
> Although the cage of gold be never so gay,
> Yet had this brid, by twenty thousand fold,
> Lever in a forest, that is wilde and cold,
> Gon eten wormes, and swiche wretchedness.
> For ever this brid will don his besinesse
> To escape out of his cage whan that he may :
> His liberty the brid desireth ay.[2]

[1] "Queen of the Air." [2] The Manciple's Tale.

And, apart from their love of liberty—the key-note of bird-life,—one can have little appetite for imprisoning birds and endangering their happiness or their lives, after hearing every day of the wholesale and pitiless destruction to which they are now exposed over a great part of the earth's surface. All the little birds —most of whom do incalculably more good than harm, have to pay for the misdeeds of the sparrow, who requires to be rigidly kept down, though certainly not exterminated. Hawks and owls are indiscriminately shot by many farmers and keepers, whose best friends most of them are in the destruction of rats and mice. Lord Lilford, who knew as much about living birds as any man of our time, declared that the fittest place for a wilful destroyer of any owl in the country would be an asylum for idiots ; and in the report of the Departmental Committee of the Board of Agriculture on Field Voles in 1893, it is stated " that white and brown owls prey upon these pests, which caused much mischief on hill farms in Scotland ; and, in their two schedules of the natural enemies of the vole, the committee place in the first category of

'vole-killers, harmless or nearly so to sheep, crops, and game, owls of all sorts, buzzards, kestrels, and the smaller sea-gulls.'"



Then there is the lark-eater, the plover's-egg eater, and the bird-catcher. Of all the birds who save an amount of labour that no farmer in England could ever bestow, none are more valuable than the

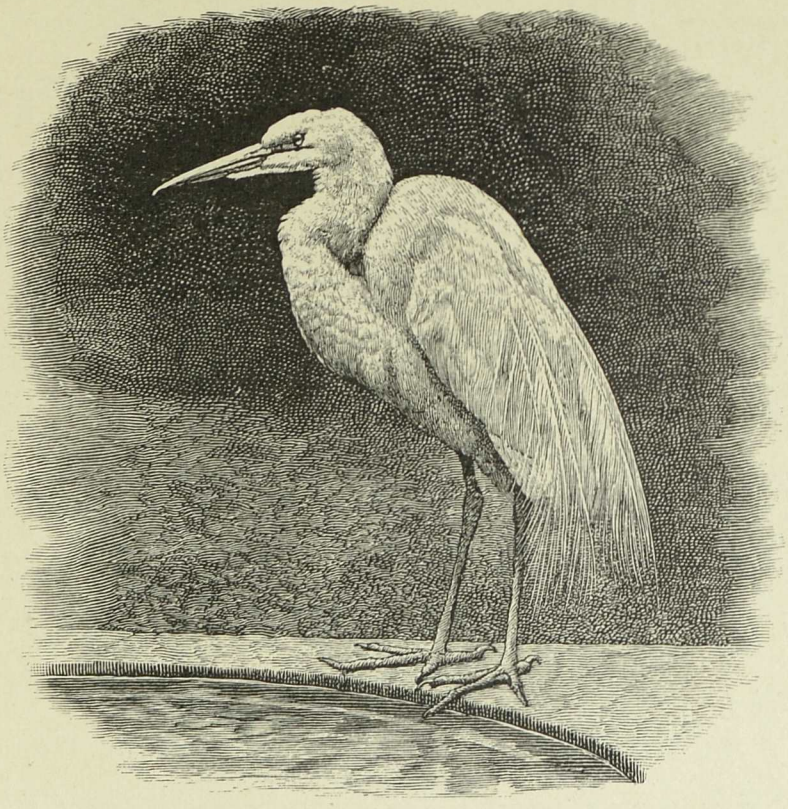
linnet, the lark, and above all, the goldfinch. All three are trapped by hundreds of thousands. Bird-catchers take up their station at certain points on the South Coast, as at Fairlight or Rottingdean, by which vast flocks pass every year on their way to winter-quarters. With a decoy-bird and great wide nets scores are taken at a time. Their captor opens his net, wrings the necks of the hens and puts the cocks in a cage. Four hundred dozen a week are reckoned a small average for October. It has been known to reach 600 dozen. They are all sent up the same night to Whitechapel or Seven Dials, where "a fortnight later some 60 per cent. die miserably in little cages not much bigger than a brick." The supply of goldfinches has naturally greatly diminished, and we import largely from Germany. This is not to be wondered at when we read that in 1860 the annual average of goldfinches caught round about Worthing was 1154 dozens, all cock-birds!

And there is the private collector, who would, no doubt, as Mr. Ruskin said, shoot an angel if one came down, for the sake of his skin and feathers. It is they very largely who have made our uncommon birds rare and our

rare birds extinct. The rarer the bird, the louder the hue and cry raised after it the moment it appears. If the bird is not picked off by a collector, he will probably meet, at least, some of the agents of the trader who supplies the collector's wants. It is certain that private collections "have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished." Surely no man can pretend to the name of a naturalist who, knowing the rapid diminution of our most beautiful species, thinks of nothing but how to kill one more individual, that it may appear in his own collection ; especially when there are so many fine public collections easily available for purposes of reference or study. Some, at least, there are, on the other hand, once enthusiastic collectors, who recognize the danger and the changed circumstances of the day, and have entirely abandoned the gun for the field-glass. A stuffed bird is, after all, a poor caricature of the living animal. What is best worth study in any class of animals is surely that which is most characteristic of that class—in birds, undoubtedly, the gift of song, the gift of flight, and their beautiful care for their young. Yet we silence the song of a bird that we may acquire the skin

from which it issued; his wings we smash with a shot that we may admire the means of his flight, and his eggs we purloin from the nest to prevent his being born at all.

But of course the chief object of the present massacre of birds is for the adornment of women's



hats and bonnets. The story of the little white egret or heron must be known to most people by this time. The exquisite skeleton feathers, which grow from between the wings, and supply the "aigrette" or so-called "osprey," appear only in the breeding-season, and are at their best when

the young are fully fledged, but not yet able to fly. It is then, while endeavouring to protect their young, that they are shot down almost to extermination-point, over great districts like Florida, and for every little handful of feathers that is taken, a nestful of young birds is left to die miserably of starvation, crying for the mother who will never return.

Not so well known, perhaps, are the almost incredible records of slaughter in the case of other birds. Here are the words of Mrs. Lemon (Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Birds), at a meeting held at Stafford House, on April 29th, 1897.

"In moving the resolution, 'That ladies be urged to discourage the wearing of feathers in cases where the procuring of them involves cruelty,' I should very much like to describe a visit I paid ten days ago to some sale rooms in the City, where were displayed, previous to being put up to auction, a large consignment of bright-plumaged birds, as they had come from the docks. I went through three large rooms, each of them as full as they could hold of cases piled high with birds of paradise, green parrots, hundreds and thousands of them, roller birds

with their exquisite blue plumage, regents in rich contrasts of yellow and black, boxes and boxes full of wee humming birds, little creatures not much bigger than a moth, which in life are like shimmering gems as they dart from flower to flower after the insects which form their food. Then came hundreds of bundles of egret and heron plumes, the *nuptial* plumage of the birds, worn only in the breeding season—so the sight of these brought visions of heaps of parent birds, who, after a few handfuls of coveted feathers had been plucked out, had been left to fester in the sun and wind in sight of their orphaned young that cry for food and are not fed. Truly a sight which might make an angel weep!

"The numbers I saw prepared for that one sale were as follows :—

Osprey Plumes.	11,352 ozs.
Peacock Feathers	215,051 bundles
Birds of Paradise	2,362
Indian Parrots	228,289
Humming Birds	116,490
Roller and Kingfishers	48,759
Owls and Hawks	7,163

"A similar sale took place in February; there will be another in July, another in October, and so on; and the same thing is taking place month

by month at many another auction, for I have only described one out of dozens."

We read that at one auction in London there were sold 404,389 West Indian and Brazilian bird skins and 356,389 East Indian, besides thousands of pheasants and birds of Paradise; that our swallows are caught in vast numbers, on the South Coast of France, in nets, while on migration; that in a recent summer, "in two forests in France, 15,000 nightingales, fly-catchers, and other insect-eating birds were captured to supply the demands of fashion"; that the incredible slaughter of sea-birds may be gauged by the fact that one London house ordered and received 10,000 pairs of wings, and that when these birds are shot down it constantly happens that "the wings are wrenched off during life and the mangled bird is left to die slowly of wounds, thirst, and starvation." After a course of such stupefying facts and figures as these, it remains only for a mere brutal male to let all wild birds severely alone. The many birds that I keep, therefore, I prefer to keep on a strictly autonomous system. Their quarters they have free leave to choose for themselves and they have one and all elected to be "blue-

domers."[1] To see my skuas, especially my great skuas, I have to go to the Shetlands, and my eider-ducks are mostly in Iceland. There was, it is true, a snow-bunting who tried to come back with me from Iceland on the steamer, but, trying to land without taking my advice as to the distance to Thurso, he fell into the sea and was drowned. On the other hand, I have only been able to visit my rollers on a ruined castle near Seville, and then could do no more than stay to a pic-nic lunch with them ; while I was able to superintend the movements of my lesser kestrels (from a respectful distance beneath of 350 feet) for a whole week, as they wheeled in thousands round the lovely belfry of the Giralda. I once kept a hoopoe, too, (for nearly a minute) on a P. and O. Liner near Gibraltar. Again, to see my storks, I have to go as far as Holstein or the mouth of the Elbe, while at Heligoland I have come across quite a number of different birds. There, however, they are apt to be even more unceremonious than usual, leaving the country altogether before one has time to get on speaking terms. There are certain disadvantages

[1] A blue-domer—"*one who says that he can worship his Creator better under the blue dome of heaven than anywhere else.*"

in keeping your menagerie in such a scattered condition, but, after all, the great majority of them I keep in the garden and the woods and lanes immediately round me. Some, at least, are particularly anxious that I shall not drop their acquaintance : the nuthatches come and call out at my window for their nuts, if I do not put them out as December goes on; and they and the great tits get through some fifteen pounds of nuts before the winter is out. The tom-tits, coal-tits, and occasionally the marsh-tits, without actually coming to ask, like the robins and nuthatches, are evidently prowling round, for they swoop down without delay on the expected bacon and scraps. With the sparrows alone (in the country : the London bird has my best wishes) my relations are a little strained—greedy, rowdy, pugnacious little termagants, who gobble up everything while the other birds are considering whether it is safe to come near, and, worse than all, drive away the far more useful and beautiful martins and seize their nests. I can save something from their maws by putting the tits' food at the end of a string, or long stick at a steep angle, but it needs more time than I am master of to

thin them down in the most merciful way, by persistently removing their nests as fast as they build them.

With the rest of them my acquaintance is kept up through a binocular—a perfect little instrument of high power, so thin that it goes into a side-pocket, and so light (of aluminium) that it can be wielded rapidly and with one hand and the birds be followed with it in their flight. In this way all the common birds may be stalked and identified in the course of a few springs, and a knowledge of their songs acquired. Here there is room for all "collectors," and a "collection" of songs is a possession for ever. Your enjoyment from the birds is indefinitely increased and you will recognise every bird around you for the future by his voice, without ever raising your eyes to look at them. In four weeks from to-day (February 25) the chiff-chaff, first of the migrants, will be here and the real spring chorus will begin. The chiff-chaffs and the nuthatches will be talking away in the tops of the trees, and the starlings be crying and gasping and wheezing on the roofs and towers in a state of uproarious ecstasy. The blackbirds will be whistling the mellowest of bird-notes in that peerless style of

theirs with its masterly deliberation ; and the thrush, with less perfect *timbre*, but far wider range—custom cannot stale his infinite variety—will "warble unchidden, unbidden," and pause between each phrase to think what he will give us next, as the robin does with his plaintive reedy song.

The blackcap will fling off his limpid notes in a fine careless rapture : they rise sparkling into the air like a fountain (as Charles Kingsley said) and fall suddenly back again to their source. The garden-warbler, shyest of birds, will try laboriously to emulate his first-cousin the blackcap, but will never quite succeed ; the willow-wren will be ringing his chime of tinkling fairy-bells ; and the wren spin off his rapid trill, like a bird out of a musical snuff-box, and come to the same abrupt end,—you can almost hear the snap of the spring. The tits will have their little songs too,

> "Gay and polite, a cheerful cry,
> *Chic-chicadeedee !* saucy note
> Out of sound heart and merry throat,
> As if it said, "Good day, good sir !
> Fine afternoon, old passenger !
> Happy to meet you in these places,
> Where January brings few faces."

The whitethroat will mean well, as usual, but

his immense efforts have a rather ludicrous result. The hedge-sparrow even now, and for some time, has been making the most pathetic attempts to be really brilliant, and, when nest-building begins, he will sometimes almost succeed. The chaffinch, too, has been practising assiduously for the last week, with a view to recovering that best known of all our bird-songs. He could *not* remember how the last part went; but yesterday he got it and will now go on till July exhibiting that extreme mechanical precision and dexterity, which, like other second rate musicians, he unfortunately mistakes for high art. In this respect he will be run hard by the yellowhammer, who will keep it up along the dustiest roads all August. If you find the long drawn notes of the greenfinch somewhat harsh, as I do not, listen at least for his call-note, and I am mistaken if you will not find it the sweetest of all the calls. It may take you a good deal of stalking to make him out when leaves are green. Is there any other country in the world where you may have all this music for the trouble of listening? But they are all eclipsed by the skylark and the nightingale. The skylark is up almost before dawn, in his wild enthusiasm for light and life, to see what

can be keeping the sun down there at this time ; and in the very last of the evening twilight must really have one more climb—just one more—to make sure that the sun has really disappeared and that he must leave the nightingale in possession of the field. Not that the nightingale by any means disdains to "sing by day, when every goose is cackling," and, with Portia's leave, is still far "better a musician than the wren ;" but then only will he take the hearts of the world by storm when the rest have fallen silent and he has set in steadily for the night.

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

THE END.

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