

ILLUSTRATED BY J. A. SHEPHERD.

NEVER trust appearances, says the wise old aunt with a sour face of her own. But the precept is futile.

Everybody does trust appearances, every day of his life, with varying success. For he who never trusts appearances is as likely to be mistaken as he who always does so. His is the fate of all who live by rule, unaided by the natural gumption that points out the occasion for exception. One rule there is, however, that all may go by, wise or foolish. Never trust a black animal. The black cat is a witch, as everybody knows. The black leopard is worse than a witch. The witch may stick pins in your effigy, in the hope that you will feel the pain; but the black leopard will stick claws and teeth into

your actual person, and so put the pain beyond all question. There must be some reason for the general human horror of all

black things. Black was the mourning colour among the Romans, who got it from the Egyptians, who had it from the beginning. A bad day is a black-letter day. A *mauvais sujet* is a black sheep, and we put him in our black list; and so, being in our black books, we black-ball him at our club. We speak of Black Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or any other day, when it is a day marked by evil hap. Wicked sorcery was the black art; the condemning judge wears a black cap, and did so far back as the Black Assize, when so many died of the black death; and even people not altogether superstitious regard it as very unlucky to



"DEATH."

be knocked down by a black-guard. Now, all this black smoke is not without its original fire; and that there is something in this universal dislike of black, the negative of colour, is evidenced by the generally satanic character of all black animals.

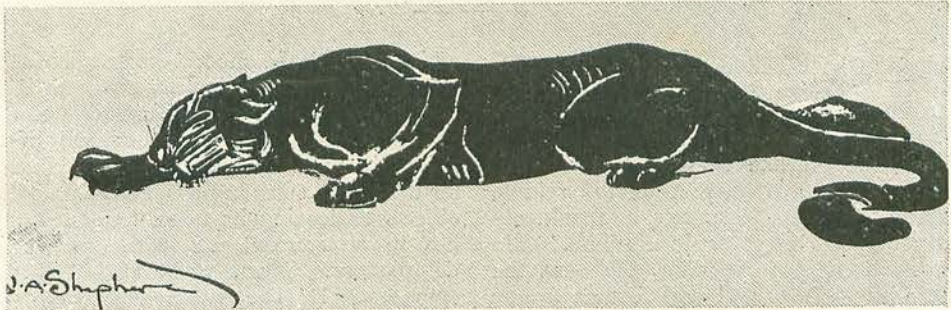
The black leopard is the most savage and untractable of all quadrupeds. Do you remember "Death," the black leopard in Eugene Sue's "Wandering Jew," and the horrible, goggle-eyed Englishman who followed it about, anxious some day to see



"SATAN."

and wants to fight it, to gnaw it, to tear it to rags and splinters; and he is staring, dancing mad, because he can't get at the world to do it. Approach his cage. He is probably raging somewhere in shadow, but, as you come near, he starts up and turns toward you, looking like—Satan. "Ah," he says to himself, "a human

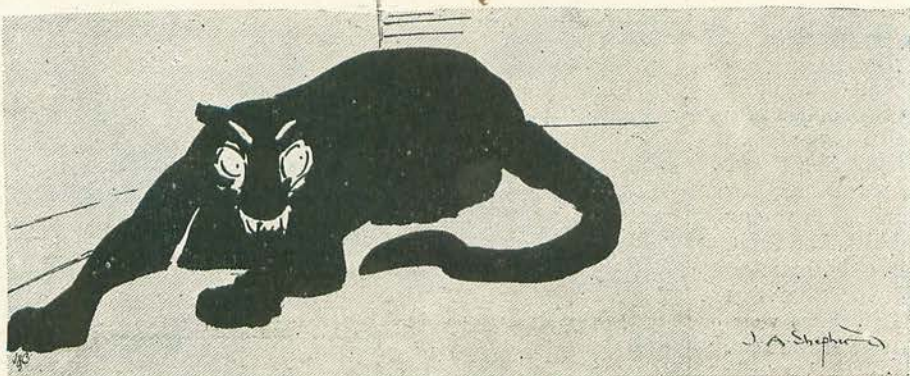
creature! Oh, to tear, bite, claw, crunch, and break him to scraps! But, soft, perhaps he'll come a little nearer—Perhaps near enough to grab. G-r-r-r! I'll crawl across to the other



"G-R-R-R! LET ME GET ROUND TO YOU!"

it eat its tamer? "Death" is no whit overdrawn—rather underdone, indeed. There is a black leopard at the Zoo now; his cheerful name is Satan. Satan hates the whole world,

side." But, no; tempting as the prospect seems, you refrain from offering him a bite of your fingers. He lies there, black and deadly, his yellow eyes ablaze, ready to bounce on



"COME INSIDE THOSE BARS!"



"EFFERVESCING."

you—if only those bars suddenly melt away! But they don't melt, and you come no nearer. Then Satan flings himself at the bars with a yell, and flies up and down and over and over about his cage, like nothing but a black leopard with about three thousand seidlitz powders, swallowed separately, and suddenly effervescing all together inside him. He claws and bites at the walls, the bars, the floor, even his own tail and feet, in frantic rage at his inability to get near you. And, finally, he rolls over on his back, half-choking, and crunches in his teeth a mouthful of straw snapped from the ground, just to make you understand what would happen to your head if it were where the straw is. And altogether Satan's manners are not of a patient and long-suffering sort. There are meeker creatures, even among the rabbits. And Satan is the only member of the cat tribe that absolutely goes vegetarian with rage. Other black leopards are much as Satan is;

and altogether the most animated job a Zoo keeper or a menagerie man ever gets is the turning of a black leopard out of one cage into another. This, more especially if the animal be just brought from another place—for then, the surroundings being strange, it objects to leaving its present quarters, and has to be smoked out with smouldering damp straw. Then, when at last it does come—well! The proceedings are more amusing if viewed from a distance.

Now, zoologists tell us that the black leopard is of precisely the same species as



"VEGETARIAN WITH RAGE."



"NEVERMORE!"

the ordinary spotted quality, differing from it only as a black cat differs from a tabby. So that it is plain that the black leopard's extra dose of original sin arises from his colour alone. Still, it is curious that the black leopard comes from a particular part—Java and the Malay Peninsula—and is never found among the variegated leopards of India. These leopards are really comparatively decent, tamable, and often friendly—when you know them. But the black leopard—never.

It is a blessed relief to turn from Satan to make friends with the comparatively soft-hearted lions and tigers who are his neighbours. It is with difficulty that you restrain yourself from rubbing their heads to make them purr, or dangling a piece of string for them to run after. Beside Satan, they are kitten-like. And all because he's black.

Another black rascal is the raven. A joker, certainly, but one of melancholy exterior. What creature in the whole world could Poe have better chosen than the raven to say "Nevermore"? The raven's

character and surroundings are an odd mixture of the dreary and the comic. The raven seems always to be "in at the death," so to speak. What blasted oak, what haunted castle, what gallows at a cross-road, without its raven? Any scene-painter who dabbed in a blasted oak or a gallows without the proper raven sitting on it would be sacked in ignominy, and sent to learn the elements of his trade. And if an art-editor commissioned an artist to illustrate a story with a haunted castle in it, do you think that art-editor would accept a drawing of that castle absolutely bare of ravens? Not he; and quite right, too. Oh, a sinister, sly, melancholy, grim-visaged, and, withal, mischievous and humorous bird is the raven. He cannot do as much damage, perhaps, as a black leopard on the loose, but devastation and the gloating over it form his mission on earth. Thus it is that nothing but his sense of humour saves him from total, neck-and-crop destruction. For people there are who buy the raven and keep him as a pet. He is getting rarer in this country than he

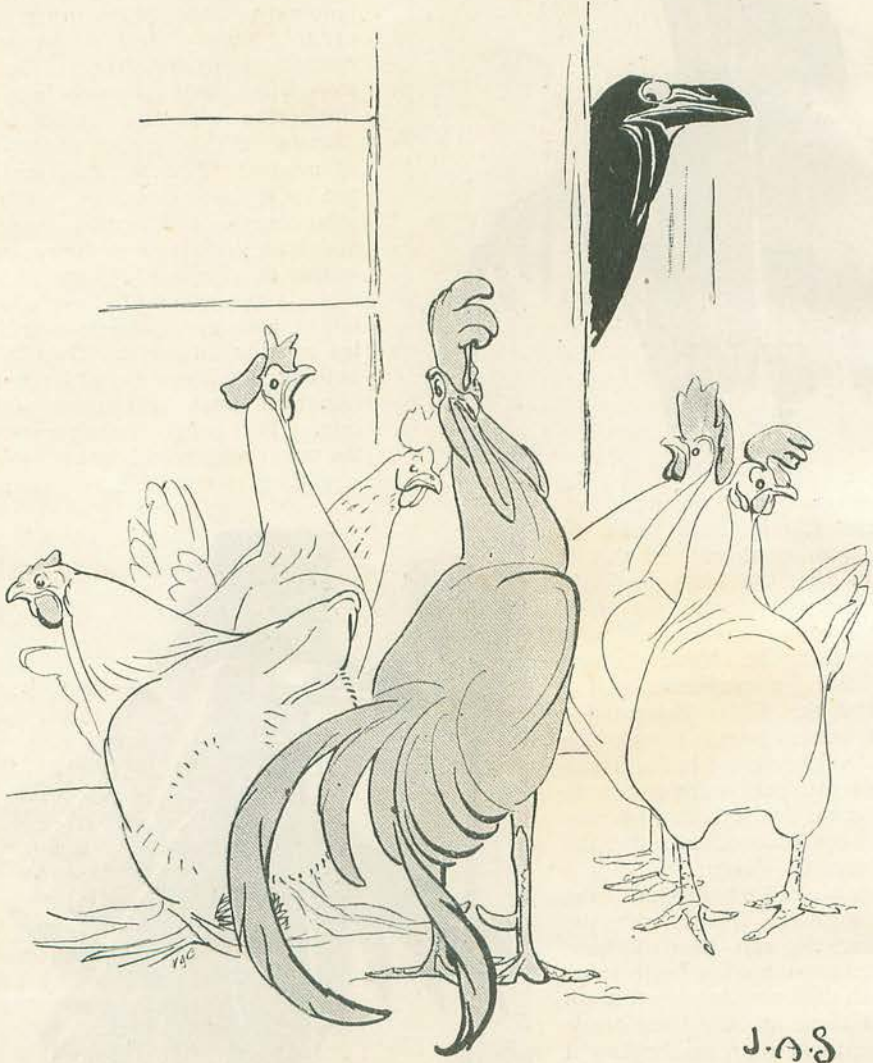


"IN AT THE DEATH."

was, and usually he is expensive to buy. But having bought him, the best thing to do next is to give him away instantly; if possible, give him to an enemy—but, anyway, give him to somebody. Then you will limit your loss to his original price.

To look, however, entirely on the bright side of raven-keeping, you may get a certain

ing, begin to count your eggs by hundreds—to say nothing of unhatched chickens—and the hens themselves dash about madly, anxious to discover the unknown champion egg-layer among them. The raven will make a fool of every other creature on the premises—more particularly yourself. He will creep close behind the cat, and startle it with a sudden



"WHO LAID THAT EGG?"

amount of fun for your money if you are a millionaire, and don't mind giving up all your worldly possessions to the raven to do as he likes with. There will be certain jokes with the fowls. He will learn to crow and to cluck before he learns anything else, and he will cluck away slyly behind a door, till you, listen-

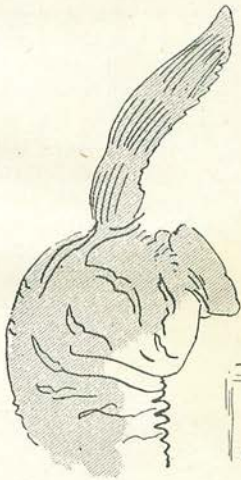
bark. He will call the dog, in your own voice, from various invisible points of the stable-roof, till something approaching hydrophobia takes possession of the worried quadruped. He will quarrel with the parrot, and pluck feathers from its tail. He will tell horses to "Get over there," and then to



"HALLOA! MOONING AGAIN!"

get back again, till they sweat and plunge. He will chase terrified housemaids and peck at their heels. He will dog the steps of the gardener stealthily as he beds out rare and valuable plants, and he will tear them up and drag them all

to be a valuable possession of yours, which you are anxious to keep alive and in good condition. When he has killed a mouse he will not straightaway eat it, as a cat would do; he will carefully separate it into joints and hang them round the wires of his own habitation, in the manner of a butcher's shop—a leg, a shoulder, another leg, the head, the brisket, and so on. He will gloat over these for some little while before he begins his meal, and call passers-by to admire his stock. And he will altogether be a big, sardonic, terrible, demoniac bird, and—black.



"BOW-WOW-WOW!"

"Hallos, hallos, hallos! What's the matter here? Keep up your spirits! Never say die! Bow-wow-wow! I'm a devil; I'm a devil;

about the premises with triumphant croaks. He will hop in at the kitchen window, and leave a few scattered bones where the cook placed a newly trussed fowl; and if the cook doesn't moderate her objections to the meal, he will as likely as not top up with a little dessert off her fingers. True, he will also catch an occasional mouse; but, probably, only because he imagines mice

I'm a devil! Hurrah!" shouted Grip, the raven in "Barnaby Rudge." Now, this Grip was Dickens's own raven, which died through eating white paint—if only it had been black paint, probably there would have been no trouble. Now, an ordinary man owning a raven, and so fortunate as to have it die, would probably—echoing the "Nevermore" of Poe's particular raven—cut him-



"WHERE'S THAT DOG?"

self off from all raven society for the future. But the great novelist, daring Fate, bought another raven, which died (with its eye on the meat roasting in the kitchen) after a liberal meal of glazier's putty. Again, if this had only been tar, or black cobbler's wax, the raven would probably have lived to vex the world for many years. The virgin purity of white paint, the pale innocence of glazier's putty, agree not with the sombre blackness and sophisticated devilry of the raven. He is another of the creatures in silhouette.

Truly there is something uncanny in a black cat, if only you look at it (remembering tales of witchcraft and *the Black Cat* tale—Poe's) till the creature hypnotizes you. It is said to be lucky for a black cat to come into the house; but if it goes out again in company with a filleted sole, the case is altered. And all authorities agree that it is unlucky to fall over a black cat and break your nose. In the old days, when witchcraft was still a respectable and remunerative profession, the black cat was found to be a useful, cheap, portable, and convenient form in which to put up one's familiar demon. Moreover, it was an equally useful, portable, cheap, and convenient form to adopt oneself when pressed for space, anxious to preserve incognito, or desirous of seeing in the dark. Though it must have been a trifle trying to a witch of weak stomach to have to play up to the character by eating mice. The devilish atmosphere about it has made the black

cat also commercially useful in the trade of novel-writing. If ever you want to invest a character with mysterious, thrilling, occult, and not altogether human attributes, you put a black cat handy to climb about the character's knees and neck and rub against his (or her) legs. That strikes the occult note at once. The character immediately becomes mystic, a dabbler in forgotten lore, a creature of magnetic power—perhaps even

a Freemason or an Oddfellow. Or if it be a woman, she stands proclaimed a witch from the beginning, and the cat her familiar spirit. The very first professional implement a wizard "has in" (from the stores nowadays, no doubt) is a black cat, as big as possible, with eyes warranted to gleam unceasingly, and the proper improved phosphorescent back, guaranteed to light a pipe when rubbed the wrong way. It comes even before the extinguisher hat (black, of course), and the black velvet dressing-gown with triangles and skulls all over it, and the indubitable old black-letter book (with more triangles) to be turned over attentively while the wizard looks sideways at the visitor's umbrella handle to read his name on the silver band, and astound him presently by his knowledge.

The Egyptians knew many things. As we have seen, they knew all about black as a mourning colour long before the first orthodox British funeral started from the original British undertaker's shop. He must have



"'I'M A DEVIL!' SHOUTED GRIP."



"PLUTO!"



"PLUTO THE SECOND'S TRADE MARK."

been a great genius, by-the-by, that original undertaker. Only a genius could have foreseen the possibilities of black as an implement of trade in the way that undertaker did; only a genius could have handled it with such mastery to conjure the last coin from the shallow pocket of dire affliction. Black horses, black palls, black coffins, black vehicles, black feathers, black weepers, black hatbands, black clothes—all useless except for the occasion, all to be paid for again and again and again, with a black settling-day fittingly to crown the grief of the bereaved every time! But, as to the Egyptians, and

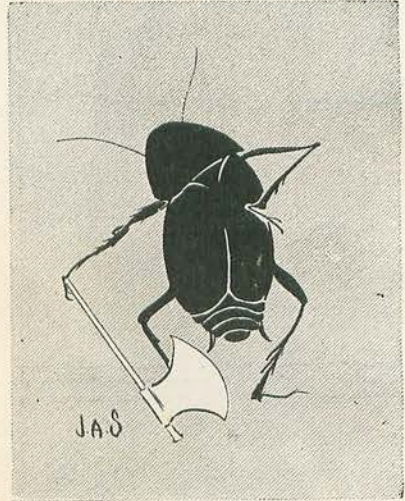
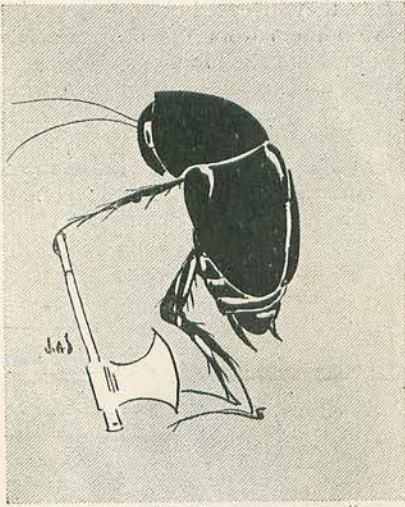


"PLUTO THE SECOND."

as to cats, they invented our cat superstitions, or derived them from the misty beginning, even as they did the functions of black. He who killed a black cat in old Egypt, whether by design or by accident, was killed himself. For the Egyptians knew many things, and doubtless the proverb, "Care killed the cat," was familiar among them. "Begone dull care," sang the hilarious Pharaoh.

Edgar Allan Poe was past-master of horror and mystery, and he well knew the value of plenty of black in his animals to get his effect. He handled the black cat in fiction as it had never been handled before, and has never been since. He did not debase it to a mere accessory, by way of imparting mystery to a mere human proprietor.

The human proprietor was no more than a common drunken ruffian with his decent qualities drunk out of him. The cat Pluto was the central figure and hero of the story; or perhaps we should say the two cats, Pluto the first with his one eye and his total blackness, and Pluto the second with *his* one eye and the white trade-mark on his chest—the gallows! Read the story in a dim room on a black night, and enjoy the black horrors, assisted, if possible, by the immediate presence of many black-beetles. The black-beetle himself, by the way, is only



"THE FURTIVE EXECUTIONER."

one more instance of the original proposition — never trust a black animal. Who would trust a black-beetle? Look at his furtive, murderous, round-shouldered deadliness of shape — a masked, black-clad headsman among insects. Nobody would trust a black-beetle, for he is doubly false, even to his own name. For he is neither black nor a beetle, say the accurate persons — he is a cockroach; and then he is neither a cock nor a roach.

Human existence, taking its occasional sup of horror from black animals, as it goes along—at

the end black animals, in black velvet and black feathers, triumph over its end. There's a deal of mystery about an undertaker's horse. How does it grow its mane and tail? It is whispered that the tail is often brought up tenderly by hand at the upholsterer's,

and grafted on with a bent hair-pin. But false hair or none, the undertaker's horse triumphs in the end. "They break us, drive us, ride us," said the horses at Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral. "Ill-treat, abuse, and maim us for their pleasure. But they die; hurrah! they die!"



"HURRAH! THEY DIE!"