



CAGE BIRDS

Illustrated
by
J A Shepherd

IV.



I DID remember the dogs who ate their railway tickets, having been much amused by

gentleman's coffee-pot hat, for that had gone, but from a myriad of wire cages. It was a cage-bird show! All that had gone before had plainly been delusion, due to the uncanny glamour of the brown Egyptian and his coffee-pot hat. I had imagined

the story in *Punch* many years ago; I turned to tell the brown gentleman this, but found that he had gone. Still, it seemed that I could hear the seething and boiling and singing of the coffee-pot he wore on his head, louder than ever. The noise increased wonderfully. Thousands of coffee-pots and kettles were hissing and singing about me. What was it? It *couldn't* be the Skye terriers. Where were the Skye terriers? And the other dogs? Where were the mastiffs, the bulldogs, the St. Bernards, the poodles, and the silken hangings, pillows, embroideries, *combs*, brushes, and smelling-bottles provided by their loving mistresses? They were gone; and all this hissing, and singing, and twittering came not from the brown

cocks and hens and dogs and geese, where actually there had been but goldfinches, canaries, nightingales, parrots, and love-birds. Come, I felt that it was time to steady my notions of things, and fix firmly in my mind that this was a show of cage-birds.

"You're not quite right even there," piped a thin but self-confident voice from a cage immediately before me. "Canaries are the important persons here. Look at the catalogue — 'CANARIES and British and Foreign Cage-birds. 'CANARIES' very large, and all the rest of it as small as the printer can manage. That's right and proper. *I'm* a canary."

And I perceived that I



"I'M A CANARY."



SCOTCH FANCY.

was addressed by a spruce little yellow bird of upright carriage. He opened the door of his cage and closed it behind him in a casual sort of way, stowing his latch-key among his tail-feathers as he hopped on to the roof.

"Come along," he said. "I see you're a stranger, and a bit bashful. You needn't be shy. I'll show you round. Company's a bit mixed here, but really very decent crowd as a whole—barring those black-guard sparrows that get in from outside. There's Norwich, Lancashire, Scotch fancy, London fancy, Belgian, Yorkshire, lizards, and cinnamons. I'm Yorkshire. Then, I believe,

there *are* varieties among the riff-raff—bull-finches and jackdaws and parrots and such—but, of course, they don't matter." He cocked his head superciliously and put his umbrella under his wing. "Come along," he proceeded, "I'll introduce you to one or two of the right sort. That fellow over there, who looks as though he would pitch forward on his nose,



SCOTCH FANCY (VARIEGATED).

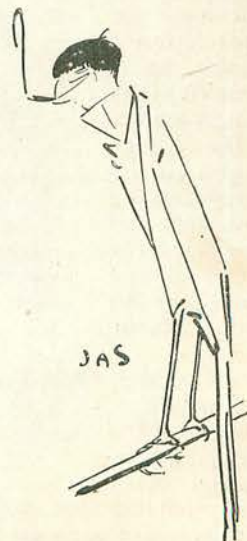


NEW LONDON FANCY.

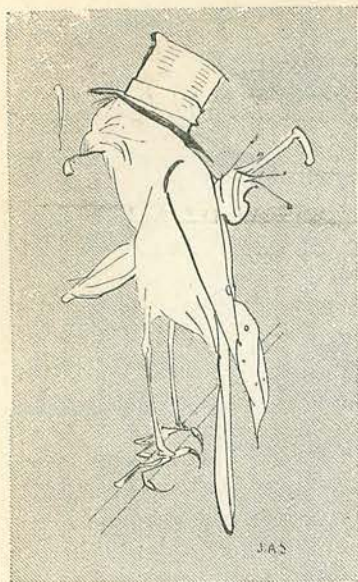
is a Belgian; and that other one, that looks like falling off the back of the perch, is a Scotch fancy."

I looked at the "Scotch fancy," and was startled. It was, so to speak, a semi-circular canary, which, if only it grew twice as long, would make a complete hoop, beak to tail-tip. It would seem that somebody with a large mouth had taken an immense bite out of his chest. I ventured to ask my guide where the rest of the unfortunate bird had got to.

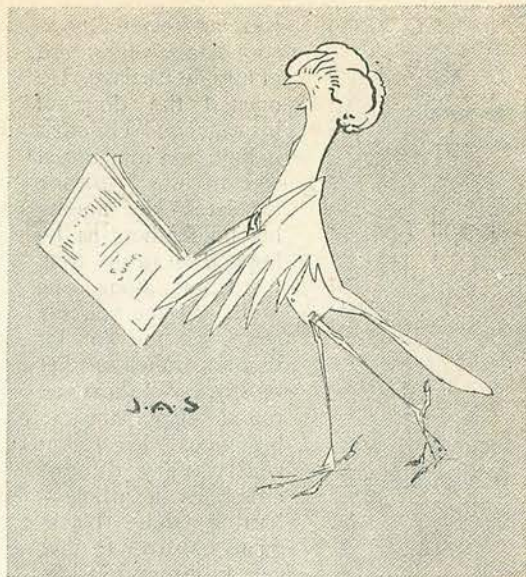
"Oh," he answered, "he's all there. It's all breeding. They're breeding 'em out into bagpipers, and that cavity is where the bagpipes will fit when they've learned to play. See the new London fancy here, with a crest? They are being bred up to designs by Phil May—just



NORWICH CRESTED, BY DESIGN.



BEFORE USING.

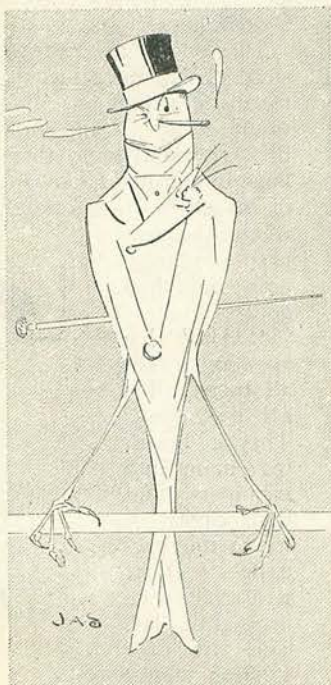


MUSIC IN THE HAIR.

as the Norwich crested are being bred up to Phil Mays, by design. See? A few more of the London fancy will give quite a Bank-holiday look to these shows, and a few more of the Norwich crested, a little further bred, will fill the comic papers with drawings that will make the Scotch fancy wish he had a chest left to jerk a laugh out of."

Here we passed an unhappy-looking bird, fluffy and straggling. The Yorkshire turned up his beak contemptuously.

"Shockingly mixed, the company in this place," he remarked. "Can't think what they send some of 'em for. That one looks like a model for 'Before Using' in an advertisement of somebody's 'Avi-



AFTER USING.

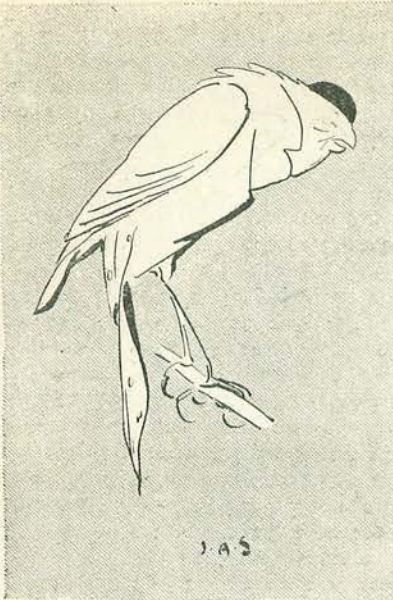
culturing,' or what not. By the way, you don't know anybody in that line of business, do you? No? I thought perhaps they might like me for an 'After Using' picture — on reasonable terms. I needn't undertake to eat their stuff, you know, of course — a fellah couldn't. By the way," he added, inconsequently, as we halted amid a crowd of crested birds, "rum thing the

effect of music on the hair, isn't it? Look at all these mop-headed chaps, singing away like anything. Is it the singing that makes the crest grow, or the crest that makes 'em keep singing in that annoying way? You ought to know. How is it with the human musicians? Just the same way with them. 'There's music in the hair,' as some song or another says. So that when any-

body breeds a crested canary with too big a top-knot

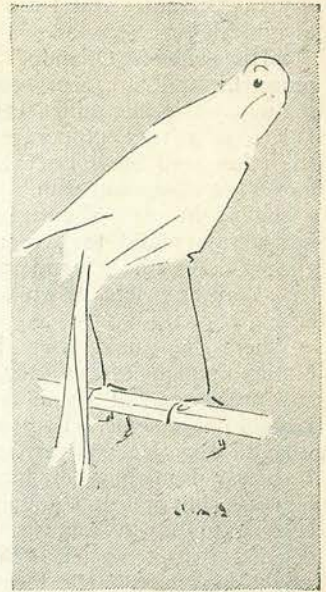


A PIANIST.



AN OLD MAID'S DARLING.

ever an old maid keeps a particularly wheezy, decrepit, and asthmatical old canary (and that is the variety they seem mostly to fancy) she *always* sends it to a show. And she's always indignant and misanthropical because it doesn't take a prize. 'Why shouldn't it?' she asks. 'It's a very quiet and well-behaved bird, and it has been taken great care of. It has always been carefully wrapped



PLAINHEAD.

(most of these are too big), he can keep it going till he gets a Paderewski or some such profitable variety. There needn't be much waste, you see. When we fail to breed a good canary, we can manage an eminent human as a by-product; not so good, of course, but better than nothing."

He cocked his head a little farther back, and appeared to meditate twisting his moustache. The recollection, however, that the lack of both moustache and fingers might cause some difficulty, decided him to change his mind and swagger on.

"Well, well," he said, presently, stopping before a cage containing a canary that would never have won a prize if there had been five thousand, "here we are again. Some old maid's pet, I suppose. Just like 'em. When-



ON CHILLY NIGHTS.

up on chilly nights, and never subjected to the cruelty of a bath or a claw-cutting. And yet it has no prize. There ought to be female judges. Those scandalously unfair men judges would never give a woman a prize, of course. Just like 'em.' And so she takes her bird away—and sends it to the next show, just the same. Well, well! Here, look at that bird! He's a 'Plainhead.' Good name for him, isn't it?"

And the ribald young Yorkshire chuckled at the afflicted plainhead's indignation.

I could not help stopping before a small and not very strong-looking canary of mild manners, and apparently of no particular breed. "Ah," said the Yorkshire, mischievously, "recognise him?" I had to reply that I did not.

"Well, his name is Orlando."

I think I have already mentioned the fact that *my*



ORLANDO.

name is Orlando ; and I did not like my guide's tone.

"His name is Orlando," the bird pursued, "and he's sent here out of the way. His wife thinks the Crystal Palace is a very proper place, and she takes care he doesn't have any money to dissipate with. He has a shilling in case of emergency, but he's always afraid to have an emergency! Ho, ho!" and the insolent Yorkshire actually winked in my face.

Where he could have heard of *Maria's* opinions of the Crystal Palace and my permanent insoluble shilling, I could not imagine. I scarcely knew what to do. He was very small, and I daresay I might safely have boxed his ears, but was it a dignified proceeding to box a canary's ears? I decided that it wasn't. Besides, it would look as though I recognised



A BRIEF FOR PEPPER.



SERGEANT BULLFINCH.

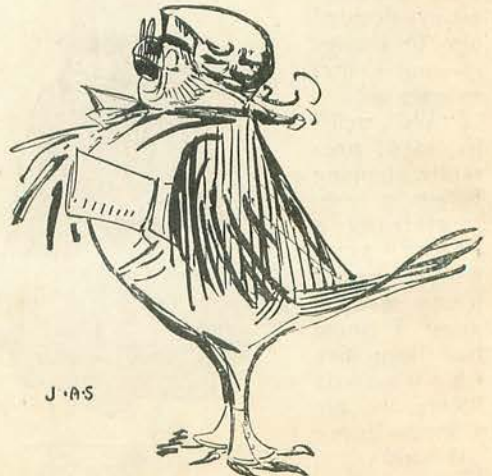
some personal allusion in his observations, which would have been more undignified still. I decided to maintain a stately silence.

Presently he spoke again, more respectfully. "One thing's a comfort, anyway," he said; "we've kept most of these wasters out of the club. Know the Cage-Bird Club? No end of a swell affair. We had a big conference and trial some time ago in Chancery Lane. Subject: Grub. Very good subject, too. The question was, to pepper or not to pepper. Fine thing, cayenne pepper for the coat. Why don't you try it? It

mightn't improve the *cut*, but it might keep the button-holes a bit less woolly."

I passed over this insolence, also.

"The point was argued out to the end," the Yorkshire continued, "by all the best birds at the Chancery Lane bar; though the end might have been the beginning for all the conclusion we came to. Anyhow, we stick to pepper, as ever. Pepper and sponge-cake. Never try cayenne pepper on sponge-cake? You should, especially now you're moulting. It would fill all that bald patch



ADDRESSING THE JURY.



LITTLE VULGAR BOYS.



AN INTOXICATED STAGGER.

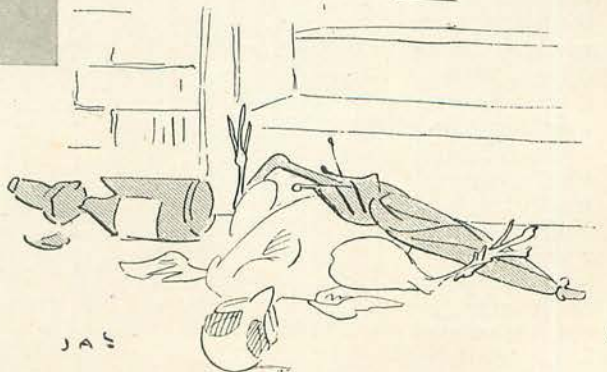
on the top of your head with handsome orange-coloured feathers, to say nothing of the coat button-holes."

"My young friend," I said, with extreme dignity, "I am grateful to you for your very interesting information, but you are not sufficiently respectful to your elders. I do *not* wish to be reminded of the years that have

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passed over my head, and rubbed it, perhaps, a little smooth as they went. By your appearance you should be a well-bred canary of some education, but I must say I believe a common sparrow would behave better."

He was very little impressed, I am afraid. He only said, "All right, old chap; keep your hair—, but there, never mind. As to sparrows, though, they're shocking bad form, you've no idea, I assure you. If you were a well-bred canary let loose among them, you'd soon find out, though. As children, even, they are frightful. Ever see anything half so dissipated-looking as a young sparrow? Two immense black eyes, puffed and swollen, an intoxicated sprawl and stagger, and vulgar insolence enough for a human vestryman. They go out of the nest on the ran-tan at night, and you discover them lying down area-steps in the early morning—shocking examples. And then people pity them! They say the poor little things have fallen out of their nests and killed themselves. Of course they fall out. They're so drunk,



A SHOCKING EXAMPLE.



JAS

IN THE KNOW.

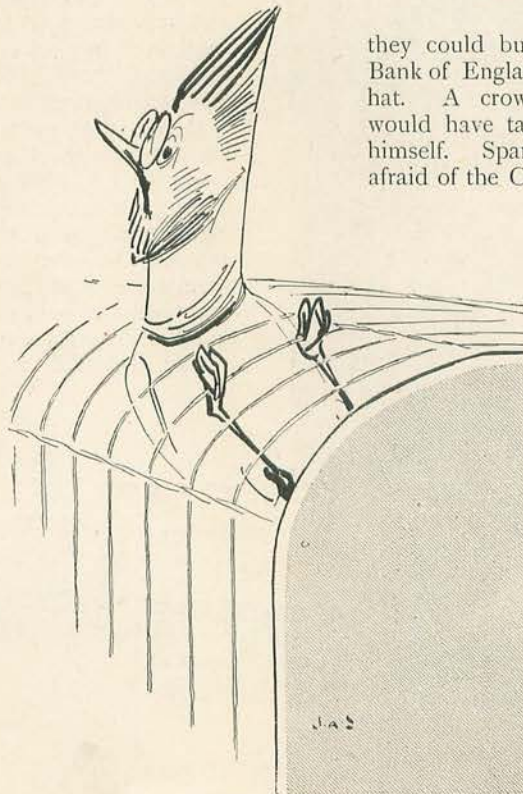
they'd fall out of anything. How can anybody find any pity for such a disreputable-looking thing as a young sparrow lying down an area? Those that don't succumb to early dissipation grow up disreputable and horsey. They hang about stables, and look as knowing and as blackguardly as a bird can. They give each other tips (always wrong), and lay the odds in worms and oats. They welsh each other eternally, and when at last, bankrupt of worms, oats, and credit, they break down, they become cab-runners and haunt cab-ranks with a view to bullying old ladies. For a sparrow will bully anything, no matter the size. It's a common sight to see a crowd of

them trying to bully a dray-horse out of his nose-bag. If a crowd of sparrows really gave their attention to the business, I believe



JAS

IN THE RANKS.



JAS

ON THE IRISH BENCH.

they could bully the beadle at the Bank of England out of his cocked hat. A crowd a little bit larger would have taken on Mr. Bumble himself. Sparrows are not even afraid of the Crystal Palace authorities and the bird-show officials—

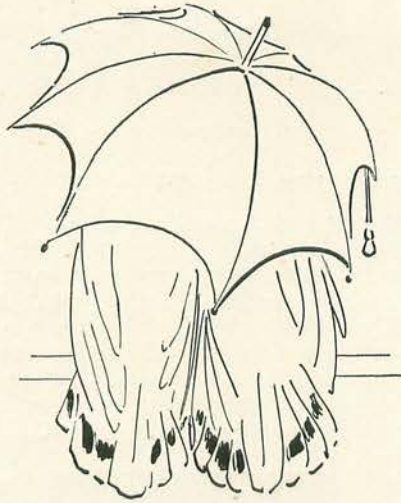
and they are people who might terrify the late Duke of Wellington. The sparrows don't mind; they come in the calmest way, without paying any entry fee, and steal our food. I don't think much of the 'other cage-birds,' as you may have guessed, but the sparrows—well, there!"

Here I grew conscious of a

very terrifying apparition among the "other cage-birds." A very startling head burst out first through one opening and then through another between the wires of a cage, in a feverish thunderstorm of excitement, indignantly reviling the birds opposite.

"That's the bul-bul," observed the Yorkshire, "bul-bullying everybody about it. He thinks he should have a show all to himself—and I wish he had, for our sakes. That's the way with all the 'other cage-birds.' They're home-rulers, every one; and I shouldn't wonder if the bul-bul's private name was Timothy.

"But," he added, "what I *can't* stand among the 'others' are the love-birds. They're maddening. Look at 'em—making love flagrantly, all over the place, in a spectacular way that even a human 'Arry and 'Arriet would be ashamed of. Is there anything in the world half as spoony? It's a disgraceful exhibition—disgraceful. They



'ARRY AND 'ARRIET.



(To be continued.)

don't care what goes on about them. Anybody may win the prizes—they snuggle up together and spoon. Even when they win prizes themselves, they don't care about them—they just rub noses together and spoon rather more. If the German Emperor were to come in a cocked hat and petticoats and dance a skirt dance before the cage, they wouldn't look. They'd put their wings round each other's waists and spoon worse than ever. The officials might at least provide them with umbrellas to spoon under, in the interests of common decorum; but if they did, I don't believe the love-birds would hold 'em up—they wouldn't bother. The umbrella might go where it liked, and they would continue to spoon on in the public gaze, with that far-gone, stupid, shameless, moony look of theirs, that makes every decent bird in the place sick. Look at that raven, now! He's longing to get out and peck them all!"