

In Show

More Cage Birds.

Illustrated
by
J. A. Shepherd

V.



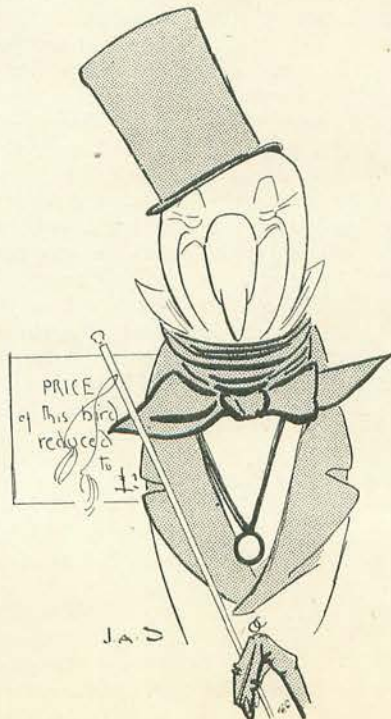
CERTAINLY the love-birds *did* look very ridiculous, and the raven fiercely mischievous. And the love-birds seemed to be almost the only birds in this part of

the show that didn't talk. We had left the canaries, and though I *had* heard somewhere of canaries that could talk, my Yorkshire guide seemed to be the only one of the sort at this place. Here, however, among the parrots and jackdaws, macaws, ravens, magpies, and starlings, conversation was in full blast, except, as I have said, among the love-birds. They mooned and spooned, and words were inadequate.

I stopped (I couldn't help it) before a large bird, and the canary whispered, "That's a macaw." The large bird caught the sound, apparently, for instantly, with a courtly bow and a flourish, he addressed me: "Yes," he said, "Micawber is my name, as my young friend has—a—
informed you. You will

perceive, if you will so far condescend as to inspect, visually, the publicly-exhibited announcement attached to my *locus standi*—in short, the label on my perch—that the advantages of my society and of such small eloquence as I may be endowed with,

together with my personal services in whatsoever humble capacity they may be desired, are now available to be placed at the disposal of any beneficent patron who may be willing, in exchange thereof, to disburse the—a—necessary needful. In short, that I am for sale. I will not attempt to conceal from you, my dear Coppernose" (the birds, generally, were very disrespectful to me, it seemed), "that I have been on offer, so to speak, for a protracted period; nor will I endeavour to obscure the unpleasant fact that the amount of the necessary needful, as per placard stipulated, has been decreased by a series of daily subtractions until now, towards the latter end of the—a—show, it

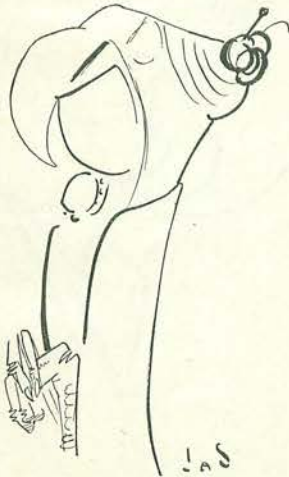


THE MACAW BIRD.



"COME, NOW, THERE'S A DEAR."

has reached the ridiculously humiliating figure at which you perceive it stands. It is also necessary to admit that even at the absurd price advertised there would appear to be very little competition for the advantages of my society and services. Notwithstanding all which difficulties and disadvantages, my dear Coppernose, I am still confidently expecting that some discriminating and liberal individual will appear who will



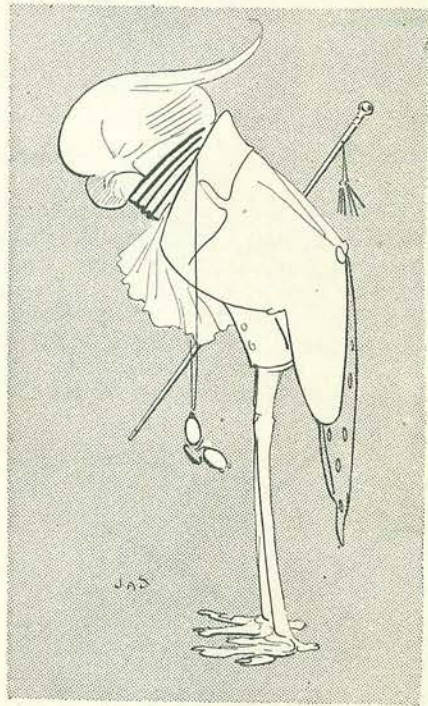
"AND WHO IS THIS?"

appreciate the advantages I offer—in short, that somebody will turn up!"

A parrot behind me sniggered slyly. "Silly old dear," the parrot said, in a whisper. "He's *always* expecting somebody to turn

up, but nobody ever does. And his price has been going down regularly every day, too, just like a Jubilee procession seat! But nobody'll take him—not even a syndicate! Ha, ha! Absurd old thing! How he can possibly expect—and at his age, too—but, there, some people are that vain! Now, if you *are* looking for something really *nice*, now—just consider *me*. Look at the label—I'm only two guineas now—being late in the show; and I don't say but what if you *did* make a close offer, perhaps—but, there! And see what a lovely perch, too—all included. Come, now, there's a *dear*—shall we make it pounds, and call it a bargain?"

Here I was conscious of the intervention of another parrot, an unattractive grey, who

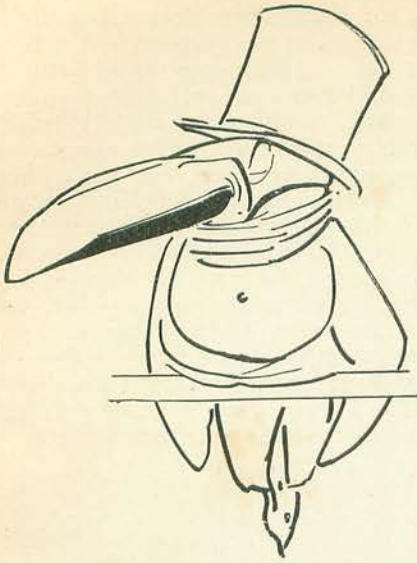


"A NICE OLD GENTLEMAN."

said, acidly: "Well, Orlando, and who is this very loudly-dressed person?" The voice was familiar; at first it seemed that of the black Spanish hen I have already told you about, but then I remembered how like that voice was to my wife's. So I ran away.

"All right," said the Yorkshire canary in my ear. "You needn't run all night. You've left her a mile away. You haven't seen half the birds."

To my astonishment I found the Yorkshire canary standing calmly on my shoulder. Moreover, though I seemed to have run an



"MY EYE! WHAT A NOSE!"

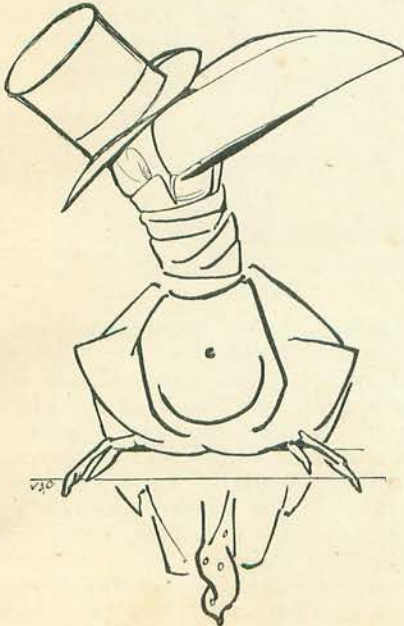
incalculable distance, we were still among the parrots.

"They *won't* attend to the proper breeding of these birds," the Yorkshire said. "They let 'em grow anyhow. They breed canaries into a decent shape, and make gentlemen of them" (I thought of the Scotch fancy and the Belgian, though I said nothing). "But look at the white cockatoo, for instance. He'd be a fine figure of a bird if it wasn't for his

ridiculous, waddling legs. He's fairly presentable as he stands still, even now; but as soon as he moves—well, look at him. If they'd only take the trouble to introduce a



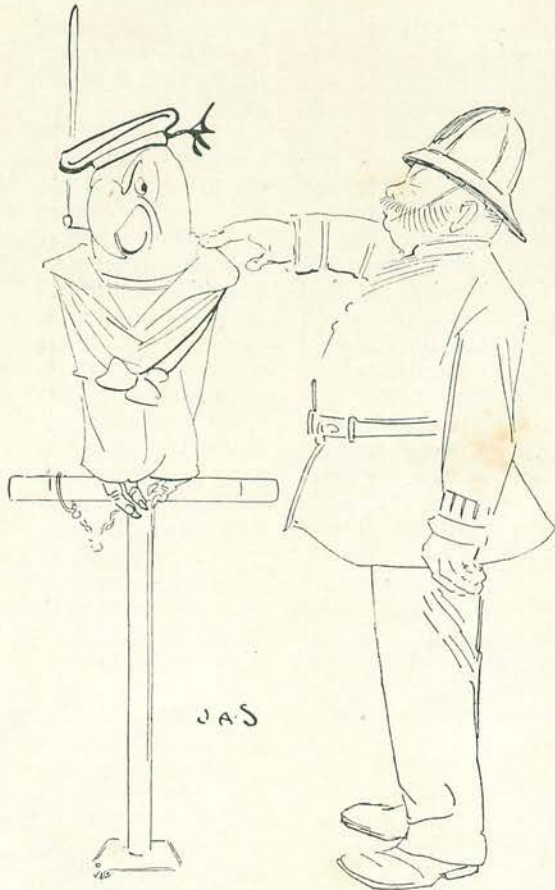
little stork blood now, to bring the legs out adequately, they'd make quite a decent bird of the cockatoo. But they won't—bless you, no. Every parrot and cockatoo in the place would be the better for a little more breeding."



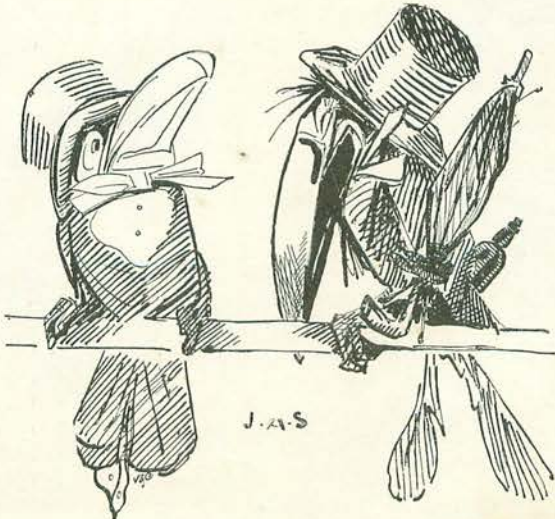
"SIR!"

To me it certainly seemed that they would, for anything more ill-bred than their shrieking and their vulgar chaff I could not imagine.

There was one particularly offensive young macaw whose remarks to a most respectable and well-behaved toucan were outrageous. And why the police did not interfere in the matter of the language of some of the parrots I could not understand. The grey parrots seemed to be the worst; and it is a noticeable fact in this connection that sailors are always bringing home grey parrots. I can never understand why the language of these birds has so little real nautical flavour about it. Of course, everybody who has read a nautical tale knows that a sailor's expletives never go beyond "Shiver my timbers," "Scuttle my bowline," "Splice my main brace," "Heave my keel overboard," "Blow my main-sail jib-boom," or on specially important or exasperating occasions, "Rake the topmizen double ratlines of the main-truck galley of my fo'c'sle quarter-deck anchor fore and aft and three sheets in the wind." These are the things that particularly bad-languaged sailors say when anybody steals their grog, or treads on their corns, or speaks



"A LITTLE BETTER LANGUAGE, PLEASE!"



"IT'SH MOULT, I 'SHURE YOU."

to the man at the wheel; but the grey parrots they bring home indulge in far worse language than this, and I can't imagine where they learn it. I mentioned my difficulty to the Yorkshire canary, who suggested that they may have learned it from the horse marines. If this is really the case, I trust that the commanding officer of that distinguished corps will issue strict orders against bad language in the stables. I have heard that the gentleman's name is Cheeks.

"The toucans are not altogether so intolerable," said my guide, "and they don't swear. But that is due to some extent to the fact that they can't talk. Of course there's no real *breeding* in them—there's none at all, or very little, in any of these outsiders. They're sent in just as they happen to be. But as to behaviour, the toucans are fairly correct; indeed, they're as proper as can be most of the time, but once a year they break out most disreputably. They put it down to the moult; but, hang it all, a bird can have a *sober* moult if it likes—just as it is quite possible

for a human to have a sober birthday, or a sober Christmas or Jubilee. Though many don't. I never saw a toucan in moult yet that anybody could look at for a second and pronounce perfectly sober. He has intoxication in his eye, depravity in his bedraggled feathers, and a fiery red beak that can only have one meaning."



JAS
AN INSULT.

Here I observed a macaw engaged in savagely pecking and tearing a card which had been affixed to its perch—a card inscribed in large capital letters

with the word "Commended." He pecked and tore with the energy of rage, and redoubled his efforts when he perceived that I was looking on.

"Well," he said, in a deep and angry



JAS
HAWFINCH.

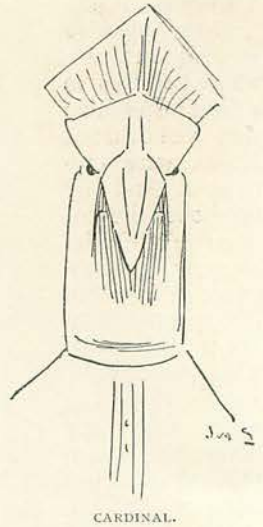
voice, "what are you looking at? Isn't it enough for me to be insulted in this way without having you coming here to gloat over it? Couldn't you wait till I'd torn the beastly card up?"

I could not understand the insult implied in this announcement of commendation, but

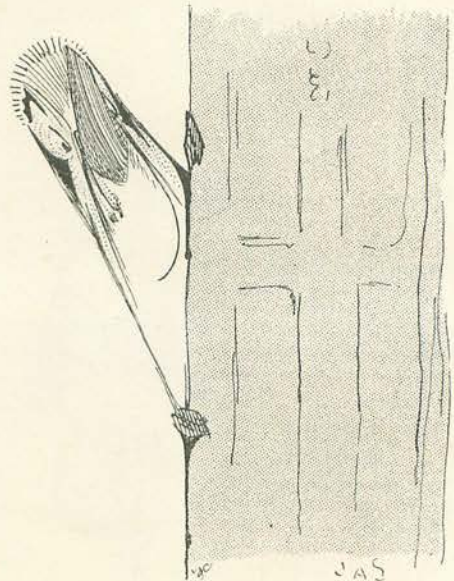
the Yorkshire canary pecked my coat-sleeve, and drew me aside. "Come," he said, "don't annoy the poor wretch. He got first prize at his last show. It wouldn't have been so bad if they had left him out altogether, but 'commended'—a mere common C—it's really too bad. 'Commended' is the last insult you can offer a bird. I'd like to see the judge who'd 'commend' me!"

The Yorkshire canary looked very fierce, and I felt reassured by the recollection that there had been no label on *his* cage whatever, so that the judges were safe for the present, at any rate.

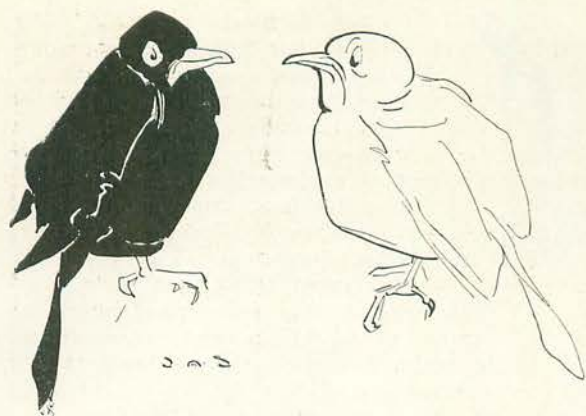
"Leave the poor chap to his grief," the Yorkshire canary proceeded, "and just run through the miscellaneous odds and ends. That's the hawfinch—he's a cardinal when he's abroad, with a gorgeous red dress, but in this country he is a bird of strict business above all things. And there's the woodpecker tapping the hollow cork tree that they've stuck up in his cage to enable him to play a foolish game of runaway knocks all by him-



JAS
CARDINAL.



JAS
"COME IN!"



"YOU'RE NOT A BLACKBIRD."

self. You observe, he goes behind his make-believe door, knocks violently, and then pops out to see who's there. Of course there's nobody, so he knocks again and again, working himself up into a fearful rage as he goes on. It pleases him, I suppose, and nobody minds.

"There's an eccentric class of birds here—



"WELL—I SUPPOSE I'M NOT!"

they compete for prizes offered for oddness of plumage. A white blackbird has taken the first prize this year, but I don't believe he's really happy, nevertheless. He must be in a terrible state of doubt and uncertainty. The other blackbirds tell him he isn't a blackbird at all, and really it seems a bit doubtful. He

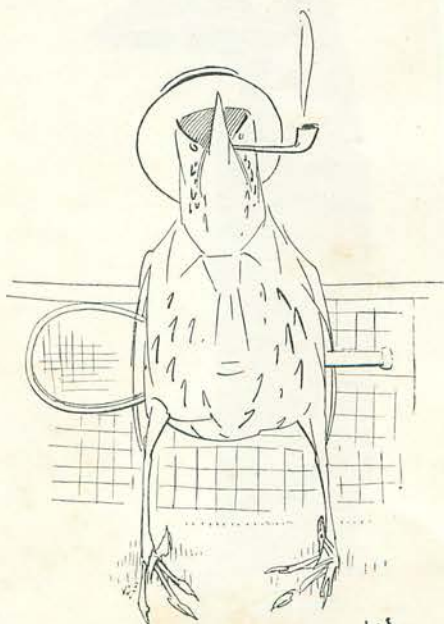
can't be a blackbird if he's white, that's plain—it's like talking of black white-wash. But there's no such species as the whitebird, so he can't be that. Moreover, to talk of a white blackbird means nothing unless it means he's grey or speckled, and he isn't either; and there seems to be no other way



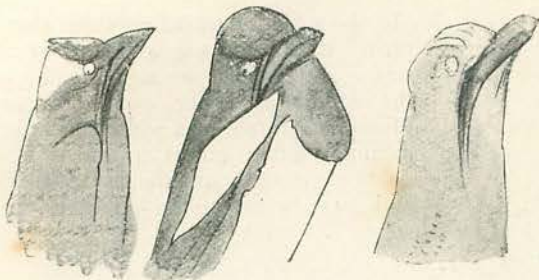
"WHAT IN THE WORLD AM I?"

in which he can be black and white too. So, for all his first prize, he's a wretched outcast.

"The commonest birds in this place seem to put most side on, you may notice," the Yorkshire canary proceeded. "But that's

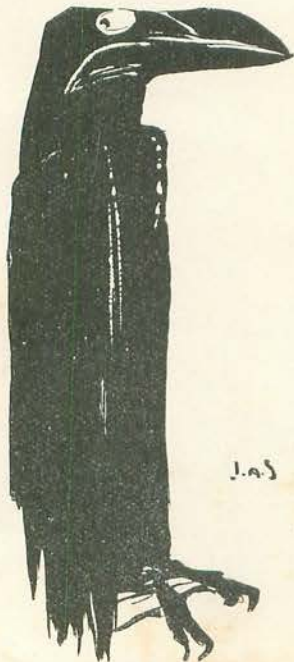


"COME ON, YOU FELLAHS!"



ARTISTS ALL.

the way with common birds. I've told you about the sparrow—but, of course, he isn't asked here. But people send the common suburban thrush—the sort of bird that hops about tennis lawns in back gardens, and puts on the airs of an over-important landed proprietor. And the alleged native talking birds are, half of them, as big humbugs as the suburban thrush. There's the jackdaw and the magpie and the jay, lots of 'em here all described as 'excellent talkers,' but precious few of 'em talk. People wait and hang about for hours, but they won't perform. Of course, they've the usual arrogant excuse. They pretend they're artists, and that they decline to show off vulgarly like the parrots. They pretend to wait for an 'artistic impulse' before performing



J.A.S.

AS HE IS.

—but it never seems to come. They're humbugs, I assure you—sham artists, every one, who couldn't carry out an engagement if they had one. They affect to despise the eccentrics—the white blackbirds and the pink greenfinches and so on—and consider them 'mere freaks' and 'side-shows,' altogether below an artist's contempt. But, personally, I'd almost rather be a white blackbird, with all the worry and uncertainty thrown in. Even a white raven might be better, though I've never heard of such a thing, and I fear he'd be a wretched milksop, and contemptibly harmless."



AS HE MIGHT BE.

Certainly it seemed to me that the raven would be a very different sort of bird if he were white, but in my view it would go a great way toward civilizing him. At present, the raven is really a most savage and dangerous character. His look, his aspirations, his manners, his disposition—they are all evil. And it all seems to be in his blackness. Turn him white, and give him pink eyes, and he must

reform ; he couldn't help it. Black, he is capable of anything ; he steals, he murders, and his habitual drink is blood. If he were white he would take milk and water and a bun, and his mildness would be a pattern to curates. The Yorkshire canary spoke of contemptible harmlessness, but that was merely his rakish, wicked, reckless habit of mind. I began to feel doubtful about the Yorkshire canary. He was much too dashing and desperate a character for me. I remembered that Maria, again and again, had warned me against being led away by fast company, and I longed for the brown Egyptian gentleman back again, coffee-pot hat and all. But the canary rattled on.



THE GAY TOM-TIT.

"We won't waste much time over the rest," he said ; "they're a job lot, generally. The gay tom-tit, the ridiculous wren, the bumptious bullfinch, the stupid starling, and all the rest of 'em. Just take a rough glance round, and then you shall have an emergency, and stand something out of that shilling you're in charge of." I resolved to defend Maria's shilling to my last breath. "Here's a fancier who'll go with us," the canary went on, indicating a curious bird in an apron. "He's a mixture of sparrow, pigeon, raven, robin, magpie, and barber ; he lives in Kingsgate

Street, and his name is——"
 "Poll Sweedlepipe," answered the curious creature for itself, in a gentle voice, like the cooing of a pigeon.



JWS
 "POLL!"