

# On Show

## Rabbits and Pigeons.

Illustrated  
by  
J. A. Shepherd

VI.

**I** WAS a little taken aback by Mr. Sweedlepipe's appearance, but he was more taken aback at something he perceived over my shoulder. I turned, and saw the Egyptian again, with his coffee-pot hat bubbling away as comfortably as ever.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "I've frightened him—I always frighten barbers." Indeed, his beard protruded from his chin in a solid black block, like a log. "I have been getting a little water in my hat—the coffee was all boiling away," he went on. "Come and see these rabbits, since you seem so anxious about them."

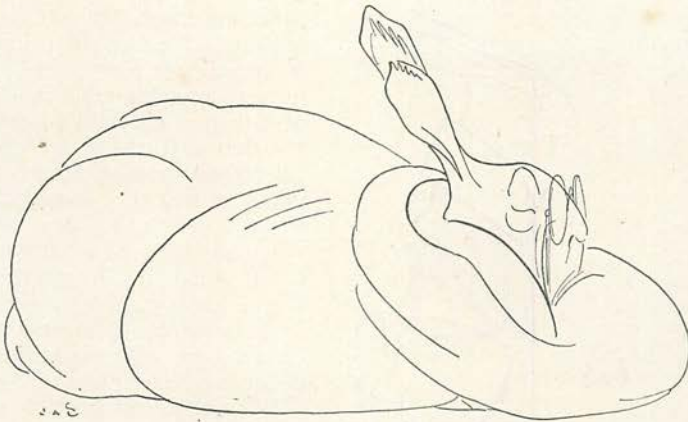
Now, I was not anxious about rabbits. I hadn't even thought of rabbits for a single moment. Nevertheless, now that I looked about me, I perceived not only that Poll Sweedlepipe had vanished

—which was perhaps natural in the circumstances—but that where I had been inspecting ravens and tom-tits, rabbit-pens covered the benches, and in the distance there were visible other pens, full of pigeons. By this time I had grown used to sudden changes of this sort, and was less startled than might have been expected.

"Ideals in rabbit-breeding are not high," said the brown man. "A lump of meat with two ears is what is wanted, and we aim at that. We don't want intelligence, or points, or any such blemishes as those. Just imagine a Flemish Giant with points! He's round everywhere—anything like a point would be token starvation. Look at the best of 'em here—here he is, a shapeless lump, squashed against the sides of the pen at each end, motionless, mindless, and gasping with fat. He was



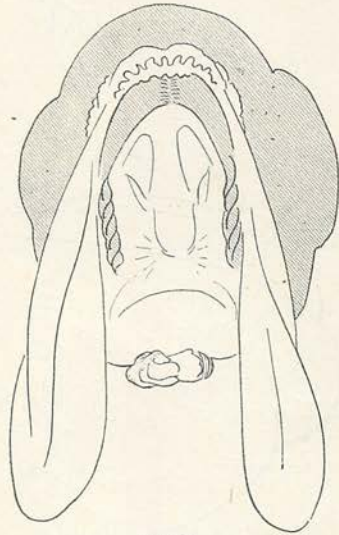
THE FLEMISH GIANT.



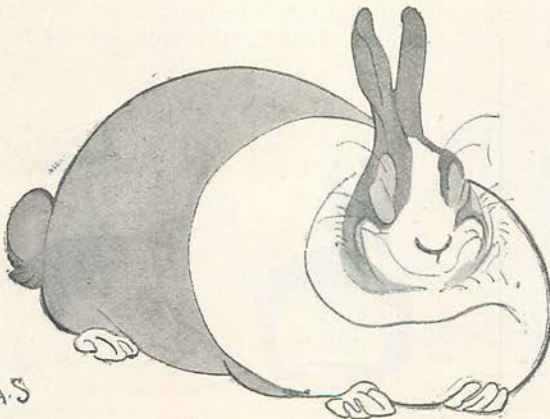
"FIRST AND SPECIAL."

so big and formless, and such a fool, that the judges gave him first prize without a moment's hesitation. There's scarce a rabbit in the section that anybody can conscientiously accuse of anything distantly resembling meaning or expression in the face. Perhaps the chief Flemish Giantess—first and special in the doe class—looks a trifle supercilious, but if the judges see it, I believe she'll be disqualified even now.

"Yes," he proceeded, after a pause, "lumpiness is the grace we chiefly cultivate, but in the lops we go for ears. Some bake their rabbits over stoves till they melt down into long ears, like a candle guttering. Others go about among the creatures pulling ears, like an enraged knife-grinder among naughty boys. Still others glue the ends of the ears together, so that the animal falls over them and stretches them that way; and quite a number strap the ears down to discourage stiffness. With one dodge and another they produce ears that hang and drag about in the dirt,



A GOOD LOP.



"THE OLD DUTCH."

and happy and proud, indeed, is he who can show 4ft. of ear to each rabbit, 2ft. on each side. But even here we mustn't forget lumpiness. Sometimes there is a tie in the matter of length of ears, and then lumpiness, dumpiness, weight, and stupidity score again. Lumpiness always helps a rabbit here, whether it be an old Dutch (not for sale) such as Mr. Chevalier might enter, a Flemish Giant, a Lop, an Angora, or a Belgian Hare. A

Belgian Hare, as you know, is so called because it is not a hare."

I well understood the system of contrary nomenclature, and I hastened to agree with the brown man's hypothesis. When I was a small boy at school it was the disrespectful custom of ill-behaved schoolfellows to call me "Bunny." I reflected that this was doubtless because of my entire unlikeness to a rabbit; and I have been assured that every school possesses at least one boy thus styled, whether from the same reason or not I cannot guess. As these thoughts passed in my mind, I noticed that the brown

man laughed very heartily to himself, and as he had already given testimony of understanding my thoughts before I expressed them, I felt uneasy.

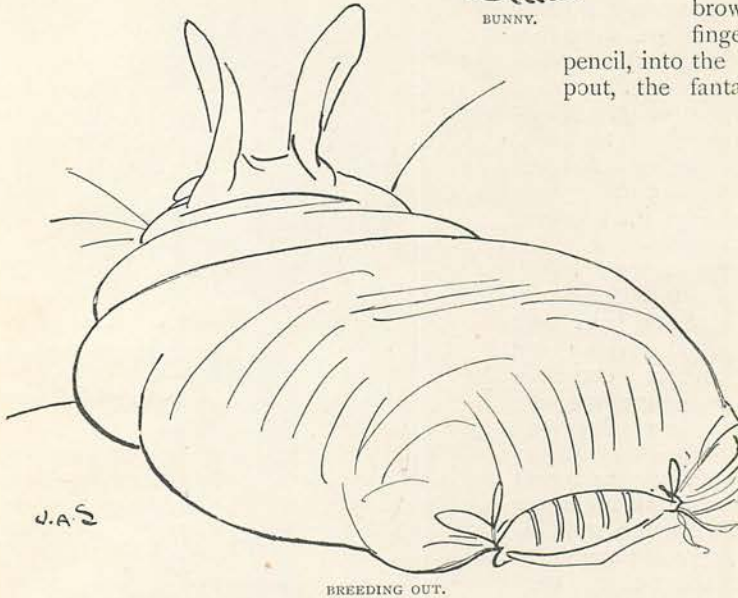
"Ah, well, never mind," he said. "As I have said, rabbits have a way of being soft, stupid, and fat; you're not *fat* any way. None of the Flemish Giant about you, Bunny. No, no. Don't be offended. Look what a triumph of breeding it would be if we could prove that *you* were evolved by selec-



fowls and so on, but not with rabbits. We couldn't hope to breed the Flemish Giant out into anything more intelligent than a pillow, I'm sure. By the way, that's an idea I'll make a note of. Even a pillow would be something useful, and a variation on the usual lump of meat with a pair of ears. I'll suggest it. We've had pens and pens of squabby lumps of meat long enough; we might try a little bed-furniture for a change."

We had passed most of the pen-loads of rabbits, and were among the pigeons. The brown man poked his long fingers, and sometimes a lead-pencil, into the pens to make the pouters pout, the fantails fan, the trumpeters trumpet, the drummers drum, the laughers laugh, and the tumblers to tumble, as well as the confined space would permit.

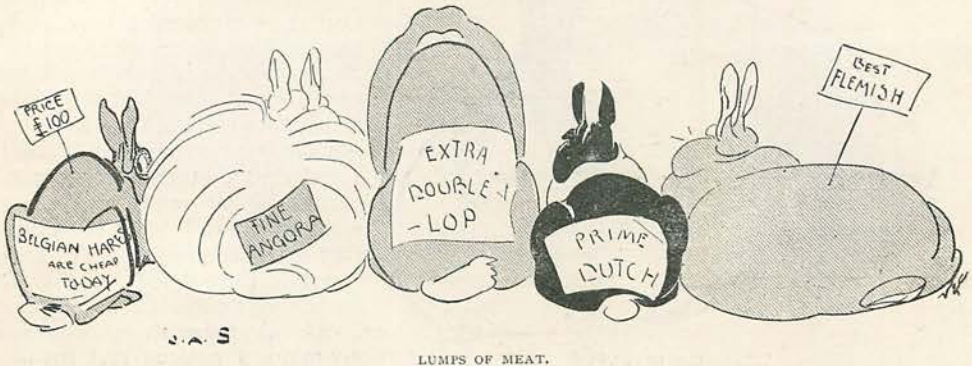
"Here they are," he said, and he ran over their names bewilderingly. "And each sort is of many classes, according to colour, as White, Chequer, Yellow, Red, Black, Blue-pied, Black-pied, Red-pied, Light Mottle, Dark Mottle, Dun, Silver, Any



Colour, Every Colour, and All Other Colours. Indeed, the only sort of pigeon

tions from rabbits! Such things are being done, as I have told you, with dogs and

Colour, Every Colour, and All Other Colours. Indeed, the only sort of pigeon

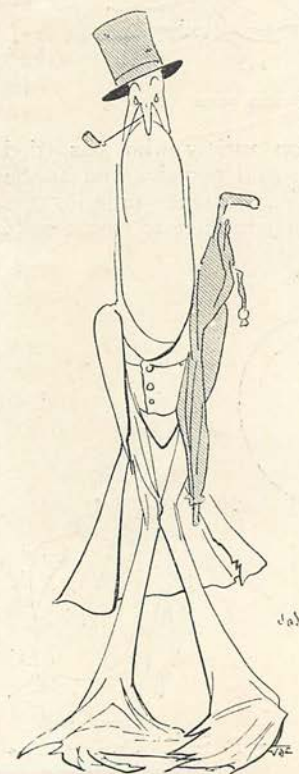


LUMPS OF MEAT.



COMMON OR HOUSE-TOP.

creatures—slack-winded, weedy, and, worse than all, pigeon-toed. This sort of pigeon must never have pigeon-toes. The real swell is the pouter who *does* swell and keep up his toes. Observe his Department! Mr. Turveydrop himself might take lessons from

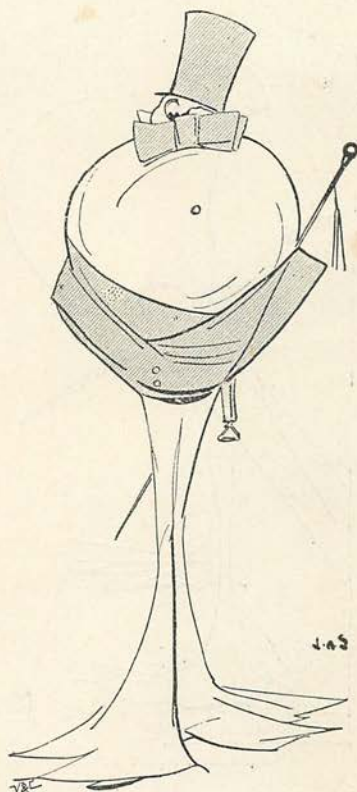


SEEDY.

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for which there is not a separate class is the Common or House-top, which hangs about stables and such places, very knowing and in-toed. True, there is a class for 'Any Other Variety,' but he is usually of *Every* other variety, with a cross or two of no variety at all thrown in. But never mind him. The great swell here is the Pouter—when he *is* a swell. Some pouters here are seedy

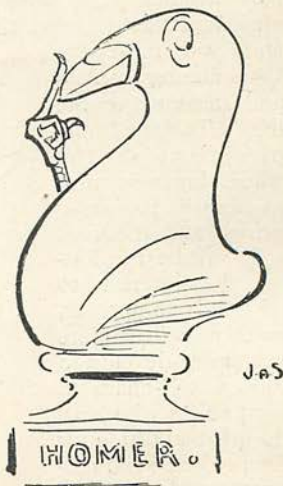
him. Indeed, that is the direction in which we are breeding. The pigeons generally are fairly promising for human development, and the pouters are doing well in the Turveydrop department. The talk which you may have heard of developing Homers into epic poets is a mere hoax, founded on a miserable pun. Still, the Homer is an intelligent bird, I assure you, a capital bird of business. Ever buy one? It's wonderful how often some



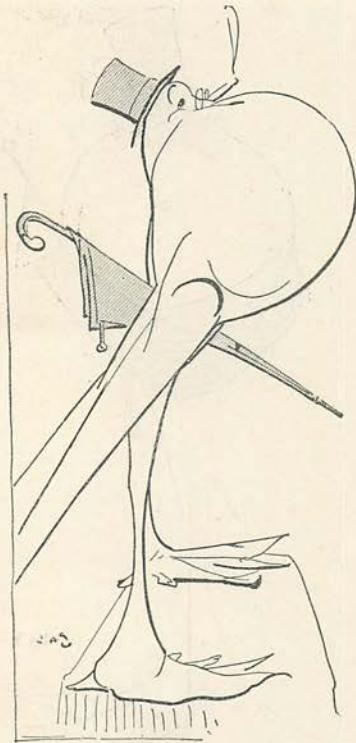
TURVEYDROP.

people sell 'em. Wonderful. I know a man that sold one every day for three weeks, each time to a different customer, and it flew back from the last customer all right and regular as clockwork the next day. Small profits but quick returns was that man's guiding principle. Rare birds of business, Homers.

"Some of our pouters are breeding into birds of business, too, though of a different sort. We are hoping for financiers out of some of them. They're rudimentary as yet, of course; haven't even pockets yet, nor hands to put into other



QUICK RETURNS.



"BIG BUSINESS, MY BOY!"

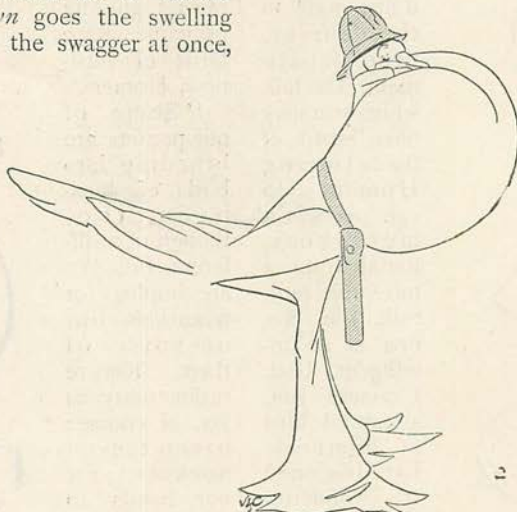
demand for beadles, butlers, and policemen. Imagine the gorgeous, swelling importance of the pouter policeman appealed to by a lost 'squeaker' of the



BROKEN DOWN.

people's. But you can see the beginnings just about judging time. Observe the pouter swell and strut and swagger! 'I've got something on, I tell you!' the pouter seems to say, with mysterious importance. 'Big schemes, my boy! There's big money coming my way soon!' Then the judge goes by without so much as a second look at him, and *down* goes the swelling crop, and the tail, and the swagger at once, and you have the City failure, sunken and sneaking, to the life. They're quite proficient in the whole business now in regard to show-prizes, and the next step will be to transfer the interest to limited companies, breed off a little more tail, and develop a thick watch-chain. A few pouters who have no great aptitude for finance, we shall cultivate with a view to supplying the

common house-top variety who has tried to fly too soon! And perceive him at the door of the British Museum ordering the swarm of house-toppers there to 'move on'!



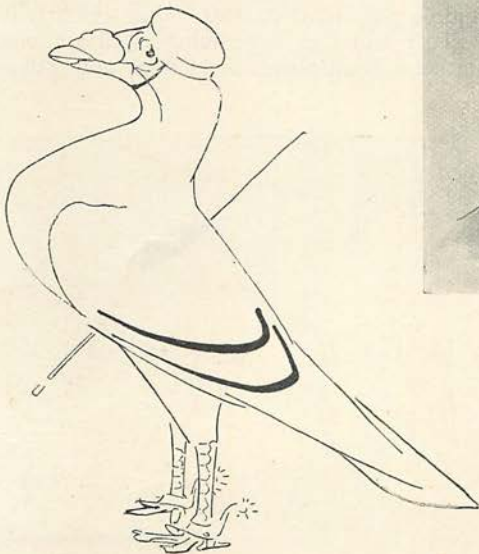
THE LOST "SQUEAKER."

To say nothing of his swelling rage at being cut out in the affections of the neat housemaid (bred up from the short-faced



JAS  
THE TUMBLER HOUSEMAID.

tumbler) by the big dragoon, which some people nowadays call the dragon. He is called a dragoon already, but we must carry the development a bit further before he can actually enlist. But there'll be money in it then, I tell you, and money in the tumbler - housemaid - notion. Everybody knows what a difficulty here is in finding good servants, and



THE DRAGON.

the high wages they want when you've found 'em. Well, here we shall be able to supply 'em in large numbers cheap, and all their food will be a little corn! Just imagine what would happen if you attempted to board Mary Jane on a handful of corn every day!"

I couldn't imagine anything so terrible. But I remembered what the brown man had told me about getting life-guardsmen from game fowl and grenadiers from houdans, and wondered what sort of chicken-hearted, pigeon-livered army we should have when the anticipated evolutions should have been effected.

"Then," the brown man went on, "the perky Turbit will develop into the mannish

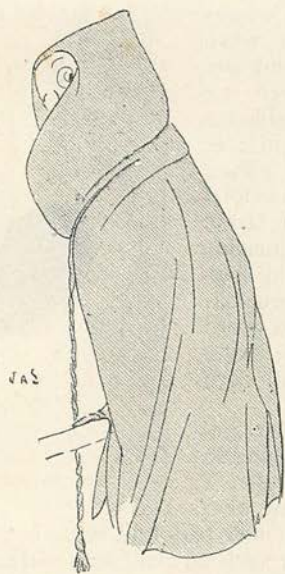


THE NEW TURBIT.



THE INTEMPERATE CARRIER.

young woman, who will wear waistcoats and ties, ride anything, iron or flesh, play at football, join clubs, and lecture. Though, to be sure," he added, thoughtfully, "there won't be much profit in that, as a commercial speculation. Nobody would be anxious to pay much for the specimens. And as for the carrier," he went on, energetically, "the sooner we stop *his* development the better



CHURCH.

for the cause of temperance, which I to some extent represent."

I remembered the coffee-pot, and had no doubt the brown gentleman meant that that was the symbol of his principles.

"The carriers," he went on, "are disgraceful enough already. Look at those noses and those awful eyes! No wonder that carriers are almost the only pigeons that can't carry a message! Do they look capable of anything at all but drink?"

I admitted that they didn't, and the brown man proceeded:—

"I'm afraid we haven't much prospect of any other very useful developments," he said. "The rest are likely to be more of the ornamental and fancy-dress ball type. We once thought the Jacobin would take to the church and join a brotherhood, as his name seems to indicate, but there seems no chance of that now. The likelihood (no pun) points rather to stage than to church. The Jacobin goes in for all sorts of vanities in colour and deportment, and probably the cape and sword drama (with the help of a few fantails) is what they will end in."

Suddenly my guide

stopped, tapped me on the chest, and asked: "Now, isn't there something you feel to be missing among these pigeons?"

I thought of the crust necessary to complete pigeon-pie, but this seemed frivolous, so I said there wasn't.

"There *is* something," he said, "and it

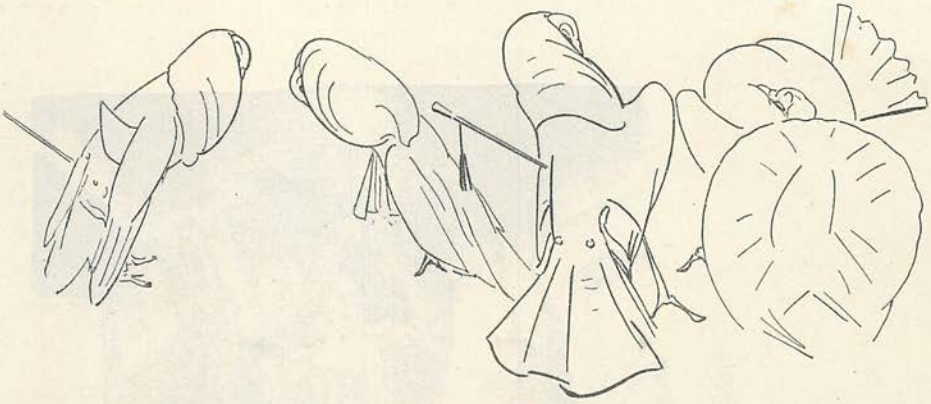


STAGE.

isn't an exhibition of pigeon's-milk either. It is an extra class with special prizes—a special class for Andrée pigeons. You know the Andrée pigeon, of course. Most celebrated variety; found in large numbers all over the northern hemisphere by sailors and other



ANCIENT COURTESY.



CAPE AND SWORD.

persons. Has invariably arrived direct from Herr Andrée at the North Pole, and bears a mysterious inscription somewhere, such as 'Ratz. U.R. 1 A.S.S.' Why was there no separate class for them?"

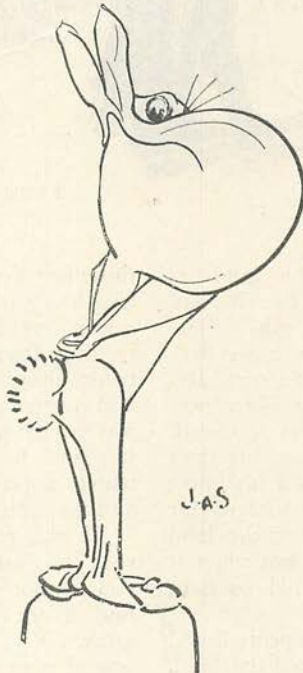
I couldn't imagine. It seemed altogether an oversight to overlook so numerous and important a section of the pigeon tribe.

"I know the reason," my friend went on. "It's very simple. There isn't room in the Crystal Palace for half of 'em!"

This certainly seemed the most probable explanation; and I could think of no building in London or near it that could

possibly accommodate the multitude in question.

"No," said the brown man, "the Andrée pigeons apart, the show's pretty complete. But I *do* wish the rabbit fanciers would go in for something a little more inspiring than lumps of meat with ears to catch hold of. Why can't they take a hint from the pigeons, now, and breed a pouter rabbit for instance? There would be something to see then. Or a fantail. Or a military rabbit, such as a dragoon, or a trumpeter, or a drummer. They've done all these in pigeons, why not in rabbits? But, no—I'm afraid they're too much attached to lumpiness."



J.A.S

A SUGGESTION.

(To be continued.)