

Animal Actualities.

NOTE.—Under this title we intend printing a series of perfectly authentic anecdotes of animal life, illustrated by Mr. J. A. Shepherd, an artist long a favourite with readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE. We shall be glad to receive similar anecdotes, fully authenticated by names of witnesses, for use in future numbers. While the stories themselves will be matters of fact, it must be understood that the artist will treat the subject with freedom and fancy, more with a view to an amusing commentary than to a mere representation of the occurrence.

VIII.



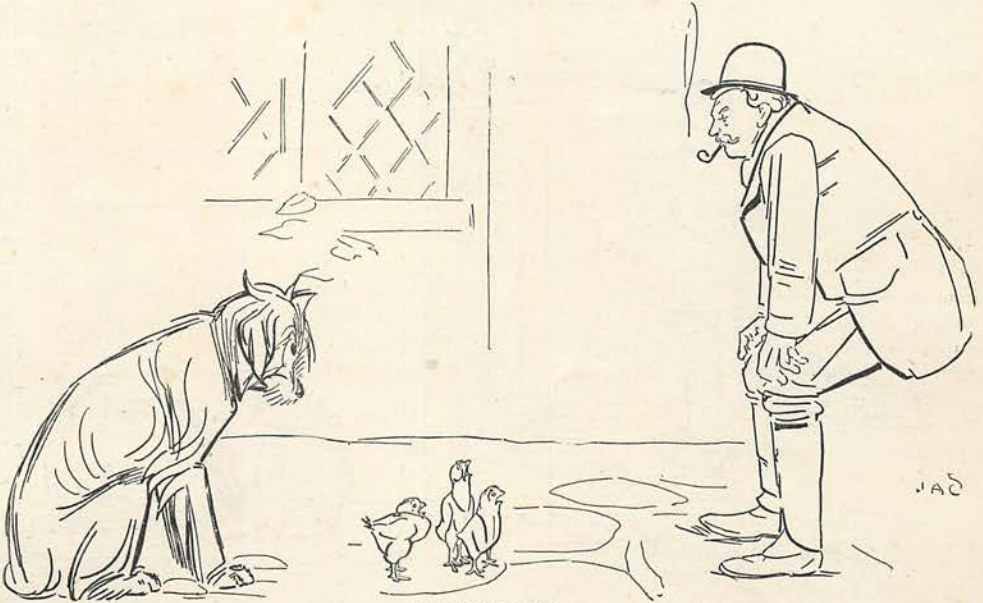
HIS incident took place in the spring of 1897, at French's Farm, Netherfield, near Battle, Sussex. This farm lies in the midst of the chicken-raising district, and it was at the time in the occupation of Mr. W. A. Williams. Mr. Williams, among his other farm operations, reared thousands of chickens, which the travelling higglers would collect

and fatten for the market. Most of these chickens were hatched in an incubator and reared by aid of a foster-mother—which latter, by the way, is not a motherly old hen, as some might suppose, but a sort of box lined with flannel. Sometimes it is merely an old coop.

The farm was surrounded by woods, and at first many chicks were lost by raids of



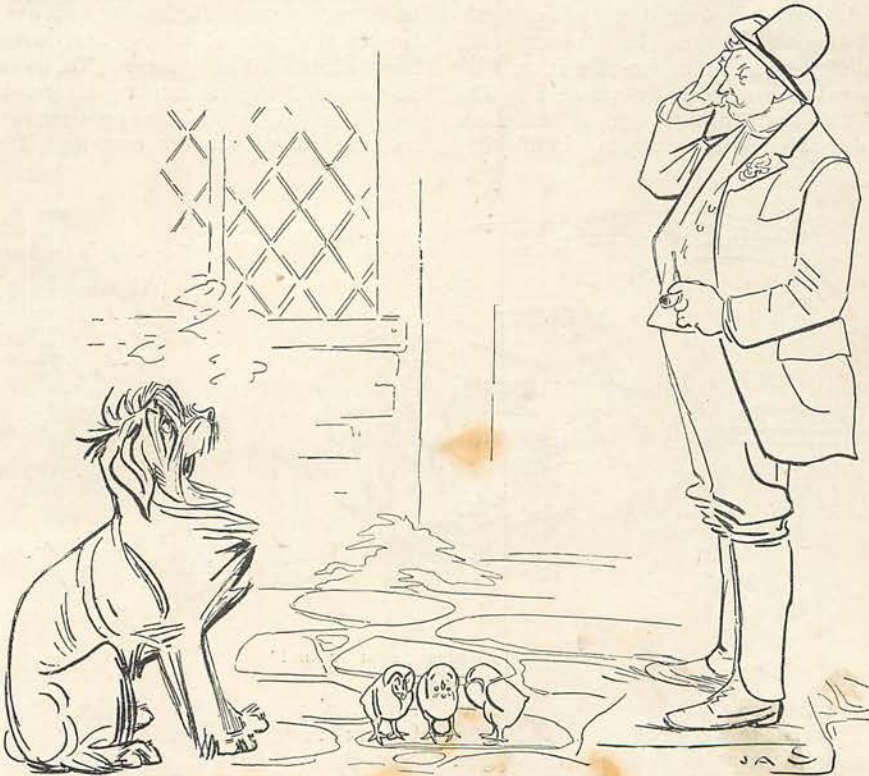
MOTHERLESS AND INQUISITIVE.



ONLY THREE LEFT.

foxes. To check the foxes, Mr. Williams washed the coops well with carbolic acid, and let his dogs loose at night. This was effectual. Mr. Williams's tailless sheepdog "Satan"

and a spaniel bitch had many a moonlight fox hunt together. Satan, by the way, was a peculiar dog, very quiet, but a game fighter when roused.



BEYOND THE WIT OF MAN OR DOG.



"WHAT! NO RATS?"

For a time the chickens prospered, and then, one morning, Mr. Williams found but three left out of some twenty-five fresh-hatched the day before. It was very odd. Mr. Williams couldn't understand it, and his dog Satan seemed equally puzzled. The chicks had been turned out in excellent health the day before, twenty-five inquisitive,

The thing occurred again and again, and the mystery was dense as ever. It couldn't be foxes, because they almost always kill a few for the sake of killing, and leave them lying about. Was it rats? No, there were no rats, said the rat-catcher who was called in. But still the disappearances went on, and morning after morning fifteen or



"THE DOG? NONSENSE; LOOK AT HIM!"

little, fuzzy activities, all agog to examine the world. Now there were but three, and not a scrap or a fragment of fluff left to suggest what had happened.

twenty of yesterday's chicks were not to be found; and the door of their coop was opened, or knocked down. If it were a human thief, why did he leave any at



LISTENING.

all? And besides, a man entering the yard at night would have been pounced on by the dogs at once. At last, in desperation, a friend suggested that perhaps the sheepdog knew something of it. But that was altogether unlikely—one had only to glance at him to see it. He was always a kindly guardian—almost a parent to the motherless chicks. He was chained up just outside the farm-house door all day, with a brood of happy chicks ever in his kennel and his food-pan, and, indeed, hopping all over him fearlessly, and nothing they could do ruffled his placid temper or changed his benevolent aspect. So the mystery continued, and was deep as ever.

Till one morning it happened to be necessary for Mr. Williams to rise just after dawn, and as he did so he looked out of his bedroom window. There stood Satan, the sheep-

dog, listening intently at the house door. As he listened and his master watched, there presently came along a batch of young chicks. Plainly the door of their coop had been opened again, and they had been let out. And then Mr. Williams gasped. For straightway the dog turned and calmly began snapping up the chicks, bolting them whole, as Mr. Williams expresses it, "like oysters." He had thus disposed of eight or nine in rapid succession, when Mr. Williams made a noise at the window, and the dog instantly fled.

That day Mr. Williams took particular care to move the chickens near him as he lay by his kennel, and to watch. But, no—the cunning rascal would take no notice of them at all. They ran and tumbled all about him, but he let them run. He was a hypocrite, consummate and proved, and he left the farm that evening.



GULP! THE MYSTERY SOLVED.