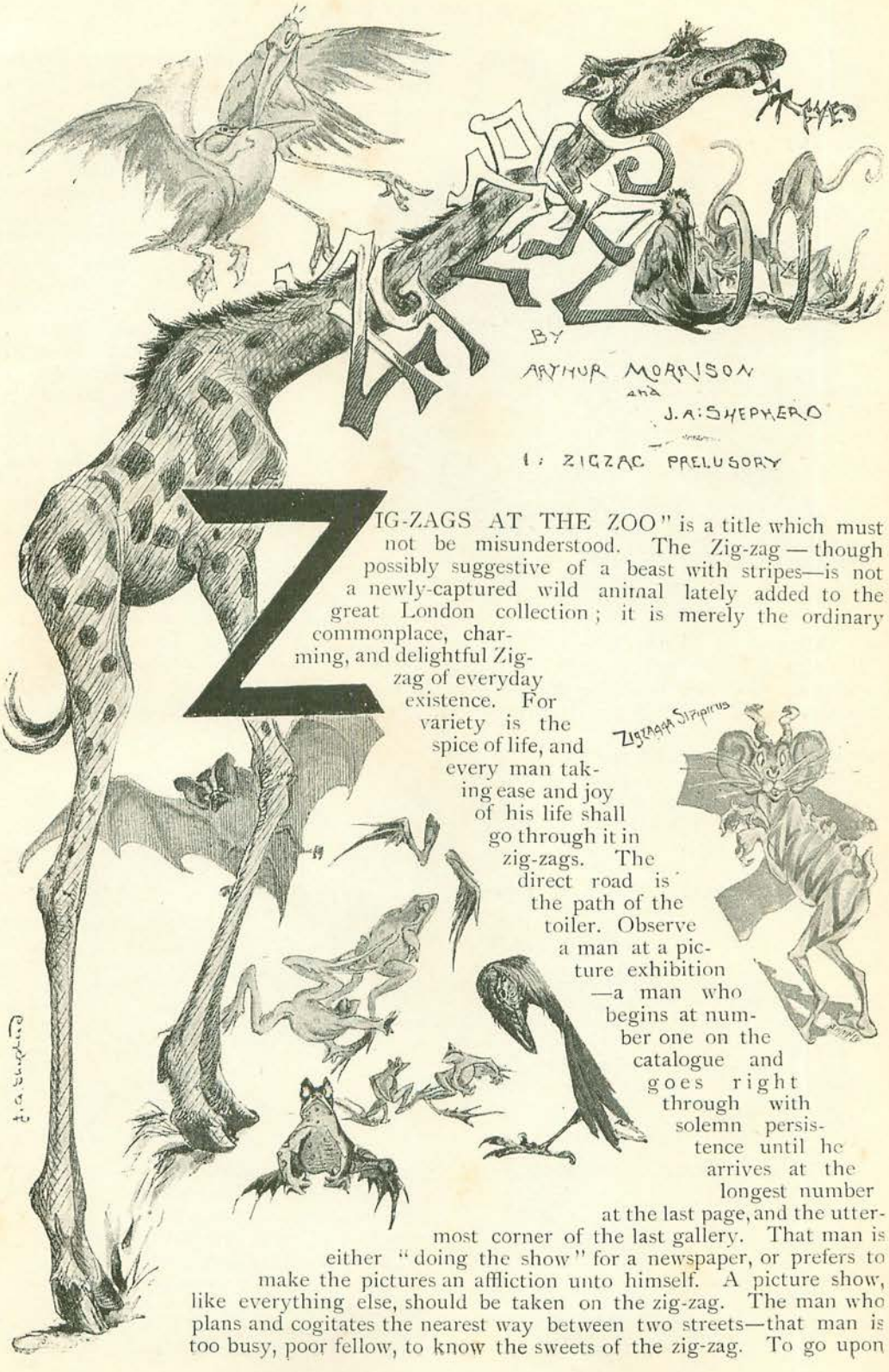


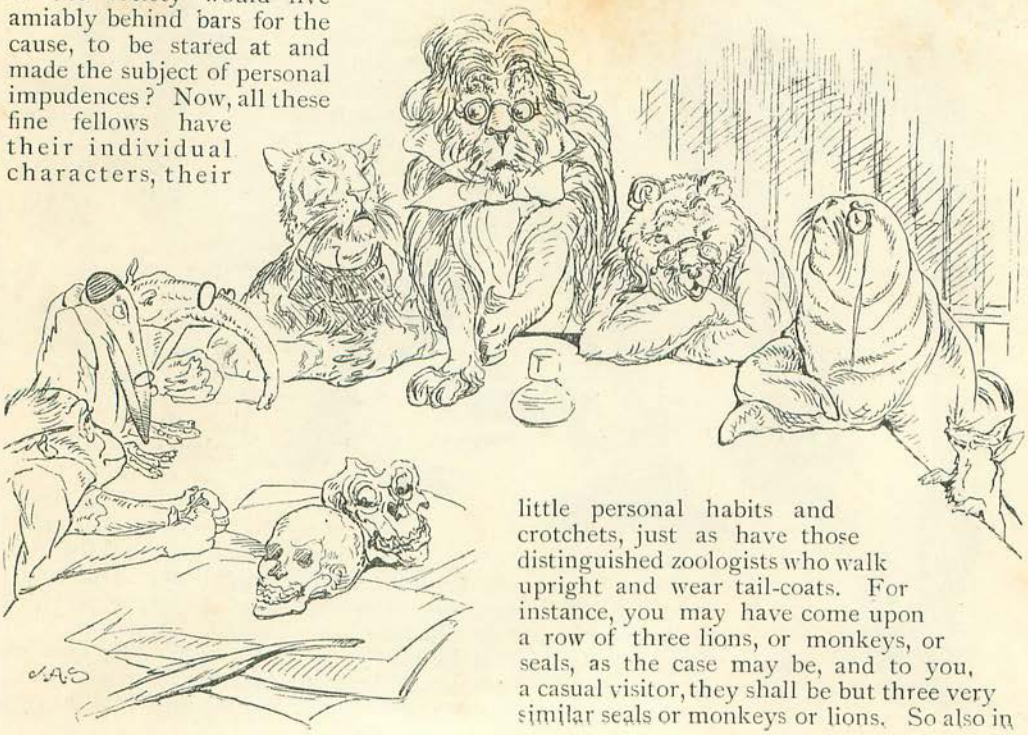
THE ZIGZAG PRELUSORY

BY
ARTHUR MORRISON
AND
J. A. SHEPHERD

"ZIG-ZAGS AT THE ZOO" is a title which must not be misunderstood. The Zig-zag — though possibly suggestive of a beast with stripes—is not a newly-captured wild animal lately added to the great London collection; it is merely the ordinary commonplace, charming, and delightful Zig-zag of everyday existence. For variety is the spice of life, and every man taking ease and joy of his life shall go through it in zig-zags. The direct road is the path of the toiler. Observe a man at a picture exhibition—a man who begins at number one on the catalogue and goes right through with solemn persistence until he arrives at the longest number at the last page, and the uttermost corner of the last gallery. That man is either "doing the show" for a newspaper, or prefers to make the pictures an affliction unto himself. A picture show, like everything else, should be taken on the zig-zag. The man who plans and cogitates the nearest way between two streets—that man is too busy, poor fellow, to know the sweets of the zig-zag. To go upon

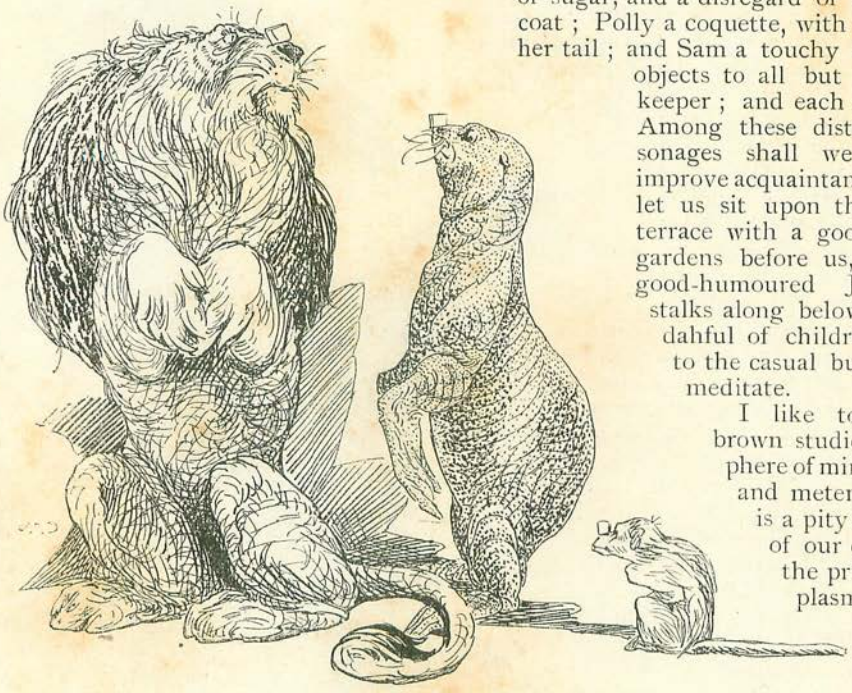
the zig-zag is to see more, and with greater entertainment. Who sees more stars, more lamp-posts, front-doors, and keyholes than other men—yea, even unto tenfold? He who goes home on the zig-zag. The zig-zag is the token, the mystic sign, of contentful ease and good fellowship the world over; the very word is passed to us, like a loving-cup, by the French, who have taken it in all good amity from the Germans, as Littré himself testifieth, and what greater sign of universal brotherhood shall you want than that? The zig-zag, too, is necessary; for the soberest citizen may not walk home through many streets in a straight line, lest he break his nose. "Zig-zag: something with short sharp turns," says the respectable Webster. Let us, therefore, take here a sharp turn, lest we run our noses against the wall of brown speculation.

Many good friends have I in the gardens of the Zoological Society of London. These good friends devote their entire lives to the furtherance of a popular taste for zoology, and are, or should be at once elected, most distinguished active members of the society. To pay certain gold guineas a year is a good thing; but what human member of the society would live amiably behind bars for the cause, to be stared at and made the subject of personal impudences? Now, all these fine fellows have their individual characters, their

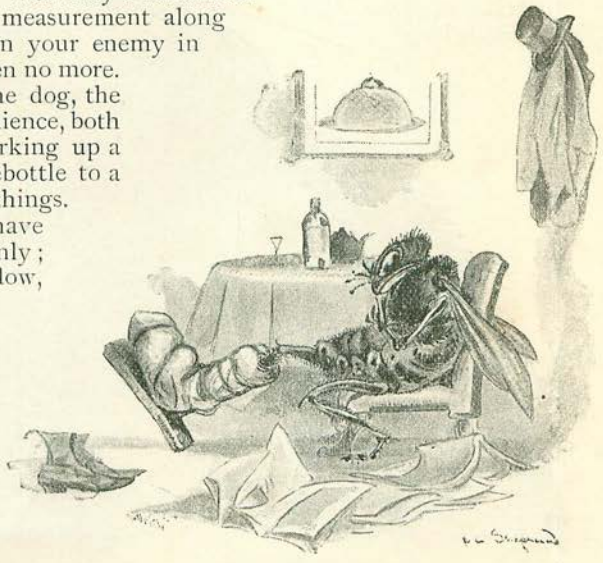


little personal habits and crotchets, just as have those distinguished zoologists who walk upright and wear tail-coats. For instance, you may have come upon a row of three lions, or monkeys, or seals, as the case may be, and to you, a casual visitor, they shall be but three very similar seals or monkeys or lions. So also in

the official guide-book, for a guide-book which is sober and official can say no other. But scrape close acquaintance with those creatures and talk to their keepers, and you shall find them Bill, Polly, and Sam: Bill, perhaps, being an easy-going lion (or seal or monkey), with a weakness for a lump of sugar, and a disregard of the state of his coat; Polly a coquette, with a vast pride in her tail; and Sam a touchy old fellow who objects to all but one particular keeper; and each with a history. Among these distinguished personages shall we zig-zag, and improve acquaintance. Meantime, let us sit upon this seat on the terrace with a good view of the gardens before us, while the big good-humoured Jung Perchad stalks along below with a howdahful of children and an eye to the casual bun; and let us meditate.

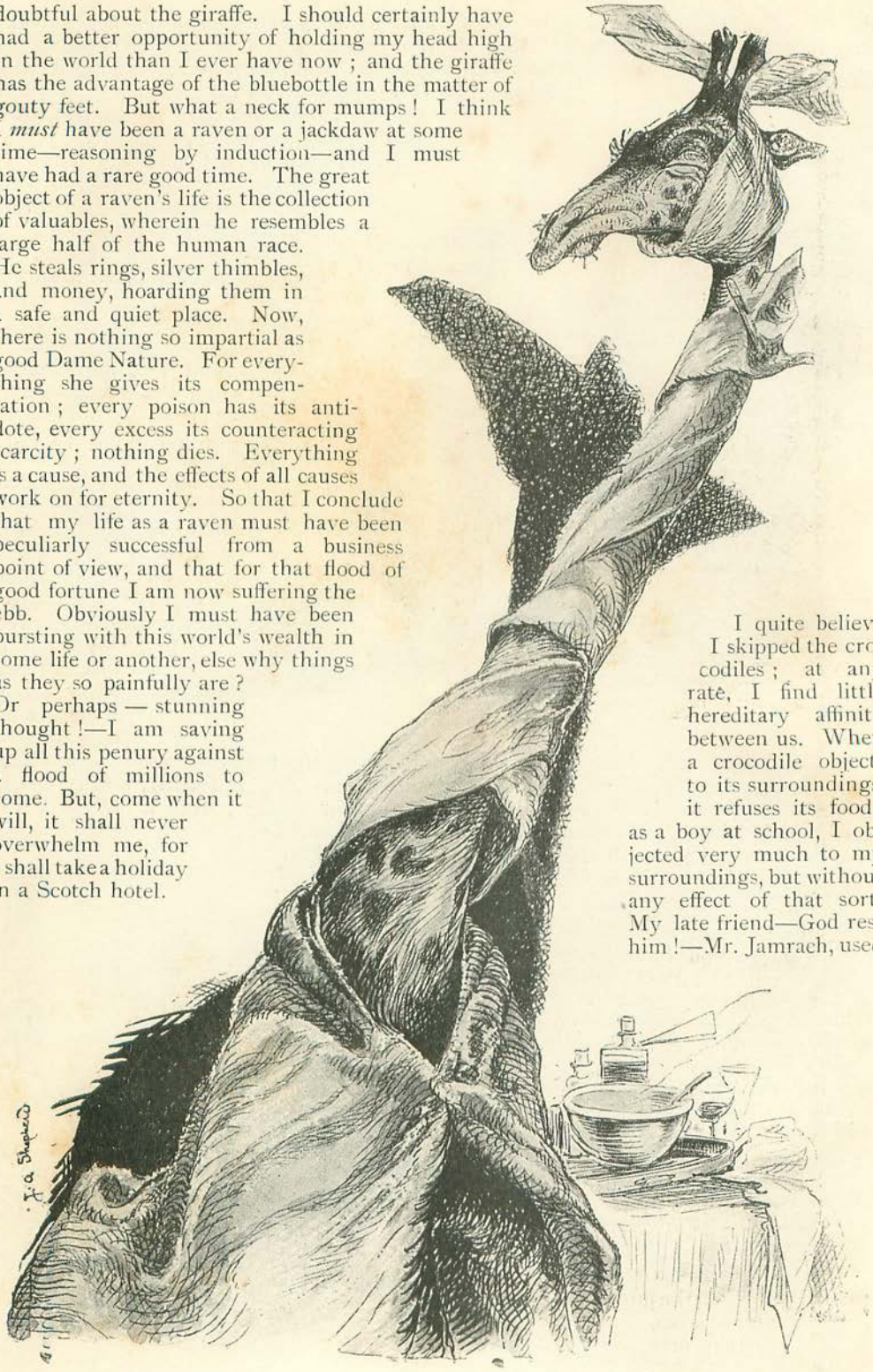


I like to conduct my brown studies in an atmosphere of mingled evolution and metempsychosis. It is a pity that the theory of our evolution from the primordial protoplasm in an inclusive line through every living species should now be considered old-fashioned. I like to imagine that among my remote ancestors every living thing is represented—it gives them a family interest. And if, further, I can persuade myself that *I* have been everything, at one time or another, from a bluebottle to a giraffe—why, then I can brown-study for ever. The imaginative mind can compass all things. Well may I remember the comfort of a mouth six feet by measurement along the lips, in a crocodile. You take in your enemy in one large generous smile, and he is seen no more. And a tail for others—the cow, the dog, the horse, the lion, the tiger—is a convenience, both as a fly-whisk and as a help to working up a tantrum. In evolution from a bluebottle to a giraffe one learns the value of these things.



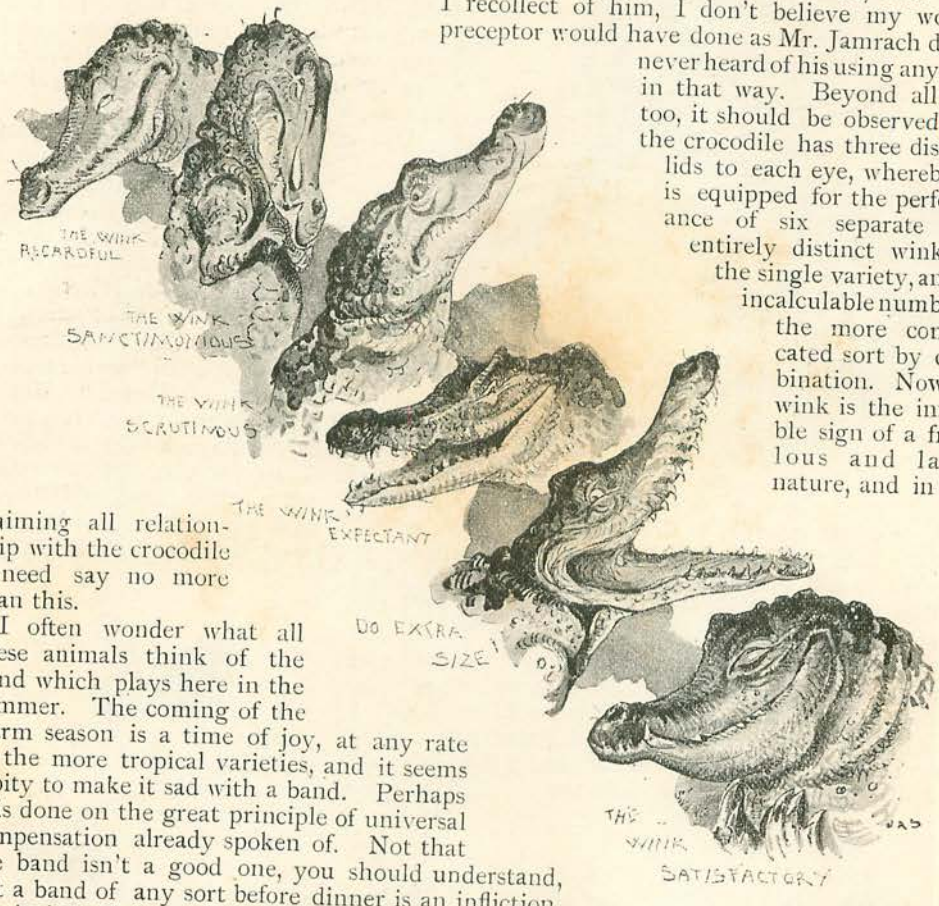
As a bluebottle, I think I should have enjoyed life—as a young one certainly; an elderly bluebottle gets bloated, slow, and gouty, losing his sense of humour. He grows infirm of purpose, too, and forgets to return to the same spot on a bald head after the eighteenth time of chasing off—the eighteenth time being really just when the fun begins. Sometimes he passes over a red nose altogether, probably from a fear of aggravating the gout in his feet. I am a little more

doubtful about the giraffe. I should certainly have had a better opportunity of holding my head high in the world than I ever have now ; and the giraffe has the advantage of the bluebottle in the matter of gouty feet. But what a neck for mumps ! I think I *must* have been a raven or a jackdaw at some time—reasoning by induction—and I must have had a rare good time. The great object of a raven's life is the collection of valuables, wherein he resembles a large half of the human race. He steals rings, silver thimbles, and money, hoarding them in a safe and quiet place. Now, there is nothing so impartial as good Dame Nature. For everything she gives its compensation ; every poison has its antidote, every excess its counteracting scarcity ; nothing dies. Everything is a cause, and the effects of all causes work on for eternity. So that I conclude that my life as a raven must have been peculiarly successful from a business point of view, and that for that flood of good fortune I am now suffering the ebb. Obviously I must have been bursting with this world's wealth in some life or another, else why things as they so painfully are ? Or perhaps — stunning thought !—I am saving up all this penury against a flood of millions to come. But, come when it will, it shall never overwhelm me, for I shall take a holiday in a Scotch hotel.

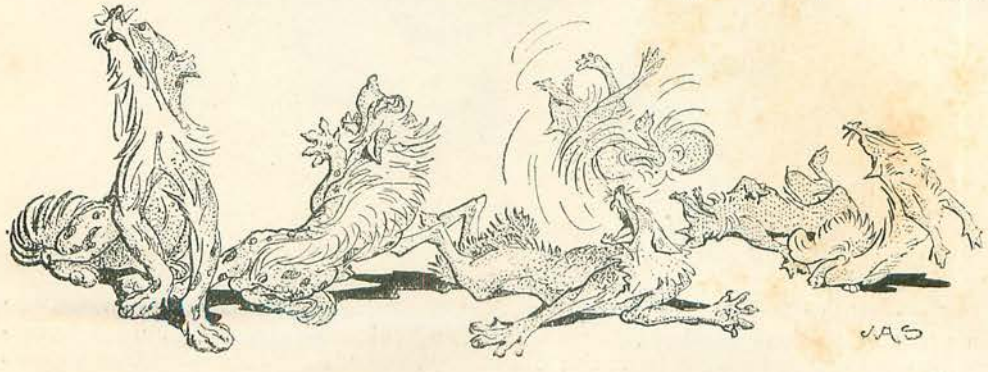


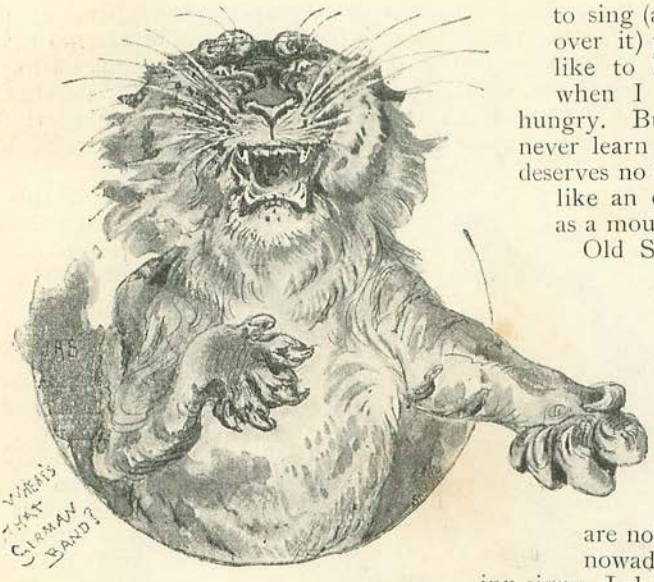
I quite believe I skipped the crocodiles ; at any rate, I find little hereditary affinity between us. When a crocodile objects to its surroundings, it refuses its food ; as a boy at school, I objected very much to my surroundings, but without any effect of that sort. My late friend—God rest him !—Mr. Jamrach, used

to have rare tussles with his crocodiles. They were valuable as property, and when, out of spite, they took to attempting suicide by starvation, he had them tied up firmly and fed forcibly with a long pole *à la* ramrod. I never remember being so obstinate about my dinner as that; and if I had, from what I recollect of him, I don't believe my worthy preceptor would have done as Mr. Jamrach did. I never heard of his using any stick in that way. Beyond all this, too, it should be observed that the crocodile has three distinct lids to each eye, whereby he is equipped for the performance of six separate and entirely distinct winks of the single variety, and an incalculable number of the more complicated sort by combination. Now the wink is the infallible sign of a frivolous and larky nature, and in disclaiming all relationship with the crocodile I need say no more than this.



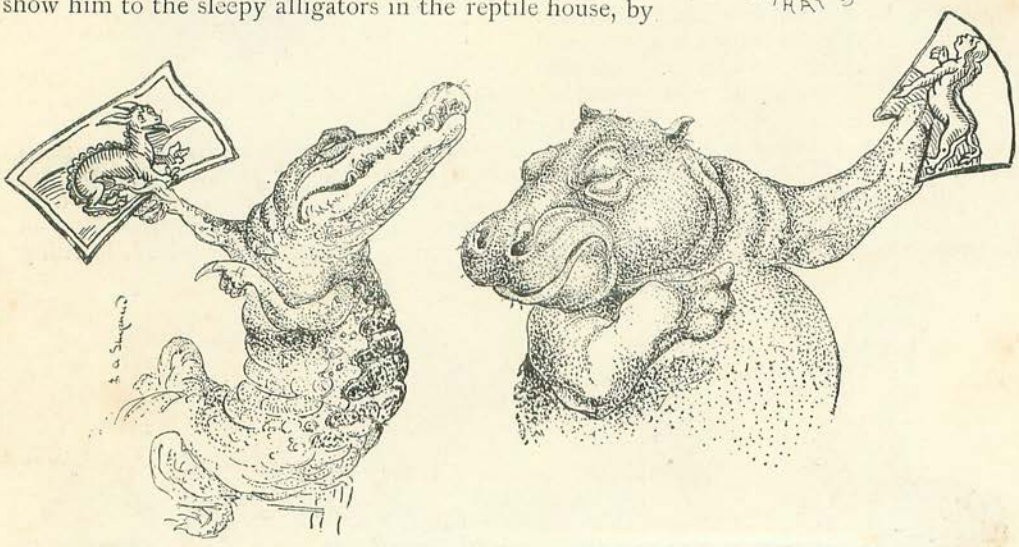
I often wonder what all these animals think of the band which plays here in the summer. The coming of the warm season is a time of joy, at any rate to the more tropical varieties, and it seems a pity to make it sad with a band. Perhaps it is done on the great principle of universal compensation already spoken of. Not that the band isn't a good one, you should understand, but a band of any sort before dinner is an infliction. Music is rather a nuisance to a hungry man, and its proper occasion arrives after a good dinner. Lions and tigers have ten times the capacity for hunger granted to man, and should be considered accordingly. Herein do I speak with feeling; for on several days of the week a German band plays near the corner of my street in the hungriest hour of the twenty-four, and on all the other afternoons the young lady next door, who is learning



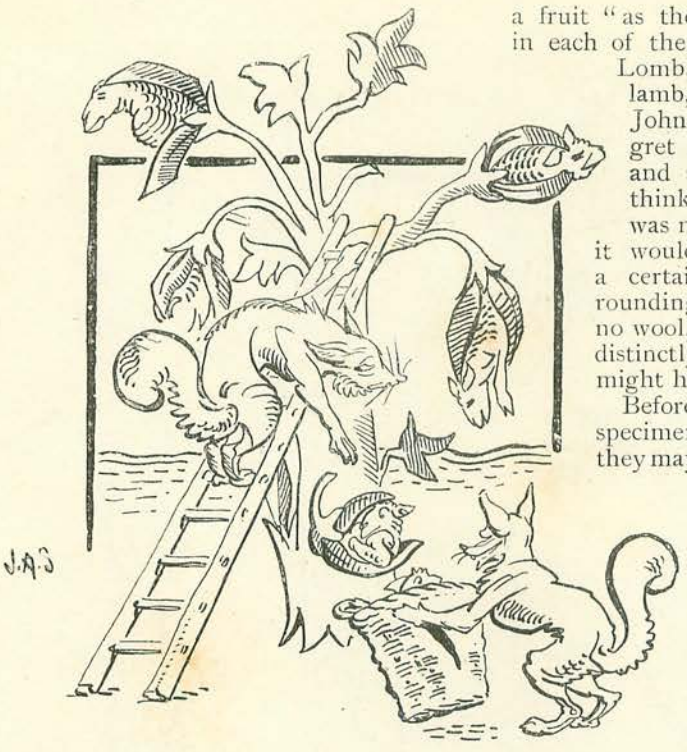


to sing (and taking a very long time over it) practises her scales. I should like to have met that German band when I was—say a tiger, and very hungry. But the young lady who will never learn to sing is infinitely worse, and deserves no consideration at all. I should like an opportunity of attacking her as a mouse.

Old Sir John Maundevile is a man one would like to have met. I would do a great deal—even unto paying at the gate—to inspect a zoological garden furnished with a good selection of Sir John's discoveries. I should like, for instance, to see his "wylde Gees, that han 2 Hedes." They are not found in many poultry-yards nowadays, and have become swans on inn signs. I should like, too, to see that "fulle felonous Best" with a black head and three long horns, "trenchant in front, scharpe as a Sword," with which he "sleethe the Olifaunt." Again, I think I should like to see those "Ipotaynes, that dwellen sometyme in the Watre and sometyme on the Lond; and thei ben half Man and half Hors," and compare them with the blithesome hippopotamus as we now see him in our own Zoo. I should like to have the opinion of the man end on his equine hinder half, and to see how he walked; for, unlike the centaur, the "ipotayne" had only two legs. I should like to get a "cokadrille" as Maundevile's book pictures him, with long legs and ears like a donkey's, and show him to the sleepy alligators in the reptile house, by

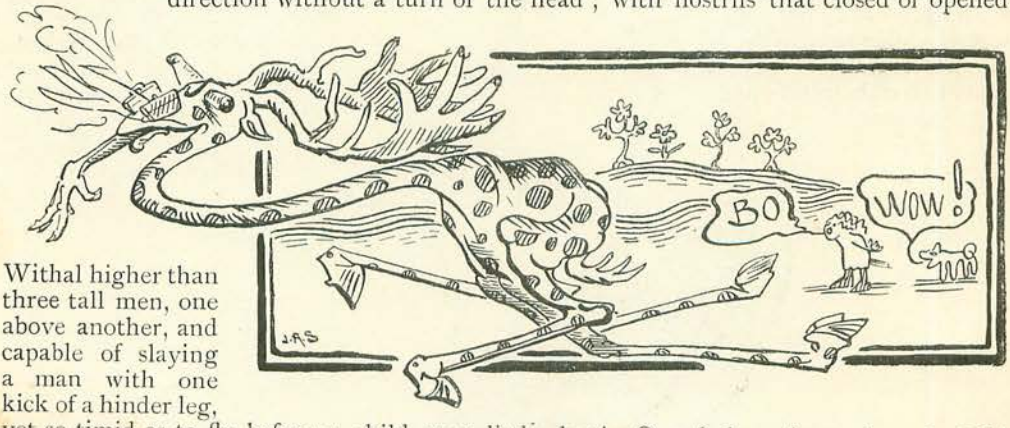


way of reconciling long-sundered relatives. But most I should like to get my mutton from a tree in the way Sir John did in a kingdom "that men clepen Caldilhe"—somewhere, it would seem, between India and China. On the tree, says our good friend, grows

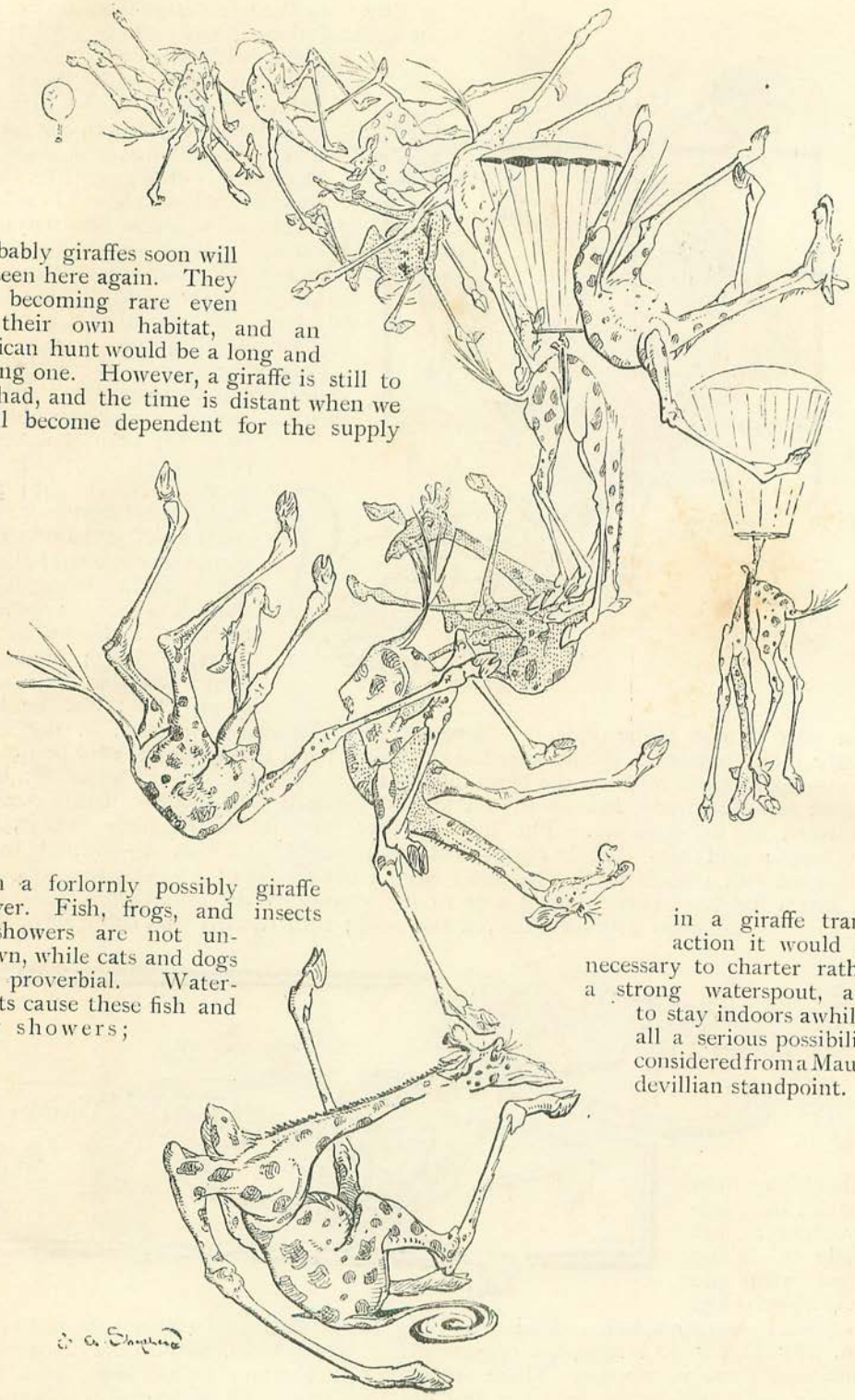


a fruit "as though it were Gourdes"; and in each of these gourds grows a "lyttylle Lomb, withouten Wolle," which lamb, as well as the fruit, Sir John has eaten. "And that is a gret Marveylle," quoth Sir John; and so it is, when you come to think of it. It is a pity that there was no wool on those "Lombs"; it would have given the narrative a certain artistic completeness, a rounding off. But, since there was no wool, it is fortunate that Sir John distinctly said so, otherwise people might have called him a liar.

Before the Zoological Society find specimens of these rarities, perhaps they may come upon another giraffe or two. Sir John Maundevile really plays light with the giraffe. He might have made something much more startling of it than "a Best pomelee or spotted; that is but a litylle more highe than is a Stede; but he hathe the Necke a 20 Cubytes long; and his Croup and his Tayl is as of an Hert; and he may loken over a gret highe Hous." Moreover, the illustrative woodcut in my copy actually under-represents the neck by full two-thirds: but that is for the very best of all reasons—there is no room on the block for any more. Perhaps it was because Sir John vouched for the giraffe that up to the present century most people in this country disbelieved in its existence. But just consider how he might have put it, and with truth; and how that heavy-handed artist might have put it—without truth. An animal with a deer's head, a leopard's skin, a swan's neck; a tongue that was used as a man's hand to grasp things a foot from its nose. With eyes that saw in every direction without a turn of the head; with nostrils that closed or opened.



Withal higher than three tall men, one above another, and capable of slaying a man with one kick of a hinder leg, yet so timid as to fly before a child or a little dog! One feels rather ashamed of Sir John, after all, for neglecting his opportunities. There is difficulty in the capture of a giraffe, and there is expense. These obstacles, however, and greater ones, have been overcome again and again in time past by the Zoological Society of London, and



probably giraffes soon will be seen here again. They are becoming rare even in their own habitat, and an African hunt would be a long and trying one. However, a giraffe is still to be had, and the time is distant when we shall become dependent for the supply upon a forlornly possibly giraffe shower. Fish, frogs, and insects in showers are not unknown, while cats and dogs are proverbial. Waterspouts cause these fish and frog showers; in a giraffe transaction it would be necessary to charter rather a strong waterspout, and to stay indoors awhile; all a serious possibility considered from a Maundevillian standpoint.