

T HE camel is very largely a fraud. That is to say, he contributes his half share to a very large fraud, and the goody-goody natural history books of childhood's days contribute the other half—perhaps rather more than half. First he is a fraud

in the matter of docility—a vile fraud. We read of the kind, patient, intelligent camel, who voluntarily settles on his knees to receive his load, and afterwards carries it for any number of thousands of miles at twenty or thirty miles an hour with nothing to eat

and we approve of the camel and his cheapness.

Then there is a proverb which aids the fraud—most proverbs, by-the-by, aid a fraud of some sort—a proverb about the last straw breaking the camel's back. What a glamour of oppressed, uncomplaining patience that proverb sets about the camel! You imagine the picturesque but inconsiderate Bedouin, having piled his faithful camel with everything he possesses,

looking about for something else to crown the structure. There are all his tents, blankets, trunks, bags, rugs, hat-boxes, umbrellas, and walking-sticks, with some grocery for Mrs. B. and a wooden horse from the Bagdad Arcade for the little B's. It seems a pity, having a camel, not to load it up enough, so he looks for something else, but can see nothing. Suddenly it strikes him that he has just used a straw to drink a gin-sling, and without for an instant considering what may be the result, he pops it on the top of the rest of the baggage. The patient, loving creature has barely time to give its master one pathetically reproachful look when its back goes with a bang.

Now, this may be the way of the Bedouin, but it isn't the way of the camel. He doesn't wait for the last straw—he won't have the first if he can help it. There's no living thing in the universe that he wouldn't like to bite or kick; and when he isn't engaged in active warfare with creation in general, he is sulking and planning it.

He equally resents being loaded or fed, or banged with a pole. He wants the world for himself, and finding he can't get it, sulks savagely. He has to be shoved forcibly to his knees and tied down by the neck and fore-legs before he is loaded, and while the operation is in progress he grunts and growls like a whole menagerie, and reaches about—he *can* reach—to masticate people. When he is loaded he won't get up—but he will grunt and bite.

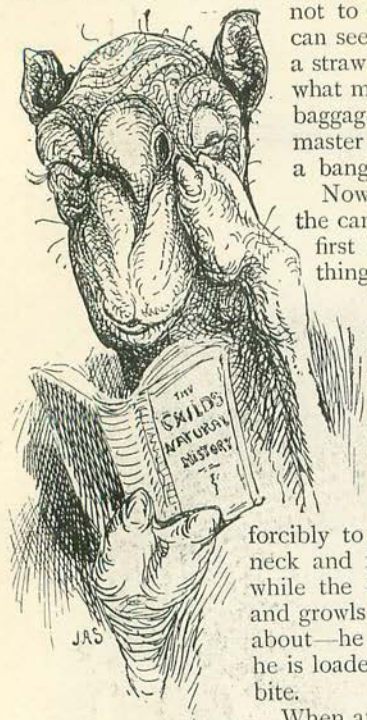
When at last he is persuaded to stand upon his legs he devotes himself to rushing about and scattering his load far and wide—and biting. The unhappy Bedouin's household furniture, hat-boxes, and wooden horse are scattered all over the Syrian Desert, and the unhappy Bedouin himself is worse off than at the beginning; and still the insatiate creature bites. The Bedouin swears—in his own way—hopes that jackals may sit upon the grave of the camel's grandfather, and so forth—and gathers his belongings together preparatory to beginning afresh.

And then, after all this—and supposing that all troubles are overcome and the journey ends without mishap—that delightful camel objects to the

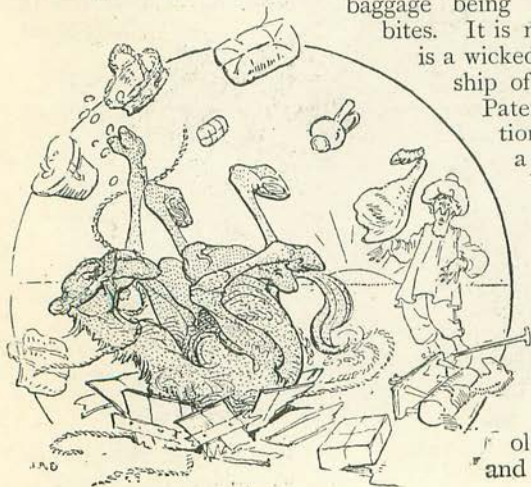
baggage being taken off, and growls and bites. It is not mere poetic imagery, it is a wicked joke to call the camel the ship of the desert. To call it even the

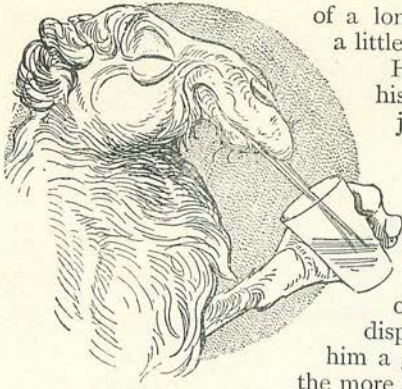
Cart Paterson of the desert would be to cast reflections upon the business conscientiousness of a very respectable firm. One is disposed to be the harder on the camel because of the goody-book fraud, which is a double-barrelled fraud, telling wonderful stories of the camel's speed. As a matter of fact, the ordinary pack-camel, lightly loaded, is barely up to three miles an hour.

He is a provident beast in the matter of drink. He takes a very long drink when he can get it, and saves it, neatly stowed away, against the drought. As a camel gets older and more experienced, he lays by more and more water in this way, arriving in the course



CARTER PATERSON OF THE DESERT.

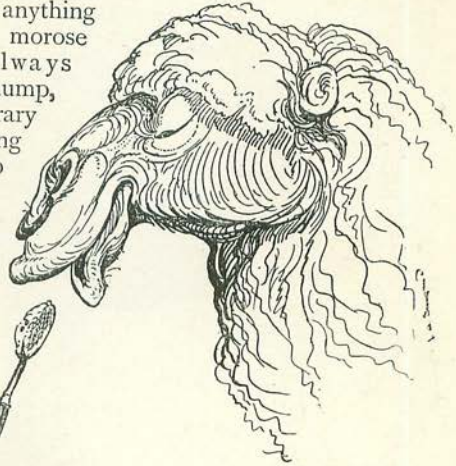




A LONG DRINK.

of a long and thirsty life at five or six quarts. If he lived a little longer he would probably add whisky.

He is also provident in the matter of food. He feeds on his hump. I see an opportunity of dragging in a joke just here about a perpetually sulky man doing the same, but I refrain. I take the occasion to renounce and disclaim all intention of saying anything about the morose camel always having the hump, or of his contrary disposition giving him a greater hump the more he has to eat. It is vulgar as well as old.



FEEDING: MANNER THE FIRST.

The only variation in the facial expression of the camel takes place when he eats. Ordinarily the camel wears an immutable, deceptive, stupid, good-natured grin. This is a wise provision of Nature, leading people to trust and approach him, and giving him opportunities to gnaw their faces off with suddenness and less difficulty; or guilelessly to manœuvre the victim near a wall, against which he can rub him and smash him flat.



SECOND.

His feeding manners are vulgar, although superior to the tiger's. When he eats he uses his immense lips first as fingers to lift the desired dainty. Then he munches in a zig-zag, using alternately his right upper teeth on his left lower, and *vice versa*, and swinging his lips riotously. And he chucks up his nose, taking full advantage of his length of neck in swallowing.

Here at the Zoo probably the first of the camels to attract the visitors' attention is Bob the Bactrian, in his semi-detached villa under the clock.

Bob the Bactrian is a handsome old ruffian when his coat is in full bloom. He sheds twenty-four pounds of hair every year—and a pound of camel-hair is a good deal. It is frightful to think of the miles of water-colour sketches which might be perpetrated with the brushes made from twenty-four pounds of camel-hair. Self the keeper has sufficient of it by him to weave enough cloth to clothe a regiment—and with good raiment.



THIRD.



FOURTH.

I think Bob is a little vain of his fine beard and long hair. He poses about in picturesque attitudes when it is in good condition, and nothing short of a biscuit will make him disturb the curve of his neck. Bob is a military character—he came from Afghanistan—and carries out the part with great completeness.

Offer Bob a biscuit, and, as he hangs his head over the railings in slobbering expectancy, he will "mark time" regularly with all four feet. Rose, the cross-bred Bactrian, lives next door to Bob,

and there is something about the pair, and about their whole environment, that makes one think of them in the characters of an *area belle* and a fascinating guardsman; particularly as Bob is, I believe, a sort of cousin. The railing between them helps the illusion, just as the clock-tower above them gives a tone to Bob's military bearing—being dimly suggestive of the Horse Guards.

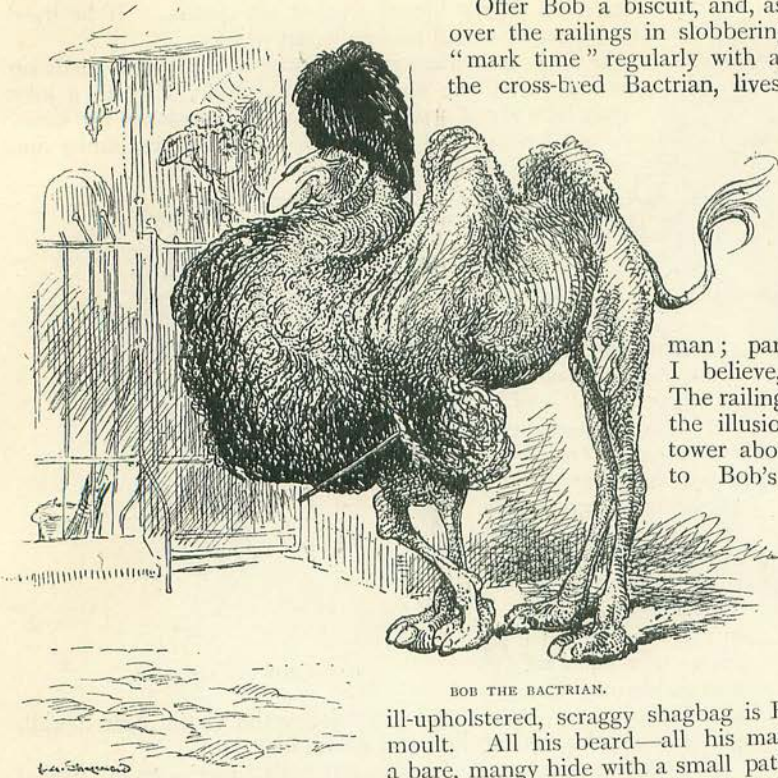
Between Bob in full bloom and Bob in a state of moult, there is a world of difference. A sorry,

ill-upholstered, scraggy shagbag is Bob in his periodical moult. All his beard—all his magnificent frills gone; a bare, mangy hide with a small patch here and there of

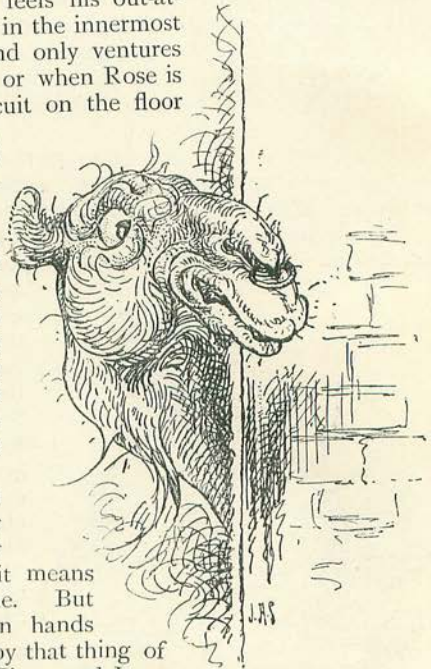
inadhesive hair is all his outward show. Poor Bob feels his out-at-elbows state keenly, and lies low. He hides all day in the innermost recesses of his state apartment under the clock, and only ventures forth when the gates of the Gardens are closed, or when Rose is asleep. Sometimes the presence of a piece of biscuit on the floor of his front garden will tempt him sorely for hours, till he ventures forth after it, first looking cautiously about from his door to make sure that he is un-

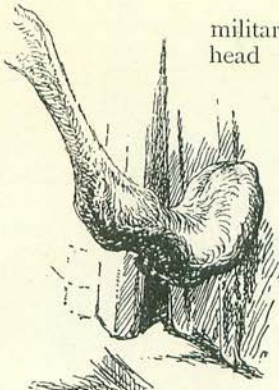
observed. Neither his periodical seediness of appearance, however, nor anything else under the sun will prevent Bob demanding his meals. He keeps Self the keeper up to his work. If at any time it should occur to him that business in biscuits is becoming slack, or that another meal is due—neither a rare contingency—Bob walks to his back door and kicks with his fore-feet, like a rude boy. The keeper must come then, because Bob's foot never improves a door.

Among Bob's accoutrements a feared and detested place is held by a big leather muzzle, a thing its wearer regards with mingled feelings. He isn't altogether sorry when Self proceeds to buckle it on, because it means that a pleasant walk about the grounds is to ensue. But bitter, bitter, poor Bob's lot to walk among human hands teeming with many buns—buns shut out for ever by that thing of leather! He sees the elephants caressed and fed; Jingo and Jung Perchad amble good-humouredly about, swinging their trunks in affable freedom right and left, and collecting many a pleasant morsel; while he, the magnificent, the bearded, the



BOB THE BACTRIAN.





"MR. SELF IN?"

military Bob, in that vile nose-cage—but there! He turns his head the other way, and tries to look as though he hated buns. He tries not to see them, but they glisten, gloriously brown and sticky, from all sides—somehow there are always more buns about when that muzzle is on. And Bob becomes a greater misanthrope than is natural to him; which, speaking of a camel, is saying much. But what living thing in all these Gardens could spend half its waking hours in painfully assuming a contempt for buns without becoming a misanthrope?

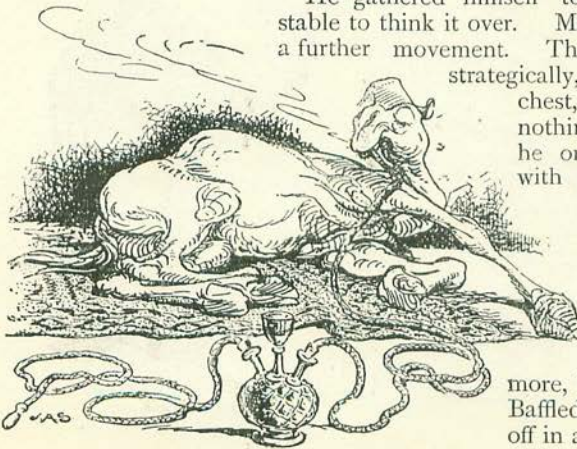
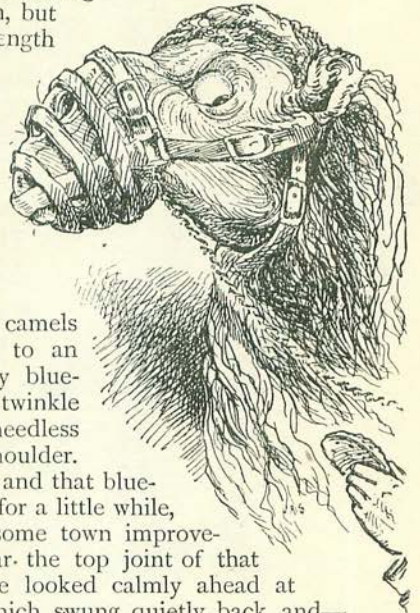
Rose, who is cross-bred, is, in sheer spite of the hint the word carries, rather an amiable creature, and very rarely cross—for a camel. There has even been no necessity to give her a nose-ring. She is not always of an industrious appearance, having a habit of lying about in an Oriental lazy heap—so Oriental a heap that one instinctively looks for the hookah which Rose ought, in the circumstances, to be smoking.

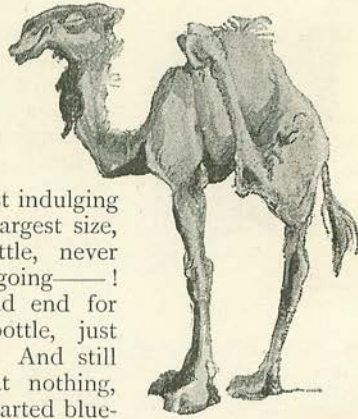
The local flies try a little annoyance now and again, but they have learned a great respect for a camel's length of reach. I remember a country bluebottle—a very raw and self-confident country bluebottle—who made a rash onslaught upon Rose without proper consideration. I knew this fly—I had met him once before, when he madly attempted to burgle a tin picnic box containing nothing.

I felt interested to observe how he would get on with Rose, knowing well that, without asking advice of any regular local bluebottle, he would assume her to be a mere scraggy town cow. This is just what he did. Rose stood, looking perfectly amiable—all camels look amiable; it is a part of their system—and, to an unaccustomed eye, quite unconscious of the country bluebottle's existence. Still, there was a certain optical twinkle which should have warned that bluebottle. But, heedless all, he rushed forward and made to settle on Rose's shoulder. With a nonchalant swing the near hind leg came up, and that bluebottle was brushed off his legs. He buzzed about for a little while, puzzled. This was quite a new motion in cow-legs—some town improvement, evidently. So he settled—at least he tried—near the top joint of that hind-leg, where the foot couldn't reach him. Rose looked calmly ahead at nothing, and moved no limb but the near fore-leg, which swung quietly back, and—that bluebottle was projected into space at the instant his feet were landing.

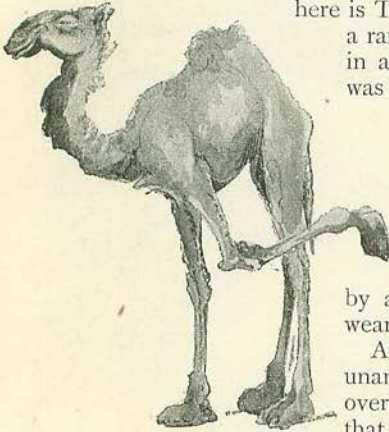
He gathered himself together, and sat on the roof of the stable to think it over. Meanwhile Rose stood at ease, without a further movement. The bluebottle considered the question strategically, and made up his mind that on the chest, just before the joints of the fore-legs, nothing could touch him. He tried it. But he only arrived on the spot simultaneously with a hind-foot, which swung neatly out between the fore-legs and drove that bluebottle into the surrounding atmosphere once more. And still Rose gazed amiably at nothing.

Losing his temper he made straight for her nose; but the nose never moved. The hind leg came up once more, however, and made the rout complete. Baffled and disgusted, the rash bluebottle flew off in a pet, over the rails dividing Rose from





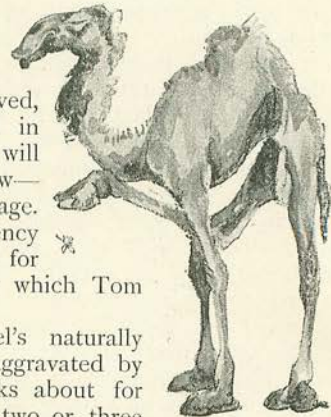
Bob. Now Bob was just indulging in a yawn of the very largest size, and that rash bluebottle, never looking where he was going—! Well, well, it was a sad end for a bright young bluebottle, just beginning to see life. And still Rose gazed amiably at nothing, standing just as that departed bluebottle first saw her.



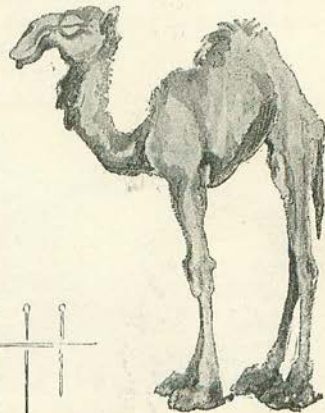
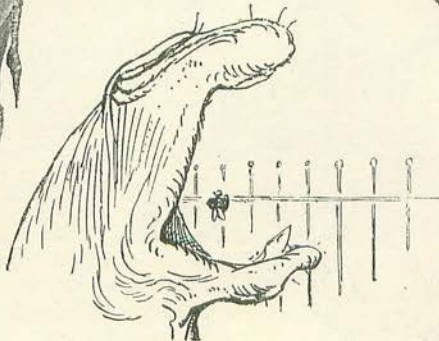
But the aristocrat among the camels here is Tom, who is white, and a rarity. He was captured in an Egyptian fight, and was little more than half-

grown when he arrived, but has increased in seven years, and will grow no larger now—nor any more savage.

This latter contingency has been provided for by a neat little iron ring which Tom wears in his nose.



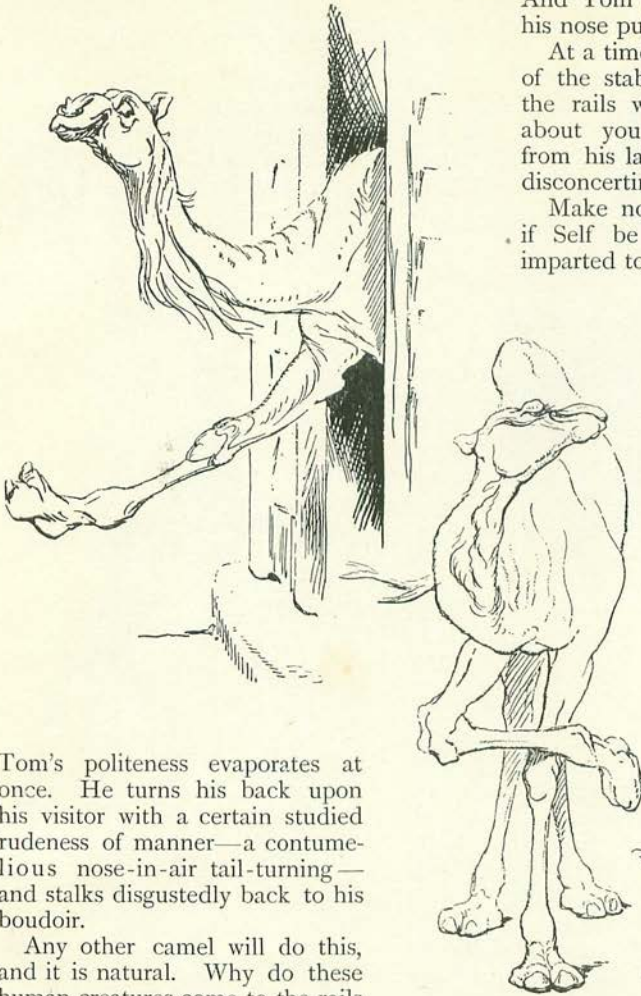
At the Zoo the camel's naturally unamiable temper is not aggravated by overloading; nobody looks about for that last straw after the two or three small boys have mounted. Wherefore these camels are as well behaved as camels can be. Tom doesn't playfully try to smash his keeper against the wall—at any rate, not quite



so often as he did at first—chiefly because of that piece of jewellery in his nose. That has made a very peaceable dromedary of Tom, for when he takes a walk the keeper snaps one end of a neat little piece of chain upon the ring, and keeps the other in his hand. And Tom will do anything rather than have his nose pulled.

At a time when Tom is in the seclusion of the stable—perhaps invisible—approach the rails with an air of having a biscuit about you. Promptly Tom will emerge from his lair, with a startling stride and a disconcerting reach of neck.

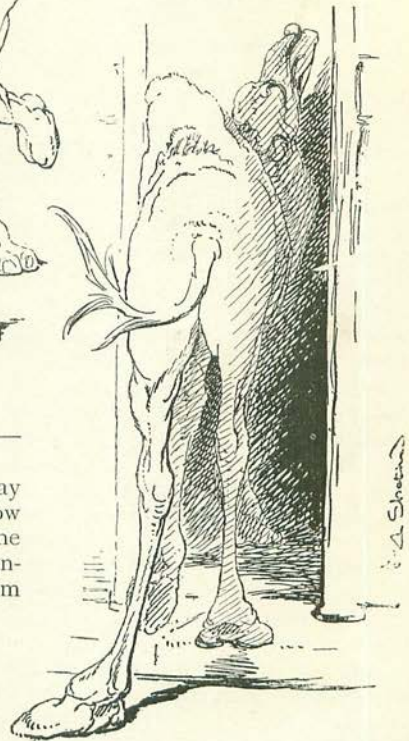
Make no further sign of biscuit. Then, if Self be by, you shall find that he has imparted to Tom a certain polish of manner surprising in a camel. Self will tell Tom to beg, and Tom will beg immediately; the supplication consisting in standing on three legs and throwing the right fore-foot negligently across the left knee. Thereat you probably give him a biscuit. But if you remain obdurate, or have come biscuitless,



Tom's politeness evaporates at once. He turns his back upon his visitor with a certain studied rudeness of manner—a contumelious nose-in-air tail-turning—and stalks disgustedly back to his boudoir.

Any other camel will do this, and it is natural. Why do these human creatures come to the rails unprovided with biscuits? What are they for? So the camel turns up his nose—and a camel *can* do this; watch him—and flounces away.

Now, I like Bob, and I like Rose, so far as one may like a camel; and I like Tom, so far as Tom will allow it. But that doesn't in the least reconcile me to the juvenile natural history book. You can't conscientiously look Bob or Tom in the face and call him a ship of the desert, or a ship of any kind. You might possibly manage to work up a small fit of sea-sickness if you rode a Heirie—the swiftest of the dromedaries—at his best pace; because at a pinch the Heirie can make ten miles an hour, shaking his unfortunate rider's joints loose, even enough he be swathed in many swaddlings. But neither Bob nor Tom is a Heirie. Tom is a fairly quick dromedary, but Bob, if he will pardon my saying so, is only an ordinary



slow camel; nothing more than the "hairy scary oont" sung by Mr. Kipling. In Mr. Kipling's ballad Mr. Atkins is made to call the camel many things, but never a ship of the desert. Contrariwise,

—"the commissariat cam-u-el, when all is said and done,
'E's a devil, an' a ostrich, an' a orphan child in one."

There you have the character of the camel in a dozen words.

Two attendants have the camels in the Zoo, Mr. Self and Mr. Toots. The former is the officially appointed keeper, with the regular badge and uniform.

He has been master of the camels for more than forty years, and knows a family (human) infant representatives of which he has led round on camel-rides for three generations.

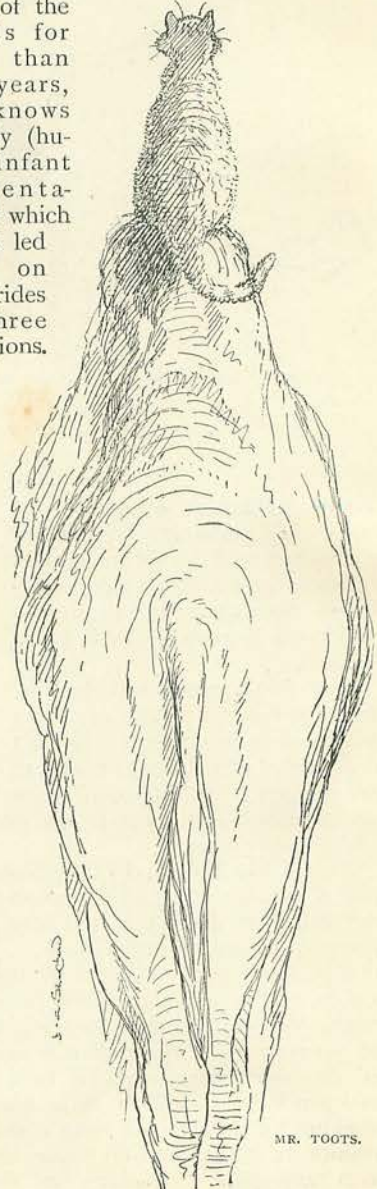


THE CAMEL KEEPER.

What Self doesn't know about the little

fads and fancies of "the hairy scary oont" there is nobody to tell him. He is a wary and observant person, is Self. When a man has been forty years watching the affably-smiling camel, and looking out to avoid being suddenly jammed to death against a wall, or having his face bitten off and his feet viciously trodden on, wary observation begins to be natural with him.

Mr. Toots occupies quite a different position in life from Mr. Self, being a cat. Mr. Toots, as fits his name, is a quiet and reserved cat. Bob and Rose are quite friendly with Mr. Toots, and will, if possible, avoid stepping on him, which is an astonishing degree of amiability in a camel; but, of course, so far as Rose is concerned, she is an unusually amiable camel. Mr. Toots is a noticeable, carrotty cat, and you can't deceive either Bob or Rose with a substitute. Once Mr. Toots was unwell, and a tabby was installed, as a temporary experiment, in his place. Bob was determined to suppress all spurious imitations, and the last worldly sensation of that unhappy tabby was conveyed through the medium of Bob's fantastic toe. Therefore Mr. Toots still maintains his monopoly, and may sit among Bob's or Rose's feet with confidence. Tom, however, doesn't know him, and won't. So that Mr. Toots, with the wisely accommodating spirit of his namesake, says—"Oh, it's of no consequence, thank you—no consequence at



MR. TOOTS.

all, I'm sure," and gets away from Tom to bask in the magnificent patronage of Bob the Bactrian and the lady next door.

Cantankerous and uncertain as is the character of the camel, there is a deal of human nature about him.

When he has packed into his character all the possible devil, and ostrich, and orphan, there is still room for much human cussedness, and it is there.

You shall see it even in his very face. There is a world of expression in a camel's face, misleading often to a stranger, but with a human deceit.

The face lends itself particularly to varied and strongly marked expression. The nostrils



will open and close with a great flexibility, and the lips and eyebrows are more loose and mobile still. What more machinery may the camel want for the facial expression of his ill qualities? With such a lip and nose he can sneer as never can human thing; this at the humble person who brings him no biscuit. He can guffaw coarsely—and with no sound beyond a rare grunt. Furious malice is native to his face, and a self-sufficient conceit and superciliousness comes with full feeding. Even in his least expressive slumber the camel is smugly complacent, although his inborn genius cannot teach him that a piece of cardboard is not a biscuit.