

ZIG ZAGS

AT THE

ZOO

BY
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&
J.A. SHEPHERD

WHEN I have wandered about the Zoo in a proper zig-zag of a suitable derangement; when Samson has been nodded to, Bob the Bactrian chatted with, and other acquaintances called upon; and when a naturally lazy disposition suggests a rest, I like to sit opposite the great birdcage, which is officially declared a pond—the Night Herons' Pond—and look upon the small world there living and moving. Everything is busy—ducks, gulls, herons, egrets, umbres, flamingoes, ruffs, spoonbills, screamers—all but the doves, who are lazy and sulky—each in his own particular way. Each, that is to say, in his own particular method and action, for each has the same object—something to eat. It is a wonderful thing to observe—this persistence of birds after something to eat. Capture almost any bird

IV
ZIG ZAG
MISCELLAVIAN

Shepherd

you please, fill him with somewhere about double his own bulk of food, and let him go again. In two minutes you shall find that bird gravely prospecting about and making all sorts of experimental borings—for something to eat. And birds show the most extraordinary conviction of the edibility of the world in general. Most birds will extract nourishment somehow from a brick, an old nail, or a broken bottle; those



VEGETARIANS.

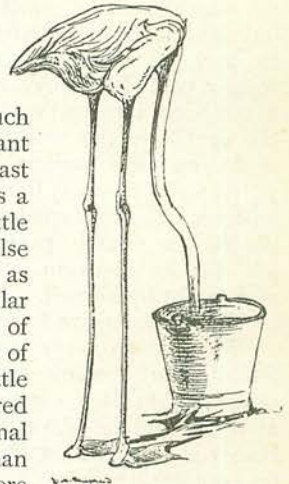
who can't will try. And when a certain tract has been searched through, pebble by pebble, and found to be absolutely barren, then they will begin on it again, on the off-chance of a thrown brick or the passing of some human creature in the meantime having left behind it something to eat.



THE GOOD-HUMOURED IBIS.

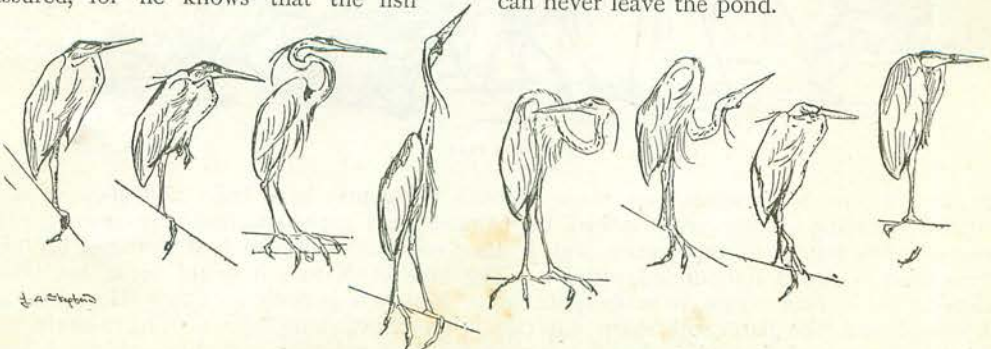
Here most of the birds are omnivorous—certainly none are vegetarians but the doves.

The doves, as vegetarians, represent the brotherhood, or the cause, or the belief, or whatever it is, rather unfavourably. The dove can never do anything much credit, being rather an insignificant humbug itself. Here, in contrast with the rest, you observe it as a miserably inactive and sulky little bird, who won't join anything else in a hopeless food-hunt, but is as



greedy as all the rest together when the keeper brings a regular meal. Also it growls and fumes angrily at the friendly approach of any other bird—a bird probably who would make little trouble of eating it at a sitting, beak and all. And sitting in fluffy little groups of two or three, it grunts pharisaically at the good-humoured ibis below, as he tosses his long beak and swallows whatever animal food it may have found him. The dove takes life more easily than any of the other birds in the place, and still goes about (or, more ordinarily, sits still) grumbling, peevish, and spiteful.

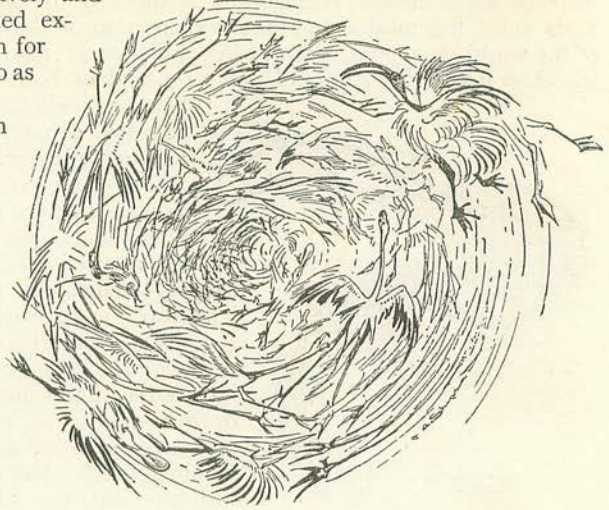
The flamingoes forming the upper ten (as well as four can) in this little world, insist on being served from a lordly pail, from which, their heads being inverted, their upper beaks scoop. The heron, although no inferior searcher of the ground, will never trouble unnecessarily about provisions already in a safe place. No provisions are in a safe place here among so many birds; but Jerry, the solitary purple heron in the cage just behind us, has a tiny pond to himself. Throw a little fish therein, soon after Jerry's dinner. Jerry, without leaving his perch, will inspect it narrowly—from above, to see if it be alive; from the side, to judge of its plumpness; and from each other direction, for purposes which any other intelligent heron will at once understand. Then Jerry will return to his siesta, his next snack assured, for he knows that the fish can never leave the pond.



A NARROW INSPECTION.

A bird will never sacrifice an ounce of dignity if it may be saved. Observe a little crowd of the smaller birds here swoop upon a handful of biscuit-crumbs—ruffs, gulls, and maybe a little oyster-catcher; see then a larger bird approach. All these dignified little birds at once raise their beaks and stalk gravely and deliberately off, with an unconcerned expression of having had quite enough for themselves, so that the big bird may do as he likes with the remainder.

The sudden appearance of a man in the inclosure may cause what seems to be a temporary upset of the general dignity—that of all the birds, big or little. All join in a tempestuous swirl, filling the air with flappings and small shrieks. But, the shock over, the swirl becomes nothing but the collective fly round, by way of exercise, which is a regular part of the day's enjoyment at the Night Herons' Pond. Though the man stay, the swirl will soon settle, and the swirlers join in a stately walk-off—away from the man, however—a sort of quaintly regular parade—a church parade, let us say, for its decorum.



A SWIRL.

The most imposing parader is the horned screamer, who is a sort of pageant by himself. He stands upright, spreads his wings wide, throws his head back, and lifts his extensive feet much before him—a very beadle, a very drum-major among birds.

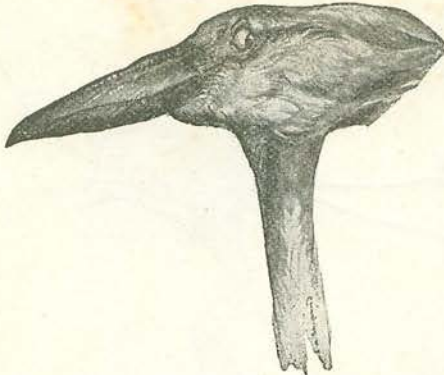
Wherever so many animals as this, of any sort, be gathered together, there will be found some comedy characters. The African hammer-head (or, more politely, the tufted umbre) is a comedy character, when he is on foot. His comic head labels him at once; and he plays up to his comic head. He doesn't join in the swirl when a man comes in—on the contrary, he runs towards him, and, cocking his sharp eye, looks out for—something to eat. Then, as the man moves off, the hammer-head trots zealously after his heels, looking for that something to eat in the boot tracks. A human being, in the belief of the hammer-head, is a moving thing which exudes everywhere something



CHURCH PARADE.

to eat. Wherefore, in whatsoever place a human being may have been, and upon or near whatsoever thing he may have touched, the hammer-head expects to find refreshments. He rushes immediately to that place and hunts assiduously. If he find nothing, his first expression is one of unbounded surprise. The laws of Nature, it would seem, are being defied. So he looks again, to make quite sure. But there is really nothing. He thinks for a second, and then glares with sharp suspicion in the direction of the retreating creature. It can't be a human being, after all. It is a mere fraud; some conceited thing trying to look

like one. Else, why isn't there something to eat? And he turns off with contempt. But when the hammer-head takes to flying, the low comedy goes, and, with his broad brown wings and swooping flight, he is rather a professional beauty than otherwise. Nothing but the flap of the hammer-head's wings will disturb the sulky heron—the solitary misanthrope whose place is the right-hand upper corner of the great cage, and whom nothing will tempt down.

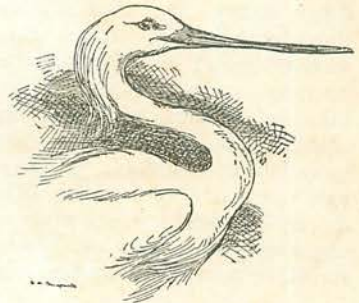


THE HAMMER-HEAD.

The spoonbill might be a professional beauty himself, if he could always be looked at sideways—a white, graceful, slim-beaked beauty; but he will turn his head about (looking for something to eat), and then that fearful, bibulous nose upsets the picture completely. Even the snowy egret provides a little fun at times, although he doesn't mean it. He is very much in earnest, is the snowy egret, and objects, with long claws and a very sharp beak, to the earthly existence of all other living things. He has given up chasing the other birds about the inclosure, because he couldn't always catch the little ones, and sometimes the big ones caught him. So he sits on a convenient tree and waits for anything assailable to come within two yards. Then every fine feather on his body stands up electrically, and—well, go and see him, if you like a picture of fury. It isn't always easy to express your egret—this last being a sentence wherein one might build a laborious pun were the laws of ordinary decency in abeyance.



FRONT.



SIDE.

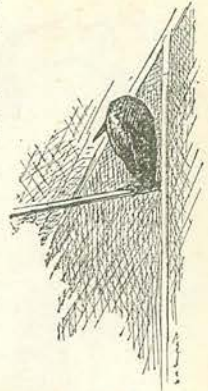
But the great bird here is the flamingo. I like the flamingo. He runs a deal to neck and legs, but his heart is in the right place. It really can't help it. You can't imagine a startled flamingo's heart jumping into his mouth—the way is too long and bendy; while as to its sinking into his boots, even if he had any—just look at his legs! When first I arrive at this inclosure I always whistle for Sam, the big flamingo. Sam immediately lifts his head and takes a long sideways look to assure himself that it is an

acquaintance, and not an impertinent stranger; then he says "Kra-a-ak!" and goes on looking for something to eat. I reply cheerily. He lifts his head again, and approaching the wires and standing at his full height, with outstretched wings, says "Kra-a-ak"—not at all the same word, observe, although of the same spelling; the tone and meaning being more confidential. Thereafter he keeps nearer, and we conduct a mutually improving conversation of whistles and kra-a-aks.

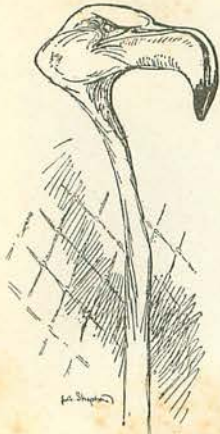
Sam is the acknowledged monarch of this inclosure. He is a gentle and considerate monarch,



THE SNOWY EGRET



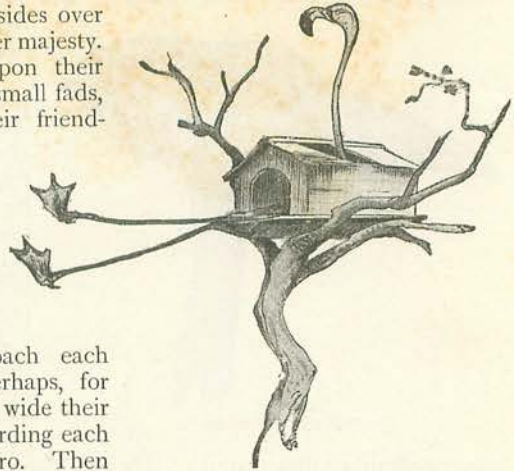
SULKY.



"KRA-A-AK!"

but won't stand any nonsense. He has been observed to inspect the small dove-cots fixed upon the trees in the inclosure, as considering it ill-fitting that the subject should enjoy a roofed habitation and the king none; but considering the habitation itself equally ill-fitting—except regarded as a waistcoat—appears not yet to have attempted to take possession.

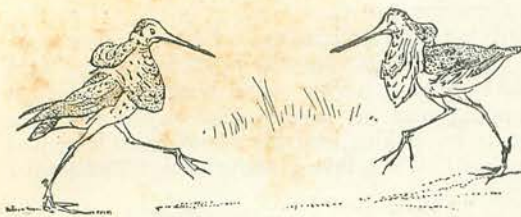
Sam, stately bird, presides over his subjects with a proper majesty. He looks from aloft upon their little weaknesses, their small fads, their quarrels and their friendships, and is amused, in a lofty and superior sort of way, just as you and I are, my friend. He looks from above with indifferent interest on the ruffs,



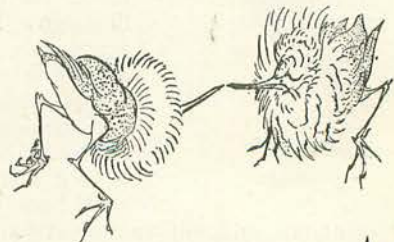
ILL-FITTING.

for instance. The ruffs are small, but there is character about them. See two approach each other from opposite directions—looking, perhaps, for something to eat. They meet, stop, straddle wide their legs, and blow up their neck-feathers. Regarding each other fixedly, they rock solemnly to and fro. Then they let fall their collars and go off, each on his way, as though nothing had happened. It is a rude courtesy—a sort of ruff etiquette, in fact. Sometimes, however, this putting on of frills—as the same thing will do in other places—leads to fights. And over all reigns the majestic Sam—over the fluffy-necked little ruff, the perky hammer-head, the dissipated spoonbill, the jolly ibis, the sedate screamer, and the excitable egret. Nothing can disturb Sam's serenity—nothing, at any rate, which can happen in this aviary. One thing might do it—a thing I hope never to see happen. An ill-natured keeper might bring in a common goose, and introduce him. Now, I believe that this would cut Sam's feelings sorely, because the flamingo, after all (although here it is treason to say so), is really only

a kind of goose, in the classification of the spiteful naturalist; and publicly to bring him face to face with his vulgar and ungraceful poor relation



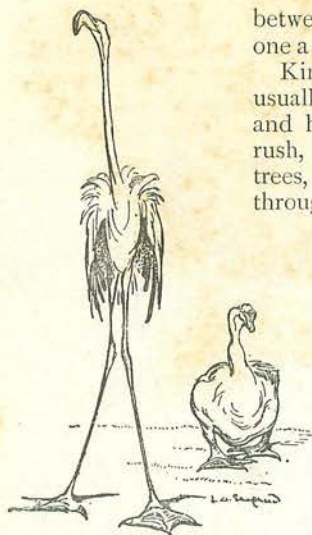
RUFF AMENITIES.



would give Sam away cruelly among his subjects. The poor relation is a mere low caricature of Sam in neck and legs; and a thing which, in its own ridiculous way, makes a preposterous showing off and posing of its burlesque neck.

Which reflection leads us to another—that the birds in this inclosure may be classified into two sorts: those who are proud of their necks—as the ruffs and flamingoes; and those who are ashamed of them—as the herons, who bury them





A VULGAR RELATION.

between their shoulders, until, from the back, you shall judge one a humpbacked old witch and a thing of evil.

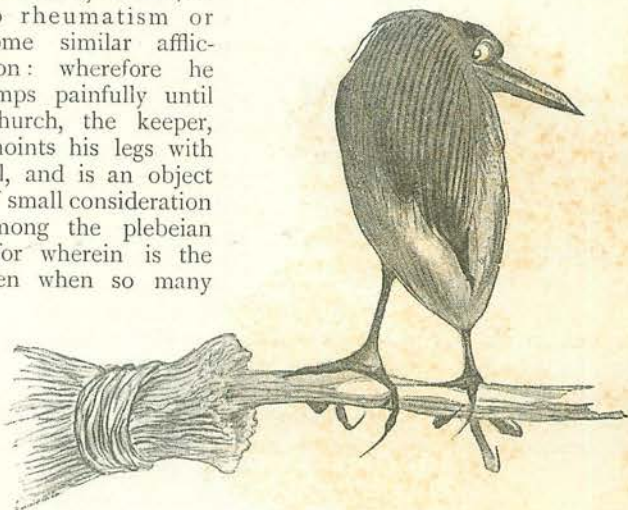
King Sam, with all his majesty, must take exercise sometimes—usually after the royal bath. Whereat all other birds avoid his path, and hide in unconsidered corners. Sam's exercise is a devastating rush, comprehending all this inclosure, without consideration for trees, or shrubs, or birds, or rocks, or water. He merely sweeps through all, in strides of many yards, with outstretched neck, and wings a-spread and gorgeous in black and scarlet. This for some five stormy minutes, and with again and again a "Kra-a-ak."

One only among the flamingo nobility retains, in this climate, a pink flush over all his outer feathers; and he, good soul, is subject to rheumatism or some similar affliction: wherefore he limps painfully until Church, the keeper, anoints his legs with oil, and is an object of small consideration among the plebeian

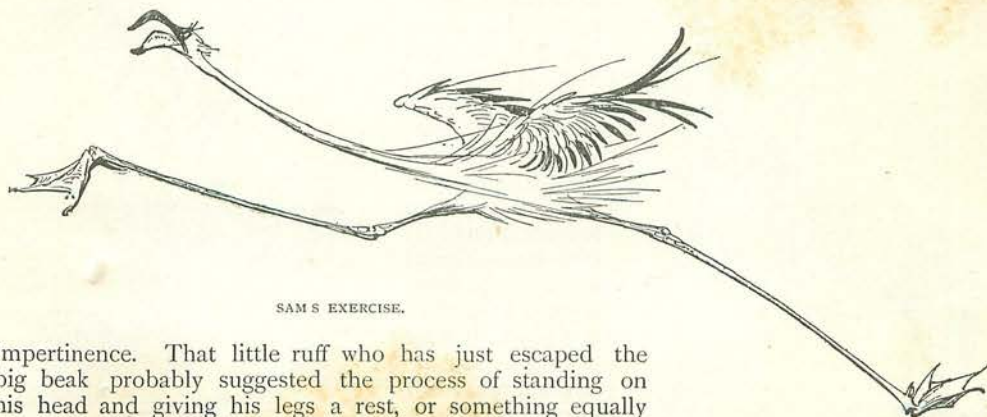
gulls and ducks about him; for wherein is the grandeur of rheumatic legs, even when so many times as long as thick?

And so, in a quiet corner, he stands, with a special pail of refreshment within beak-reach, and nurses his affliction. And smaller birds, with a certain timorous impudence—for he has still a fearsome beak, which will reach a long way—trot up and pretend to sympathize with him. You have only to look at them to read all they are saying.

They suggest all sorts of treatment, just as people do to human rheumatics. They begin by suggesting reasonable remedies, and, growing bolder by reason of impunity and the titters of their friends, venture upon



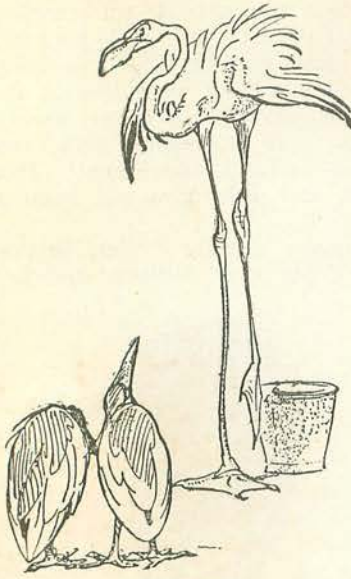
A THING OF EVIL.



SAM'S EXERCISE.

impertinence. That little ruff who has just escaped the big beak probably suggested the process of standing on his head and giving his legs a rest, or something equally savouring of errand-boy wit.

There are two wicked old herons who offer advice with ulterior designs. They assume a sympathetic and soothing demeanour and approach together. They inquire anxiously for



I.—SYMPATHY.

any improvement. There is none. Then number one engages the invalid's attention while number two sidles round behind in the direction of the refreshment-pail. I know what number one is saying as well as if I could hear it—"Now, there was an aunt of mine," says number one, "who suffered terribly. She had all the best doctors and tried everything. All the specialists gave her up—quite incurable. Well, one day, who should come



III.—MORE OF IT.

in but an old neighbour of hers—one of the Kingfishers. 'Haven't you tried French polish?' says he. 'No,' says my aunt, 'and don't intend.' 'Oh, but you should try French polish,' says he. And so, after a lot of persuasion, she tried it; and I assure you—" etc., etc. In course of which number two's head is hidden in the refreshment-pail. Presently the head reappears, and number two, springing suddenly into notice, says: "Now, I once had

a grandfather who was a sad victim. He had all the best doctors—dear me, but that leg must really be very painful. I can't help noticing it—such a really noble leg too! Really I *am* sorry. Well, as I was saying, my grandfather was a sad victim. Tried all the doctors, you know—all the famous specialists; cost him a fearful amount. Nothing seemed to do him any good. Indeed I always said he only got worse and worse. Really we quite began to despair of my poor grandfather. Well,



II.—ADVICE.



IV.—PERFIDY.



A POSSIBILITY.

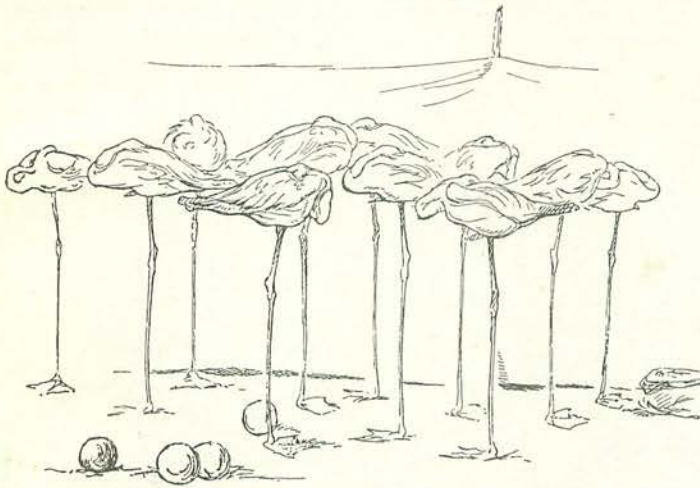
one day—just as it might be to day, you know—in drops an old friend—bittern—just as it might be me. ‘Dear me,’ says the bittern—just as I might say to you—‘why don’t you try dynamite—,’” and so on, and so on; while number one fades off towards the pail. It is a sad world, wherein even herons’ friendship is false.

I rather dread the winter for this invalid. Church may pull him round now with much oil, but the winter will assuredly call for crutches and a foot sling. Or will they swathe his legs in great folds of straw and matting as they do a tropical plant or a barnstormer brigand, leaving him to stand the winter through in a warm corner, and watch his merry cage-mates at their winter sport? I should like to see—to see their winter sport—their winter sport—



ANOTHER.

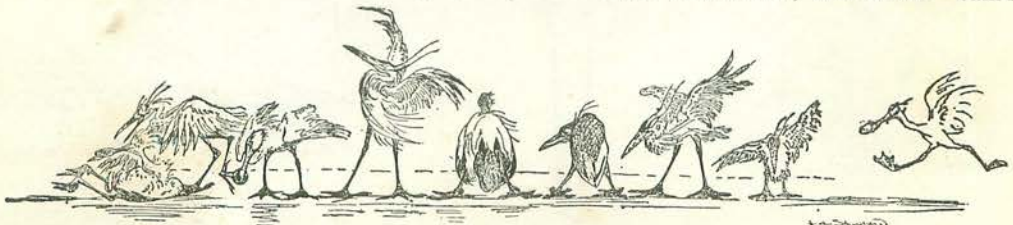
see their winter sport. Yes. Snow-balls, no doubt, and sliding on the pond on the pond But it’s



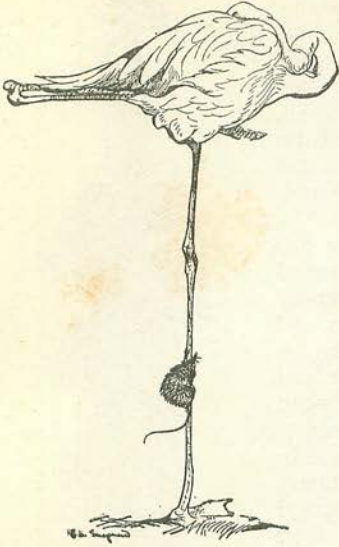
ROLL, BOWL, OR PITCH.

warm now. Yes. The present sport is a sort of cocoanut-shy business, with trussed poultry for prizes. Is it really the flamingoes, standing on one leg apiece? Flamingoes—red wings—flaming goes about the cage. That’s a joke; funny. Roll, bowl, or pitch. See that rat? He’s going to climb one of the sticks. Rats always expect to find something to eat—top of a stick. Part of their

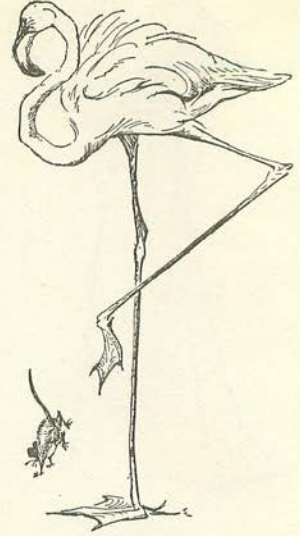
system. Poultry at top opens out and unfolds another stick—leg. Why, it’s Sam. That’s funny! Rat bolts—he’d better. Not quite sure I shouldn’t bolt myself if Sam were after me with that beak. And eyes, too; seem bigger than usual; and closer. Sam’s



WINTER SPORT.



a shocking monster. Rat bolts up stage. It is a stage, of course. Rock scenery R., tropical vegetation L.U.E. and back. Chorus of herons and ibis—ibises—ibiseses. Sam is M. le Brun, and M. le Brun is *première danseuse*. Wriggles down centre of stage on toes, *secundum artem*. That's Latin. Don't remember the ballet—or is it pantomime? Herons in front look at me and grin fiendishly. Also ducks; very good masks. Sam pirouettes, kicks twice, and smiles. Wonder what he'll do when he wants to kiss his hand. Must think it over. Why, here come the others, invalid



and all. He's all right; he can kick higher than any of them. They all range up behind Sam and begin a furious *pas de quatre*. It is very fine, and not in the least



surprising. The herons seem to be growing a great deal larger, and stare horribly. The *pas de quatre* goes faster than ever. It is getting extravagant, not to say ridiculous. If the County Council — “Good after



noon, sir! Do you see we've bred another pair of Mandarin ducks?"

The keeper really has a most startling voice. Now, if I had fallen asleep in the sunshine —