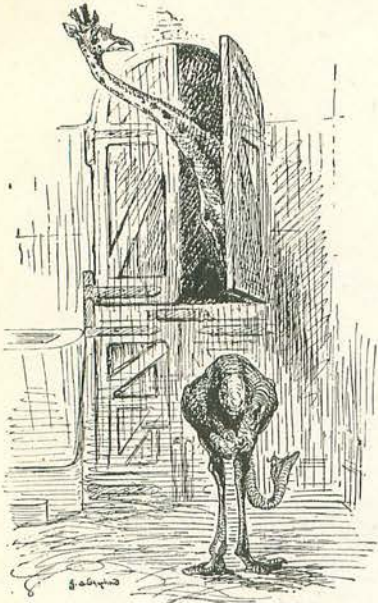




UCH birds as, having wings, fly not, preferring to walk, to run, or to waddle, as legs and other circumstances may permit or compel—these are the cursores; such birds also as, having no wings, or none to speak of, run by compulsion on such legs as they may muster. These are many—so many that I almost repent me of the heading to this chapter, wherein I may speak only of the struthiones among the cursores—the curious cassowary, the quaint kiwi, the raucous rhea, the errant emeu, and the overtopping ostrich. But the heading is there—let it stand; for in the name of the cursores I see the raw material of many sad jokes—whereunto I pray I may never be tempted, but may leave them for an easy exercise for

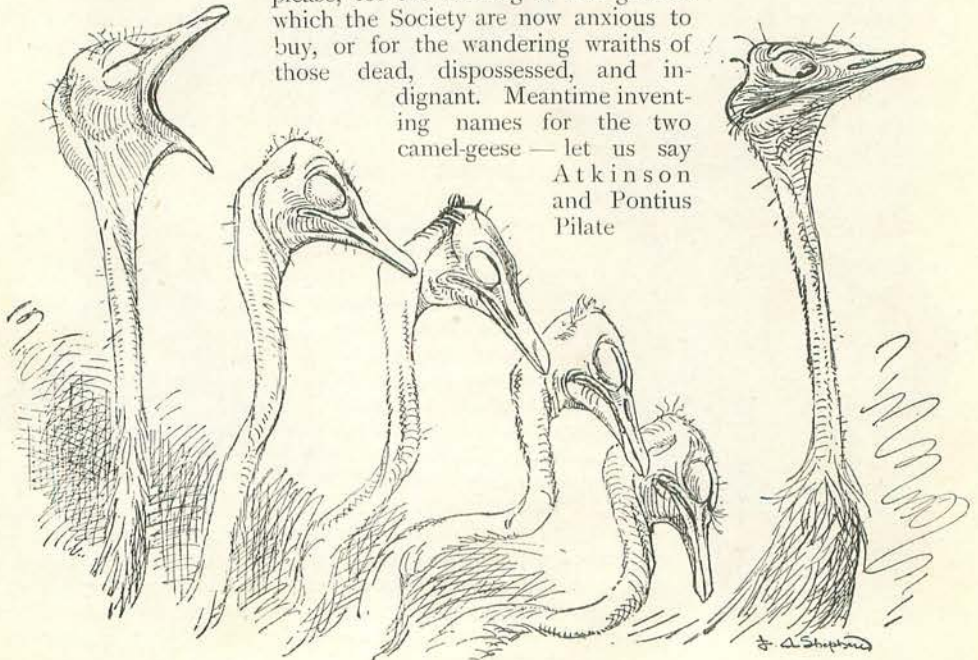


"GET OUT OF THIS!"

fitted with tenants twenty feet high—queer tenants, which were often called camelopards. We can't replace these with similar tenants, unfortunately, but we will do our best with animals as high as possible and with all available neck; and they shall be camel-geese. And here they are; a few feet short, unavoidably, but as high as possible; quite the equivalent of the giraffes so far as concerns the camel, and as much superior as one may consider a goose to a leopard. And here you may stand and watch them, or sit. And you may watch, if you

please, for the coming of the giraffes which the Society are now anxious to buy, or for the wandering wraiths of those dead, dispossessed, and indignant. Meantime inventing names for the two camel-geese—let us say

Atkinson  
and Pontius  
Pilate



ATKINSON DOZES.

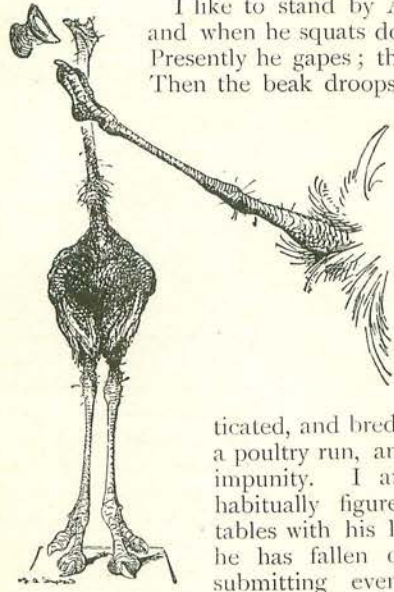
such as have set out upon the shameless career of the irreclaimable pun-finger.

It was some time—years—before I got rid of the impression left upon me by the first ostrich with which I became acquainted. He lived in an old picture-book, and would nowadays be considered quite out of fashion by up-to-date ostriches, having webbed feet and an improper number of toes. I like to believe that feet of this sort were popular among ostriches at that time, being loath to destroy early beliefs. From the same cause, I have other little private superstitions about the ostrich; there was no ostrich, so far as I can remember, in my Noah's ark, whence I derive my conviction that the species cannot have existed at the time of the Deluge, but has been evolved, in the succeeding centuries, by a gradual approach and assimilation of the several characteristics of the camel and the goose.

The two ostriches here, at the Zoo, have no pet names bestowed on them by the keepers. This is inconvenient, not to say unfair. They have been placed, it will be observed, in the stables hitherto occupied by the late lamented giraffes. It is a striking and notable instance of care and the sense of fitness of things on the part of the Society. These stables, they probably reflected, have all along been

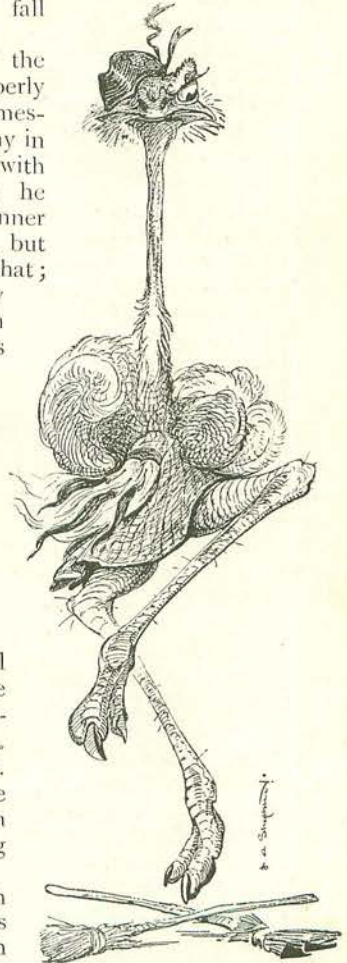
I like to stand by Atkinson till he dozes. Atkinson is a fine, big fellow, and when he squats down his head is in a convenient position for observation. Presently he gapes; then his eyes shut, and his beak droops—just a very little. Then the beak droops a little more, and signs of insecurity appear about the neck. Very soon a distinct departure from the vertical is visible in that neck; it melts down ruinously till almost past recovery, and then suddenly springs erect, carrying an open-eyed head, wherefrom darts a look of indignant repudiation of any disposition to fall asleep; and so keeps until the eyes close again. I have waited long, but have never seen Atkinson fall permanently asleep.

The possibilities of the ostrich are not properly recognised. He is domesticated, and bred with the utmost ignominy in a poultry run, and his tail is pulled out with impunity. I am not quite sure that he habitually figures on South African dinner tables with his legs skewered to his ribs, but he has fallen quite low enough for that; submitting even to the last indignity of being hatched out by a common stove incubator. Now, the elephant has

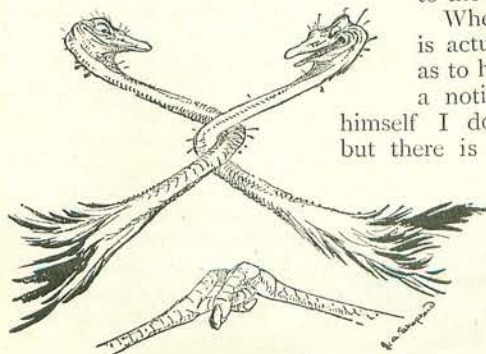


HIGH KICKS.

also been domesticated, but he has also been allowed to adopt a profession. He dances on a tub and rides a tricycle at a circus. Nothing of this sort has been attempted with the ostrich, but much might be done. He would make a first-rate bicyclist, and could get through much of the business of the "eccentric comedian." A couple of them would go to make a capital knockabout act. High kicks of the very highest, floor-strides of the very longest—and there would be a world of opportunities in the neck. No end of possibilities lie in the neck—even the "legitimate." You could run in a forty-minute sketch, wherein two long-separated but faithful lovers should fall against each other and wind their necks about together like a caduceus, or barley-sugar—or anything. Also the camel-goose might fling his neck about the villain, and strangle him. But perhaps, after all, variety business would suit best. Pontius Pilate in a kilt and philibeg would bring down the house with a Highland fling or gillie callum. And Atkinson in a long-stride table chair and banjo act would be comforting to the perceptions.



GILLIE CALLUM.



LONG SEPARATED.

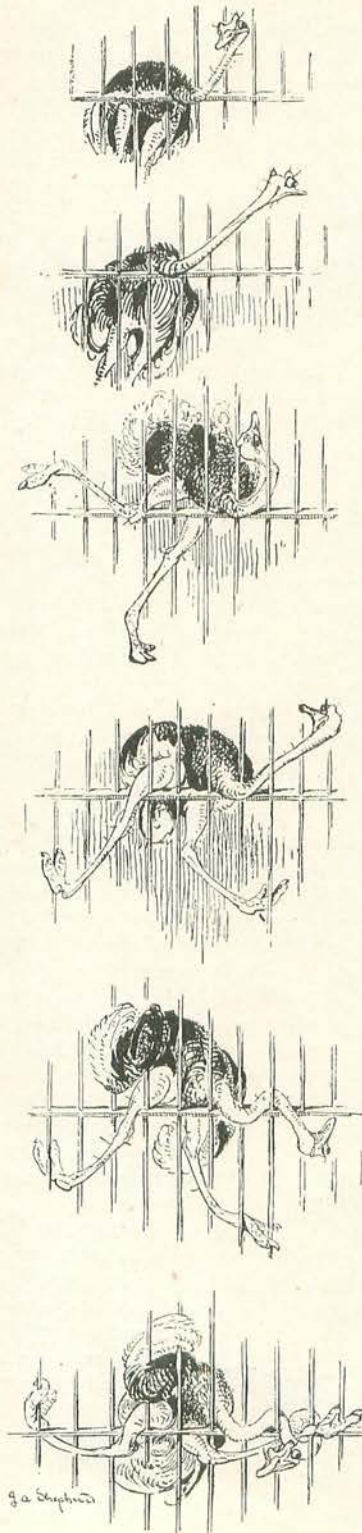
Whether the ostrich is actually such an ass as to hide his head with a notion of concealing himself I don't quite know, but there is certainly a deal of ass in the camel-goose. A

Hottentot will put an ostrich skin over his head, and walking with his natural shanks exposed get among an ostrich family and kill them off one after another, to the family's astonishment. Now, a bird who mistakes a nigger with a mask for an intimate relation plainly enjoys in his composition a large flavour of the ass. Not knowing it, however,

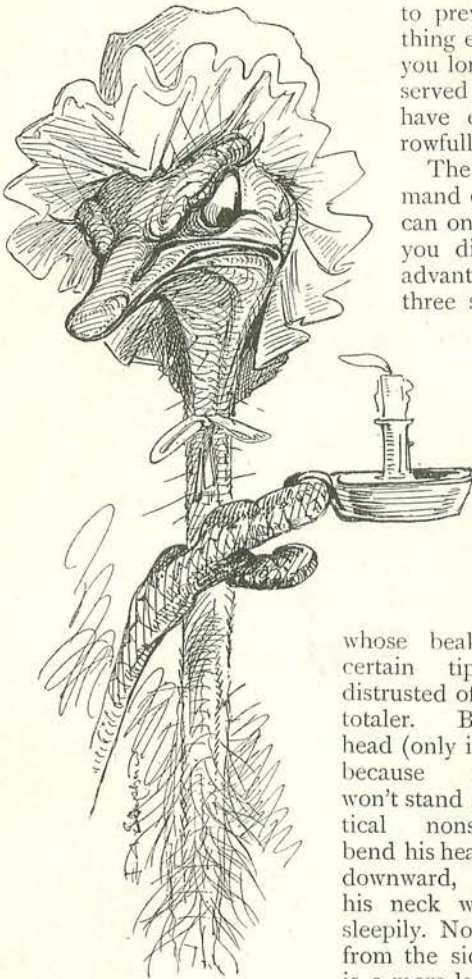
the camel-goose is just as happy, and neither experiences the bitterness of being sold nor the sweetness of selling. I don't believe that Atkinson was even aware of the triumphant sell which he lately assisted in administering to Mr. Toots, the cat from the camel-house.

The cat in the ostrich-house is a sly fellow, and I believe he knows why there are fewer pigeons in the roof of the hippopotamus-house than there were. He horribly sold Mr. Toots, who was anxious to have a snack of poultry himself, for a change. "In my house," said this bold, bad cat, "there are the biggest pigeons you ever saw. Go in and try one, while I look out for the keeper." And the trustful Mr. Toots went in; and when, full of a resolve to make it hot for everything feathered in that house, Mr. Toots bounced into the presence of Atkinson, who is rather more than seven feet high, he came out anxious for the scalp of that other cat. I never mention this little adventure to Mr. Toots, who is sensitive, but all the other Zoo cats chaff him terribly. Even Jung Perchad and the other elephants snigger quietly as they pass, and Bob the Bactrian, from the camel-house, laughs outright; it is a horrid, coarse, vulgar, exasperating laugh, that of Bob's. Atkinson, however, is all unconscious of the joke, and remains equally affable to cats, pigeons, and human beings.

Pontius Pilate is just the sort of camel-gander that *would* bury its head to hide itself. Pontius Pilate is, I fear, an ass; also a snob. He has a deal of curiosity with regard to Atkinson,



who is a recent arrival, and lately belonged to the Queen. Also, he is often disposed to pay a visit—with his head—to Atkinson's quarters, and take a friendly snack—at Atkinson's expense; this by an insinuation of the neck out between his own bars and in between those of Atkinson, adjoining. But he doesn't understand the laws of space. Having once fetched his neck around the partition into Atkinson's larder by chancing to poke his head through the end bars, he straightway assumes that what is possible between some bars is possible between all; and wheresoever he may now be standing when prompted by companionable peckishness, straight he plunges among the nearest bars, being mightily astonished at his inability to reach next door, if by chance he have dropped among bars far from Atkinson's. He suspects his neck. Is the ungrateful tube playing him false? Maliciously shortening? Or are his eyes concerned in fraud? He loops his head back among his own adjoining bars, with a vague suspicion that they may be Atkinson's after all; and he stretches and struggles desperately. Some day Pontius Pilate will weave himself among those bars, basket fashion, only to be extricated by a civil engineer and a practical smith. Pontius Pilate is the sort of camel-gander that damages the intellectual reputation of the species. Of course he would bury his head to hide himself. Equally of course he would muzzle himself to prevent you from biting him, or tie his legs together

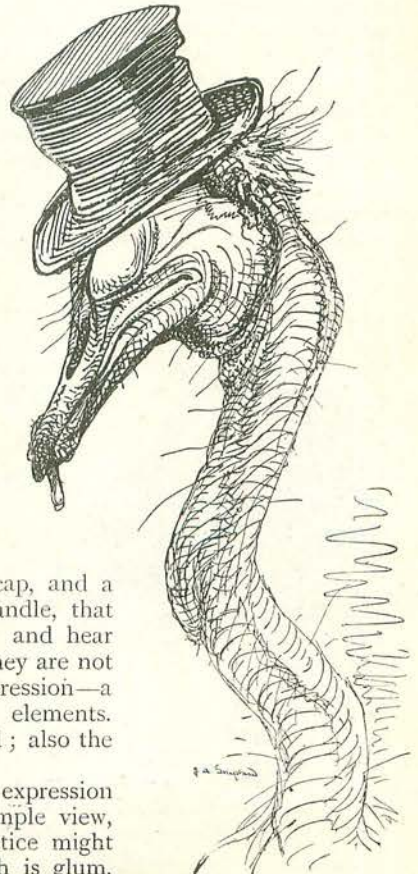


to prevent you from running and catching him, or anything else equally clever. Pontius Pilate, I have known you long—even loved you, in a way. But I have observed you closely, and though, like Dogberry, you may have everything fine about you, I am impelled sorrowfully to write you down an ass.

The ostrich is one of those birds whose whole command of facial expression is carried in the neck. He can only express himself through his features by offering you different views of his head. This is a great disadvantage. It limits the range. You may express three sentiments by the back, front, and side of the head, and something by way of combination in a three-quarter face. Then you stop, and have no further resource than standing on your head, one of the few things an ostrich is not clever at. But with such materials as he has, the ostrich does very well. Observe, his mouth is long, and droops at the corners; but the corners are wide apart, for there the head is broad.

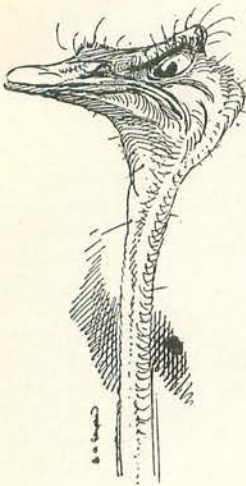
Now you may present simple drama by the aid of this mouth—suitably disposed and ordered by the neck. Take Atkinson, here,

whose beak has a certain tip-tinting distrusted of the teetotaler. Bend his head (only in theory, because Atkinson won't stand any practical nonsense)—bend his head to look downward, and let his neck wilt away sleepily. Now, viewed from the side, where is a more lamentable picture of maudlin



intoxication? What could improve it, except, perhaps, a battered hat, worn lop-sided, and a cigar-stump? He is a drunken old camel-gander, coming home in the small hours, and having difficulties with his latch-key. Straighten Atkinson's neck, open wide his eyes, and take a three-quarter face view of him. Sober, sour, and indignant, there stands, not the inebriated Atkinson, but the disturbed Mrs. Atkinson on the stairs, with a candle, and a nightcap, and a lecture. That awful mouth actually conjures that candle, that nightcap, and that lecture into existence—you see and hear them more clearly than you do Atkinson, although they are not there. But this is an advanced exercise in struthian expression—a complicated feat, involving various and complex elements. There is the neck-wilt and the bending of the head; also the three-quarter face, not a simple element.

The plain and elementary principles of struthian expression lie in the mere front and side views. The third simple view, the back, is not particularly eloquent, although practice might do something even for that. At the side the ostrich is glum,



GLUM SIDE.

savage, misanthropical, depressed—what you will of that sort. Let him but turn and face you—he can't help a genial grin. All done by the versatile neck, you observe, which gives the head its position.

Man, instigated by woman, has a habit of pulling out the camel-gander's tail. This ruins the appearance of the site of that tail, without commensurately improving the head whereunto the tail is transplanted—an unprofitable game of heads and tails, wherein tails lose and heads don't win. Even the not over clever ostrich knows better than to wear those feathers on the wrong end. Perhaps he knows that he is enough of a fool already.

There is a deal of hidden interest about the ostrich's neck. It is the cleverest piece of an ostrich—unless you count his stomach; and even in the triumphs of the stomach the neck takes a great share.



GENIAL FRONT.

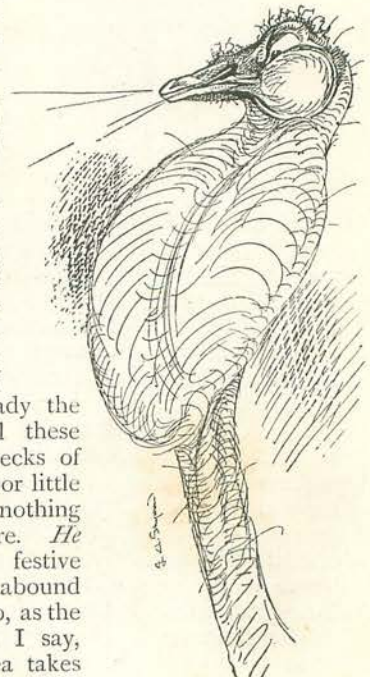
When a camel-goose lunches off a box of dominoes, or a sack of nails, or a basketful of broken bottles, there is quite as much credit in the feat due to the neck as to the stomach; with anybody else all the difficulties of that lunch would begin with the neck—even a thicker neck. Parenthetically, one remembers that the ostrich's neck is not always thin. Catch Atkinson here in a roaring soliloquy, and you shall see his red neck distended as a bladder, with a mighty grumbling and grunting. This by the way. The neck makes nothing of the domino difficulty, or the tenpenny nail difficulty, or the door-knob difficulty, or the broken bottle difficulty—which are not difficulties to the camel-goose. On the contrary, the neck revels in them and keeps the dainties as long as possible. Give Pontius Pilate, or Atkinson—I am quite impartial—an apple. When he swallows it you shall see it, in a bulge, pass along and round his neck; down it goes and backward, in a gradual curve, until it disappears among the feathers—corkscrews, in fact. Observe, I recommend an apple for this demonstration. Dominoes and clinkers are all very well, but they rattle about inside, and disturb the visitors; and with an apple you will the more plainly observe that corkscrew.



HEADS AND TAILS.

Not satisfied, you perceive, with enjoying his domino or his door-knob all the way along that immense neck, the camel-gander must needs indulge in a spiral gullet. It is mere gluttony. Especially is it wicked of Atkinson, who has already the longest bird-neck in all these gardens. Look at the necks of all the cursors. The poor little wingless kiwi, with a mere nothing of a neck—for a cursor. He

does without a spiral gullet. The festive cassowary—which, by-the-bye, *doesn't* abound—or exist—on the plains of Timbuctoo, as the rhyme says—the festive cassowary, I say, wears his gullet plain. The rusty rhea takes things below with perfect directness. The



A ROARING SOLILOQUY.

lordly emeu gets his dinner down as quickly as the length of his neck will permit. It is only when one reaches the top of the cursorean thermometer, all among the boilings, so to speak, that the ostrich, with the longest neck of all, must poach another few inches by going in for a spiral. Pontius Pilate is bad enough, but a spiral for Atkinson!—well, there!

The partiality of the struthians for eccentric refreshments—clinkers, nut-crackers, and the like—leads many to a superstition that these things are as nourishing as they are attractive. They're not. Certain liberal asses have a curious habit of presenting the birds with halfpence. I scarcely understand why, unless modern environments have evolved penny-in-the-slotomania. And I am prepared to bet that on occasions they are less generous with their pence. Nevertheless, they do it, and it kills the birds. One cassowary who died recently was found to contain one and eightpence in copper. I suggest that in future the experimentalizers confine their contributions to bank-notes. I have taken the trouble to ascertain that these will do no harm, while their disappearance will afford an additional enjoyment to the contributors commensurate with their higher value.

Perhaps there is something in the habits of the cassowary himself that explains these offerings. The cassowary always comes to meet you at the bars with a look of grave inquiry.

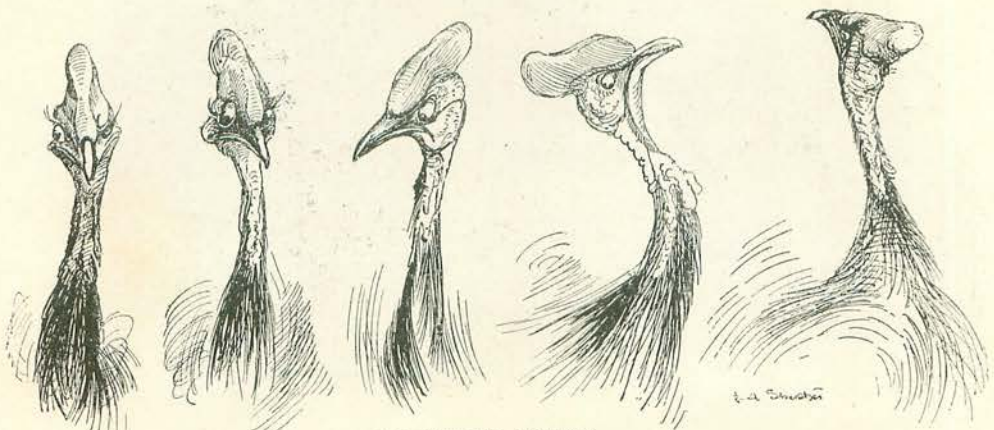


THE CURSOREAN THERMOMETER.

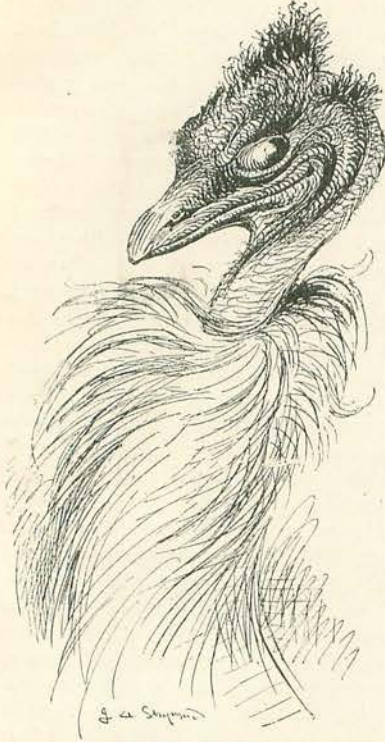
If you offer no tribute he turns off, with many cockings of the beak, surprised, indignant, and contemptuous. Very few people can endure this. They hastily produce anything they have—anything to conciliate the contemptuous cassowary. And as he takes it, an expression steals across the cassowary's face which seems to admit that perhaps the fellow isn't such a shocking outsider after all. When a man has nothing more nutritive about him, this form of extortion may produce halfpence.

The rhea is small potatoes beside the ostrich—merely a smaller and dingier camel-gander. But the emeu is a fine upstanding fellow, with his haughty sailing head and his great feather boa.

He is a friendly and inquisitive chap, and will come stalking down to the wires to inspect you. If you like to walk up and down outside his inclosure he will take a turn with you, walking at your side and turning when you do. He is justly proud of his height and his ruff, but there is nothing objectionably haughty about the emeu; I have always found him ready for a quiet chat. He will eat various things, like the ostrich; so that one regards him with a certain respect, not to say awe, for there is no telling what wonderful things may or may not be inside him. The biggest and handsomest emeu here is my particular friend. When he talks to you or walks by your side he is very fine; but when he walks



THE CASSOWARY DISGUSTED.



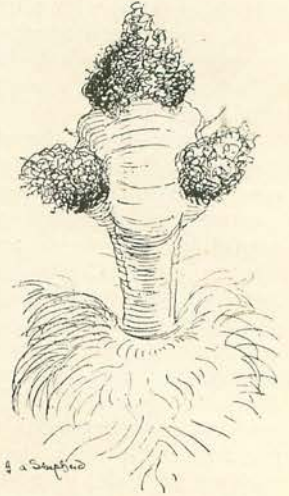
THE PROUD EMEU.

about a little way off, with his head to the ground, foraging, he looks rather like a tortoise on stilts, which is not imposing. Sometimes, when he thinks nobody is looking, he rushes madly up and down his territory by way of relieving his pent-up feelings, stopping very suddenly and looking cautiously about to assure himself that nobody saw him. I call this emeu Grimaldi; firstly, because Grimaldi is rather a fine name, and secondly, because when once you have had a view of his head from the back you can't call him anything else.

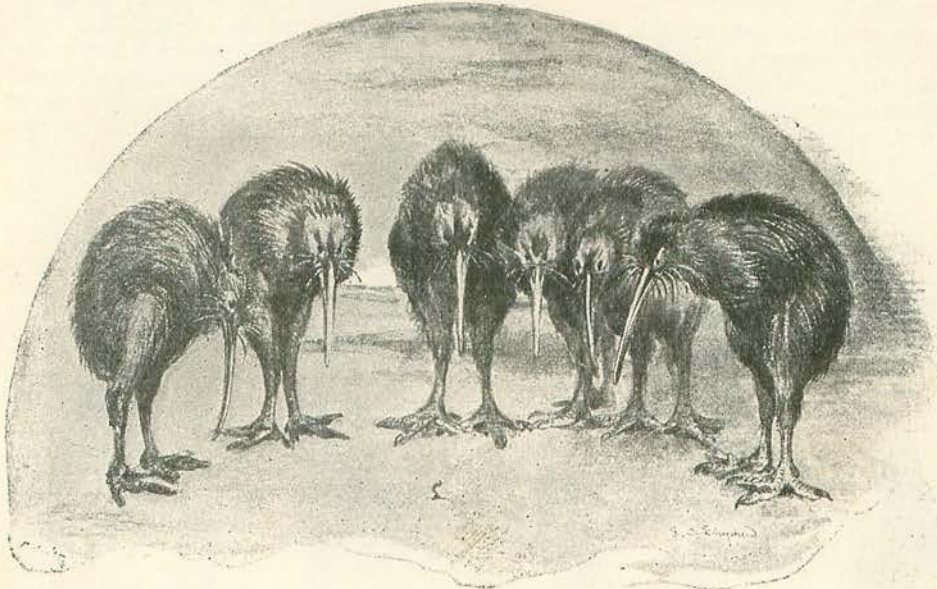
The most extraordinary bird in the world is the kiwi. But it is not the most extraordinary bird seen by visitors to the Zoo, because they never see it. The kiwi buries itself

asleep all day, and only comes out in the night to demolish an unpleasant and inconvenient proverb. The kiwi is the latest of all the birds,

but catches the most worms. For this let us honour the kiwi, and hurl him in the face of the early risers. He stamps about the ground in the dark night, and the worm, being naturally a fool, as even the proverb demonstrates, comes up to investigate, and is at once cured of early rising for ever. The kiwi, having no wings (unless you count a bit

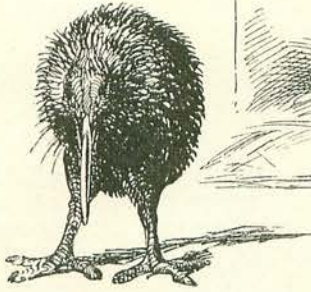


GRIMALDI.



THE DIET OF WORMS.

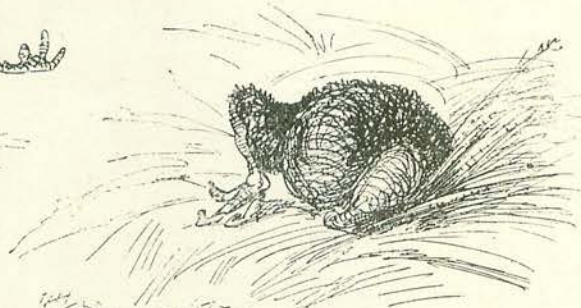
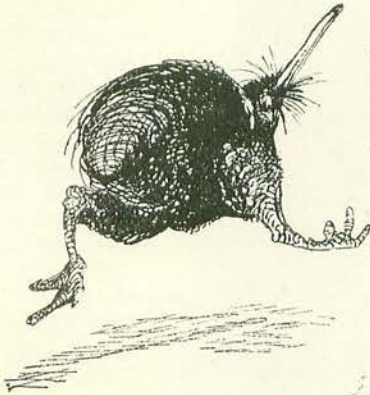
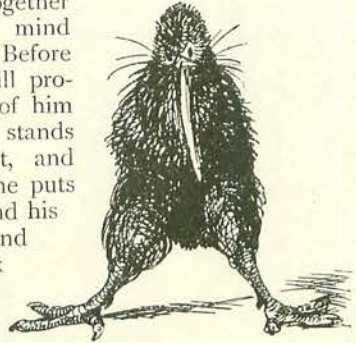




bably become extinct. Any glimpse here is short. Suddenly brought out

of cartilage an inch or so long, buried under the down), has the appearance of running about with his hands in his pockets because of the cold. And being covered with something more like hair than feathers, is a deal more like a big rat than a bird of any sort. Indeed, I don't believe the kiwi himself has altogether

made up his mind which to be. Before he decides he will prohibit his friends have of him into the day, he stands for a moment, and blinks; then he puts his beak up and his legs apart, and there is a black streak and a heap of straw where it vanishes.



A. A. Shepherd