



BY
ARTHUR MORRISON
AND
J.A. SHEPHERD.

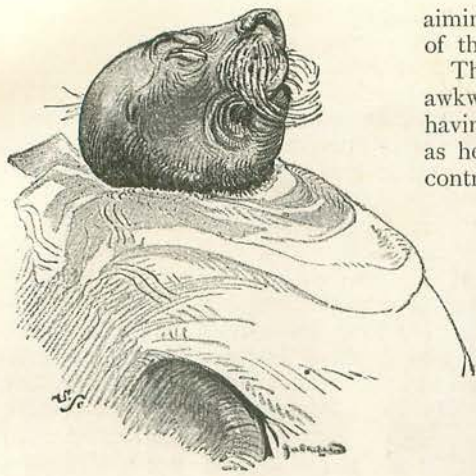
VIII.
ZIGZAG PHOCINE.

HE seal is an affable fellow, though sloppy. He is friendly to man; providing the journalist with copy, the diplomatist with lying practice, and the punster with shocking opportunities. Ungrateful for these benefits, however, or perhaps savage at them, man responds by knocking the seal on the head and taking his skin; an injury

which the seal avenges by driving man into the Bankruptcy Court with bills for his wife's jackets. The puns instigated by the seal are of a sort to make one long for the animal's extermination.

It is quite possible that this is really

what the seal wants, because to become extinct and to occupy a place of honour beside the dodo is a distinction much coveted amongst the lower animals. The dodo was a squabby, ugly, dumpy, not to say fat-headed, bird when it lived; now it is a hero of romance. Possibly this is what the seal is



A SHAVE.

and he is dead now. I don't say that that remark sealed his fate, but I believe there are people who would say even that, with half a chance.

Another class of frivoller gets his opportunity because it is customary to give various species of seals—divers species, one might say—inappropriate names. He tells you that if you look for sea-lions and sea-leopards, you will not see lions, nor even see leopards, but seal-lions and seal-leopards, which are very different. These are called lions and leopards because they look less like lions and leopards than anything else in the world; just as the harp seal is so called because he has a broad mark on his back, which doesn't look like a harp. Look at Toby, the Patagonian sea-lion here, who has a large pond and premises to himself. I have the greatest possible respect and esteem for Toby,



TOBY—BEHIND.

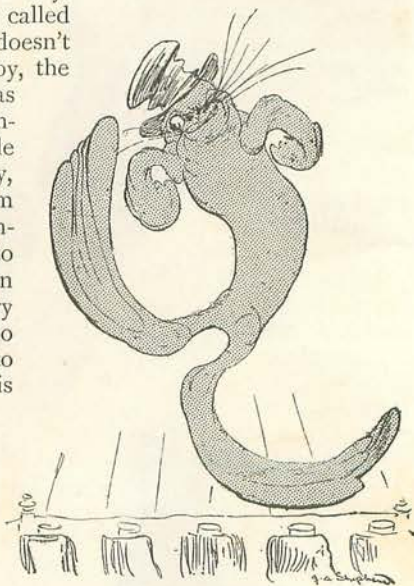
and sit back in that chair that stands over his pond, he would look very respectably human—and he certainly wants a shave.

Toby is a low-comedy sea-lion all over. When I set about organizing the Zoo Nigger Minstrels, Toby shall be corner-man, and do the big-boot dance. He does it now, capitally. You have only to watch him from behind as he proceeds along the edge of the pond, to see the big-boot dance in all its quaint humour. Toby's hind flappers exhale broad farce at every step. Toby is a cheerful and laughter-moving seal, and he would do capitally in a pantomime, if he were a little less damp.

Toby is fond of music; so are most other seals. The complete scale of the seal's preferences among the various musical instruments has not been fixed with anything like finality; but one thing is certain—that far and away above all the rest of the

aiming at; but personally I should prefer the extinction of the punster.

The punster is a low person, who refers to the awkwardness of the seal's gait by speaking of his not having his seal-legs, although a mariner—or a sealubber, as he might express it. If you reply that, on the contrary, the seal's legs, such as they are, are very characteristic, he takes refuge in the atrocious admission, delivered with a French accent, that they are certainly very sealy legs. When he speaks of the messages of the English Government, in the matter of seal-catching in the Behring Sea, he calls it whitewashing the sealing, and explains that the "Behrings of this here observation lies in the application on it." I once even heard a punster remark that the Russian and American officials had got rather out of their Behrings, through an excess of seal on behalf of their Governments; but he was a very sad specimen, in a very advanced stage,



THE BIG-BOOT DANCE.



THE SEAL ROW.

things designed to produce music and other noises, the seal prefers the bagpipes. This taste either proves the seal to be a better judge of music than most human beings, or a worse one than any of the other animals, according as the gentle reader may be a native of Scotland or of somewhere in the remainder of the world. You may charm seals by the bagpipes just as a snake is charmed by pipes with no bag. It has even been suggested that all the sealing vessels leaving this country should carry bag pipes with them, and I can see no sound objection to this course—so long as they take all the bagpipes. I could also reconcile myself to a general extrusion of concertinas for this useful purpose—or for any other; not to mention barrel organs.

By-the-bye, on looking at Toby again I think we might do something better for him than give him a mere part in a pantomime; his fine moustache and his shiny hair almost point to a qualification for managership. Nothing more is wanted—except, perhaps, a fur-trimmed coat and a well-oiled hat—to make a very fine manager indeed, of a certain sort.

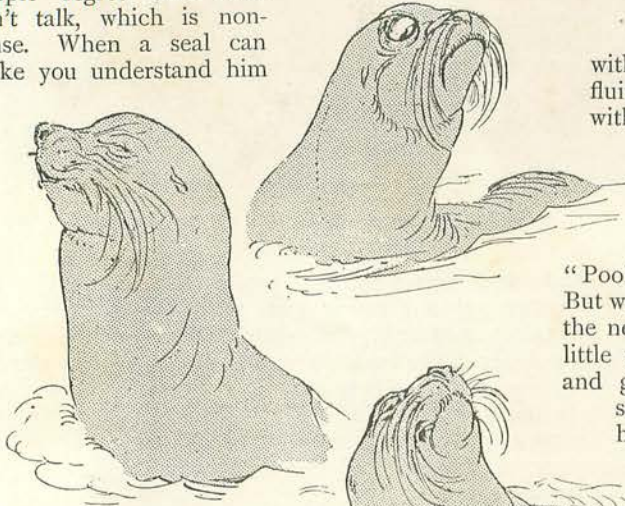
I don't think there is a Noah's ark seal—unless the Lowther Arcade theology has been amended since I had a Noah's ark. As a matter of fact, I don't see what business a seal would have in the ark, where he would find no fish to eat, and would occupy space wanted by a more necessitous animal who couldn't swim. At any rate, there was originally no seal in my Noah's ark, which dissatisfied me, as I remember, at the time; what I wanted not being so much a Biblical illustration as a handy zoological collection. So I appointed the dove a seal, and he did very well indeed when I had pulled off his legs (a little inverted v). I argued, in the first place, that as the dove went out and found nothing to alight on, the legs were of no use to him; in the second place, that since, after all, the dove flew away and never returned, the show would be pretty well complete without him; and, thirdly, that if, on



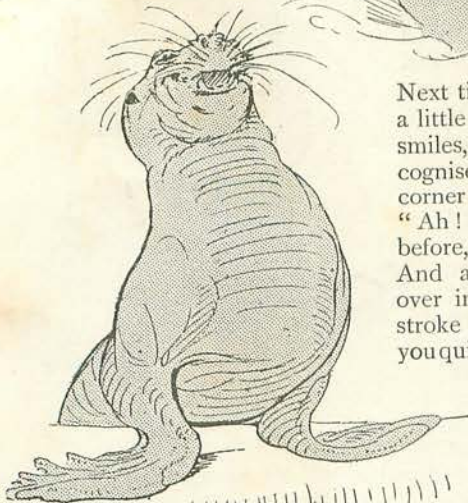
A VERY FINE MANAGER.

any emergency, a dove were imperatively required, he would do quite well without his legs—looking, indeed, much more like a dove, as well as much more like a seal. So, as the dove was of about the same size as the cow, he made an excellent seal; his bright yellow colour (Noah's was a yellow dove on the authority of all orthodox arks) rather lending an air of distinction than otherwise. And when a rashly funny uncle, who understood wine, observed that I was laying down my crusted old-yellow seal because it wouldn't stand up, I didn't altogether understand him.

Toby is a good soul, and you soon make his acquaintance. He never makes himself common, however. As he swims round his circular pond, behind the high rails, he won't have anything to say to a stranger—anybody he has not seen before. But if you wait a few minutes he will swim round several times, see you often, and become quite affable. There is nothing more intelligent than a tame seal, and I have heard people regret that seals can't talk, which is nonsense. When a seal can make you understand him

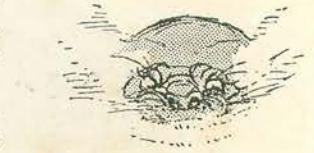
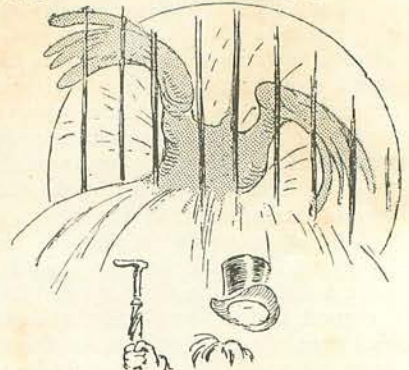


without it, talking is a noisy superfluity. Toby can say many things without the necessity of talking. Observe his eyes fixed upon you as he approaches for the first time. He turns and swaps past with his nose in the air. "Pooh, don't know you," he is saying. But wait. He swims round once, and, the next time of passing, gives you a little more notice. He lifts his head and gazes at you, inquisitively, but severely. "Who's that person?" he asks, and goes on his round.



J. A. Shepherd

Next time he rises even a little more. He even smiles, slightly, as he recognises you from the corner of his eye. "Ah! seen you before, I fancy." And as he flings over into the side stroke he beams at you quite tolerantly.



He comes round again; but this time he smiles genially, and nods. "Morning!" he says, in a manner of a moderately old acquaintance. But see next time; he is an old, intimate friend by this; a chum. He flings his fin-flappers upon the coping, leans toward the bars with an expansive grin and says: "Well, old boy, and how are you?"—as cordially and as loudly as possible without absolutely speaking the words. He will stay thus for a few moments' conversation, not entirely uninfluenced, I fear, by anticipations of fish. Then, in the case of your not being in the habit of carrying raw fish in your pockets, he takes his leave by the short process of falling headlong into his pond and flinging a good deal of it over you. There is no difficulty in becoming acquainted with Toby. If you will only wait a few minutes he will slop his pond over you with all the genial urbanity of an intimate relation. But you must wait for the proper forms of etiquette.

The seal's sloppiness is annoying. I would have a tame seal myself if he could go about without setting things afloat. A wet seal is unpleasant

to pat and fondle, and if he climbs on your knees he is positively irritating. I suppose even a seal would get dry if you kept him out of water long enough; but *can* you keep a seal out of water while there is any within five miles for him to get into? And would the seal respect you for it if you did?

A dog shakes himself dry after a swim, and, if he be your own dog, he shakes the water over somebody else, which is sagacious and convenient; but a seal doesn't shake himself, and

can't understand that wet will lower the value of any animal's caresses. Otherwise a seal would often be preferable to a dog as a domestic pet. He doesn't howl all night. He never attempts to chase cats—seeing the hopelessness of the thing. You don't need a license for him; and there is little temptation to a loafer to steal him, owing to the restricted market for house-seals. I have frequently heard of a dog being engaged to field in a single-wicket cricket match. I should like to play somebody a single-wicket cricket match, with a dog and a seal to field for me. The seal, having no legs to speak of—merely feet—would have to leave the running to the dog, but it *could* catch. You may see magnificent catching here when Toby and Fanny—the Cape sea-lion (or lioness), over by the turkeys—have their snacks of fish. Sutton the Second, who is Keeper of the Seals (which is a fine title

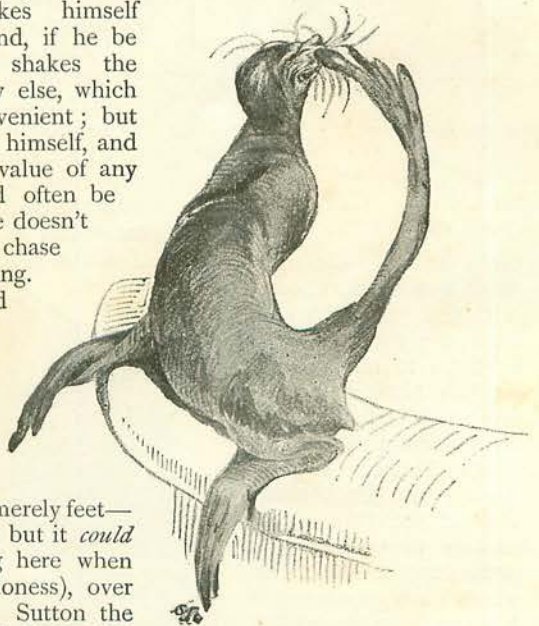


AS

GOOD DOGGY!



"CAUGHT, SIR!"

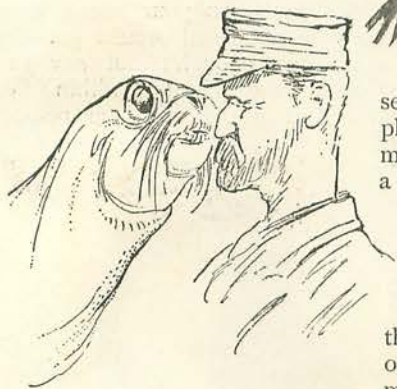
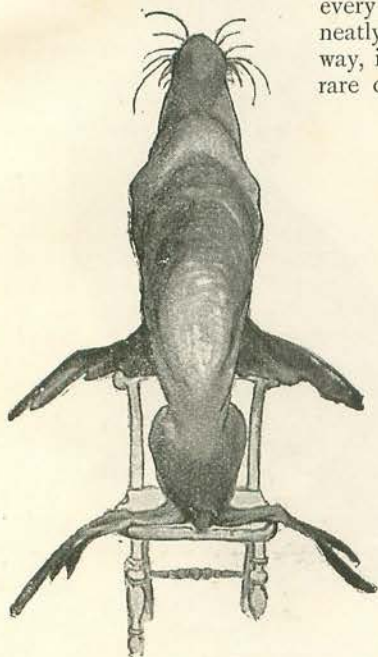


FANNY.

—rather like a Cabinet Minister), is then the source of a sort of pyrotechnic shower of fish, every one of which is caught and swallowed promptly and neatly, no matter how or where it may fall. Fanny, by the way, is the most active seal possible; it is only on extremely rare occasions that she indulges in an interval of comparative rest, to scratch her head with her hind foot and devise fresh gymnastics. But, all through the day, Fanny never forgets Sutton, nor his shower of fish, and half her evolutions include a glance at the door whence he is wont to emerge, and a sort of suicidal fling back into the pond in case of his non-appearance, all which proceedings the solemn turkeys regard with increasing amazement.

Toby, however, provides the great seal-feeding show. Toby has a perfect

Toby, however, provides the great seal-feeding show. Toby has a perfect



set of properties and appliances for his performance, including a chair, a diving platform, an inclined plane leading thereunto, and a sort of plank isthmus leading to the chair.

He climbs up on to the chair, and, leaning over the back, catches as many fish as Sutton will chair for other fish. He

throw for him. He dives off the shuffles up the inclined plane for more fish, amid the sniggers of spectators, for Toby's march has no claim to magnificence. He tumbles himself unceremoniously off the platform, he clambers up and kisses Sutton (keeping his eye on the basket), and all for fish. It is curious to contrast the perfunctory affection with which Toby gets over the kiss and takes his reward, with the genuine fondness

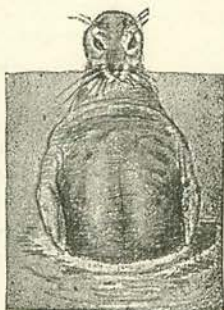


A. J. ...

of his gaze after Sutton when he leaves—with some fish remaining for other seals. Toby is a willing worker; he would gladly have the performance twice as long, while as to an eight hours' day—!

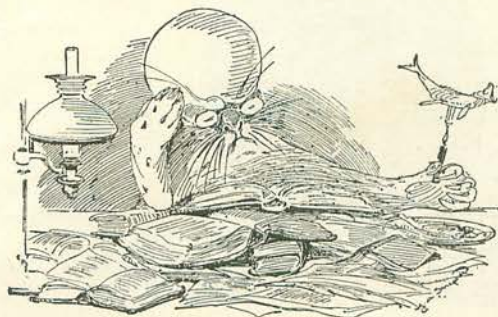
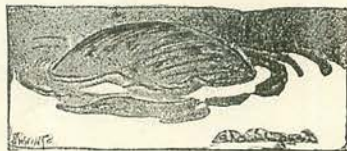
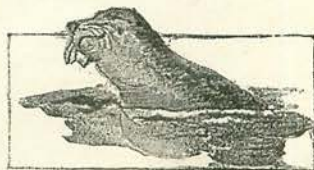
The seals in the next pond, Tommy and Jenny, are insulted with the epithet of "common" seals; but Tommy and Jenny are really very respectable, and if a seal do happen to be born only *Phoca vitulina*, he can't really help it, and doesn't deserve humiliation so long as he behaves himself. *Phoca vitulina* has as excellent power of reason as any other kind of seal—brain power, acquired, no doubt, from a continual fish diet. Tommy doesn't feel aggrieved at the slight put upon him, however, and

has a proper notion of his own importance. Watch



him rise from a mere floating patch—slowly, solemnly, and portentously, to take a look round. He looks to the left—nothing to interest a well-informed seal; to the front—nothing; to the right everything is in order, the weather is only so-so, but the rain keeps off, and there are no signs of that dilatory person with the fish; so Tommy flops in again, and becomes once more a floating patch, having conducted his little airing with proper dignity and self-respect. Really, there is nothing common in the manners of Tommy; there is, at any rate, one piece of rude mischief which he is never guilty of, but which many of the more aristocratic kinds of seal practise habitually. He doesn't throw stones.

He doesn't look at all like a stone-thrower, as a matter of fact; but he—and other seals—*can* throw stones nevertheless. If you chase a seal over a shingly



FISH DIET.

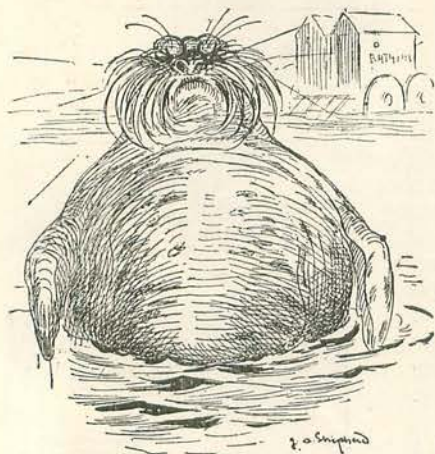
beach, he will scuffle away at a surprising pace, flinging up the stones into your face with his hind feet. This assault, directed toward a well-intentioned person who only wants to bang him on the head with a club, is a piece of grievous ill-humour, particularly on the part of the crested seal, who can blow up a sort of bladder on the top of his head which protects him from assault; and which also gives him, by-the-bye, an intellectual and large-brained appearance not his due, for all his fish diet. I had been thinking of making some sort of a joke about an aristocratic seal with a crest on it—beside a fine coat with no arms—but gave up the under-

taking on reflecting that no real swell—probably not even a parvenu—would heave half-bricks with his feet.

All this running away and hurling of clinkers may seem to agree ill with the longing after extermination lately hinted at; but, in fact, it only proves the presence of a large amount of human nature in the composition of the seal. From motives of racial pride the seal aspires to extinction and a place beside the dodo, but in the spirit of many other patriots, he wants the other seals to be exterminated first; wants the individual honour, in fact, of being himself the very last seal, as well as the corporate honour of extinction for the species. This is why, if he live in some other part, he takes such delighted interest in news of wholesale seal slaughter in the Pacific; and also why he skedaddles from the well-meant bangs of the genial hunter—these blows, by the way, being technically described as sealing-whacks.

The sea-lion, as I have said, is not like a lion; the sea-leopard is not like a leopard; but the sea-elephant, which is another sort of seal, and a large one, may possibly be considered sufficiently like an elephant to have been evolved, in the centuries, from an elephant who has had the ill-luck to fall into the sea. He hasn't much of a trunk left, but he often finds himself in seas of a coldness enough to nip off any ordinary trunk; but his legs and feet are not elephantine.

What the previous adventures of the sea-lion may have been in the matter of evolution, I am at a loss to guess, unless there is anything in the slug theory; but if he keep steadily on, and cultivate his moustache and his stomach with



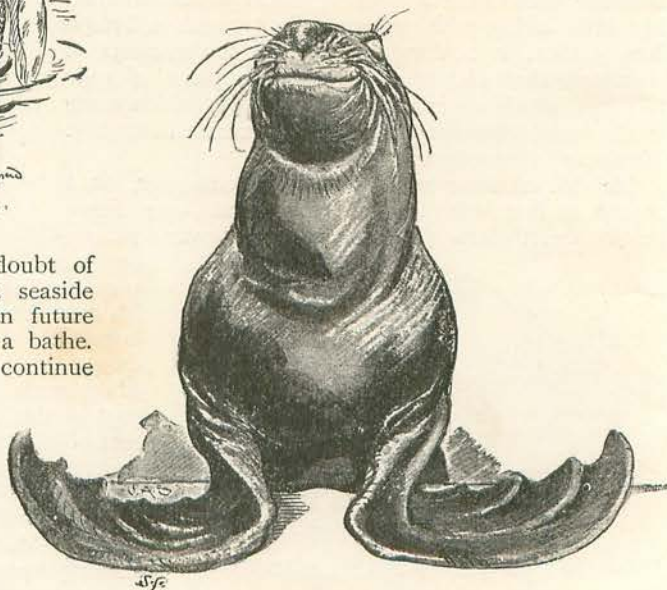
"DAS VAS BLEASANT, AIN'D IT?"

proper assiduity, I have no doubt of his one day turning up at a seaside resort and carrying on life in future as a fierce old German out for a bathe. Or the Cape sea-lion, if only he continue his obsequious smile and his habit of planting his fore-flappers on the ledge before him as he rises from the water, may some day, in his posterity, be promoted to a place behind the counter of a respectable drapery warehouse, there to sell the skins his relatives grow.

But after all, any phocine ambition, either for extinction or higher evolution, may be an empty thing; because the seal is very comfortable as he is. Consider a few of his



INTEREST IN THE NEWS.



"AND THE NEXT ARTICLE?"

advantages. He has a very fine fur overcoat, with an admirable lining of fat, which, as well as being warm, permits any amount of harmless falling and tumbling about, such as is suitable to and inevitable with the seal's want of shape. He can enjoy the sound of bagpipes, which is a privilege accorded to few. Further, he can shut his ears when he has had enough, which is a faculty man may envy him.

His wife, too, always has a first-rate sealskin jacket, made in one piece, and he hasn't to pay for it. He can always run down to the seaside when so disposed, although the run is a waddle and a flounder; and if he has no tail to speak of—well, he can't have it frozen off. All these things are better than the empty honour of extinction; better than evolution into bathers who would be drownable, and translation into unaccustomed situations—with the peril of a week's notice. Wherefore let the seal perpetuate his race—his obstacle race, as one might say, seeing him flounder and flop.

