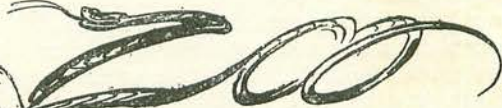


ZIGZAGS

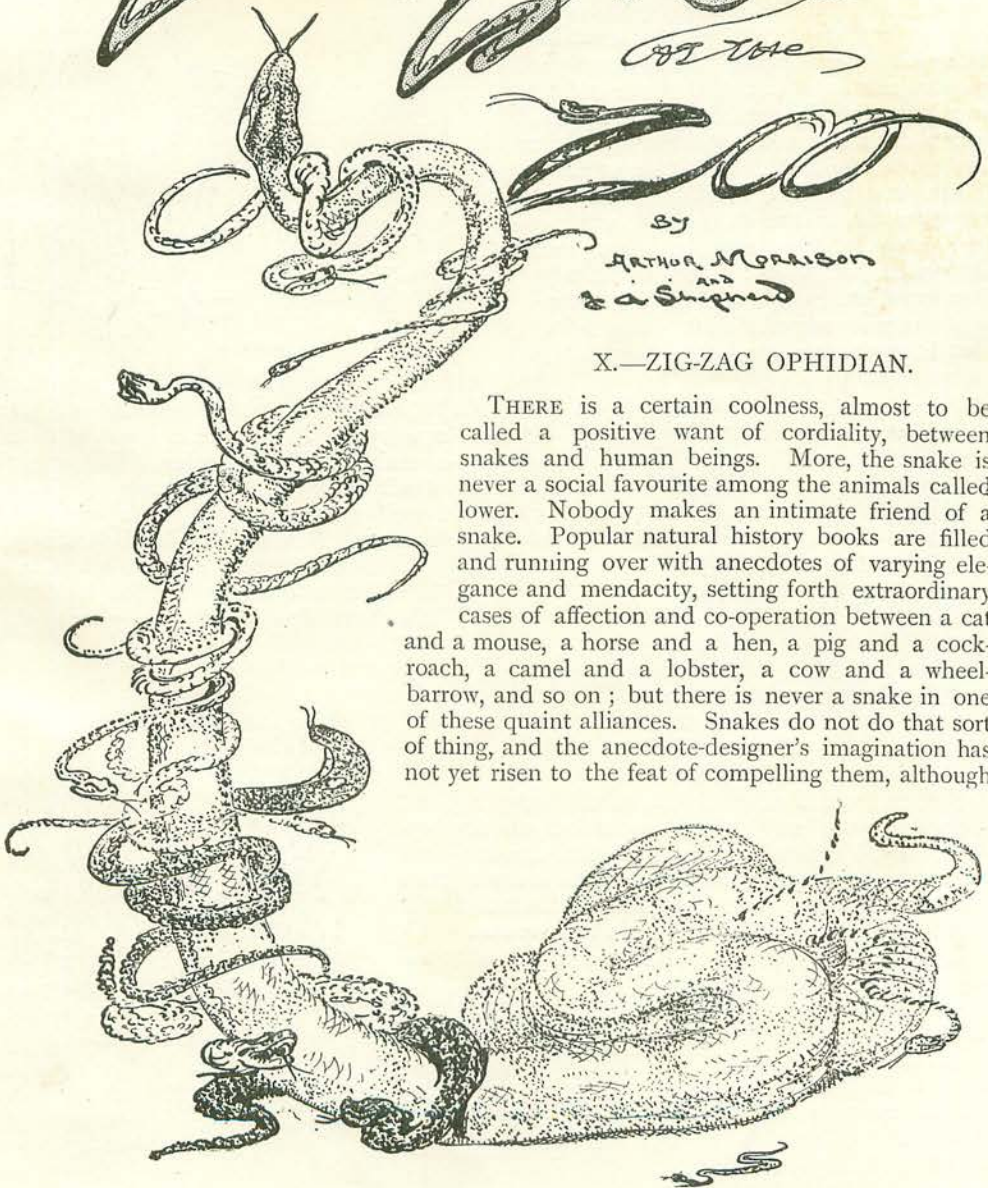
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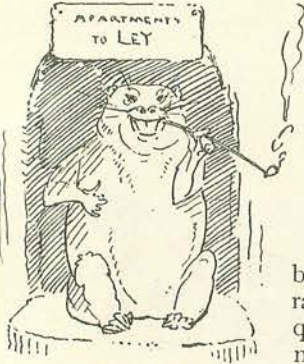


By
ARTHUR MORRISON
AND
a Shepherd

X.—ZIG-ZAG OPHIDIAN.

THERE is a certain coolness, almost to be called a positive want of cordiality, between snakes and human beings. More, the snake is never a social favourite among the animals called lower. Nobody makes an intimate friend of a snake. Popular natural history books are filled and running over with anecdotes of varying elegance and mendacity, setting forth extraordinary cases of affection and co-operation between a cat and a mouse, a horse and a hen, a pig and a cockroach, a camel and a lobster, a cow and a wheelbarrow, and so on; but there is never a snake in one of these quaint alliances. Snakes do not do that sort of thing, and the anecdote-designer's imagination has not yet risen to the feat of compelling them, although





LANDLORD.

The prairie marmot takes a lot of trouble and builds a nice burrow, and then the owl, who is only a slovenly sort of architect himself, comes along and takes apartments. It has never been quite settled whether or not the lodger and the landlord agree pleasantly together, but in the absence of any positive evidence they may be given credit for perfect amiability; because nobody has found traces of owl in a dead marmot's interior, nor of marmot in an owl's. But the rattlesnake is another thing. He

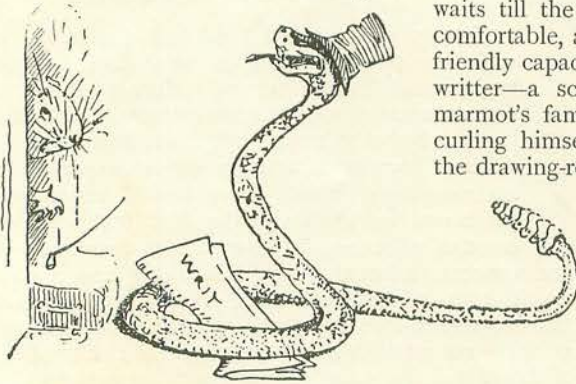
the stimulus of competition may soon cause it. The case most nearly approaching one of friendship between man and snake known to me is the case of Tyrrell, the Zoo snake keeper, and his "laidly worms." But, then, the friendship is mostly on Tyrrell's side, and, moreover, Tyrrell is rather more than human, as anyone will admit who sees him hang boa constrictors round his neck. Of course one often hears of boys making pets of common English snakes, but a boy is not a human creature at all; he is a kind of harpy.

The prairie marmot and the burrowing owl come into neighbourly contact with the rattlesnake, but the acquaintance does not quite amount to friendship.



LODGER.

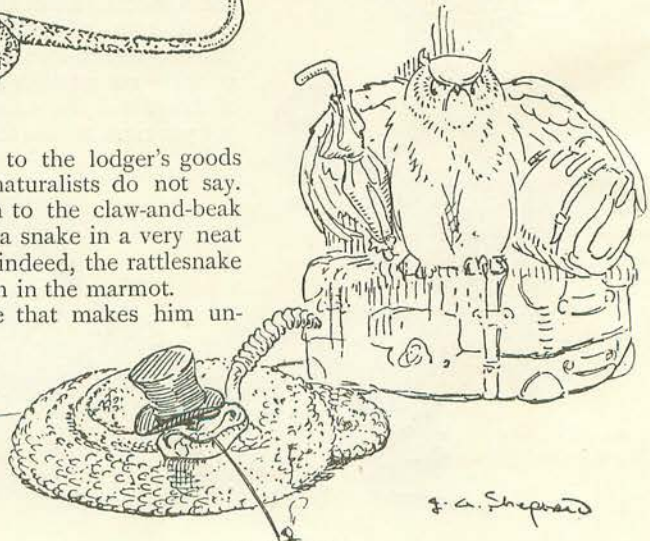
waits till the residence has been made perfectly comfortable, and then comes in himself; not in the friendly capacity of a lodger, but as a sort of unholy writer—a scaly man-in-possession. He eats the marmot's family and perhaps the marmot himself; curling himself up comfortably in the best part of the drawing-room. The owl and his belongings he leaves severely alone; but whether from a doubt as to the legality of distraining upon the goods of a



WRITER.

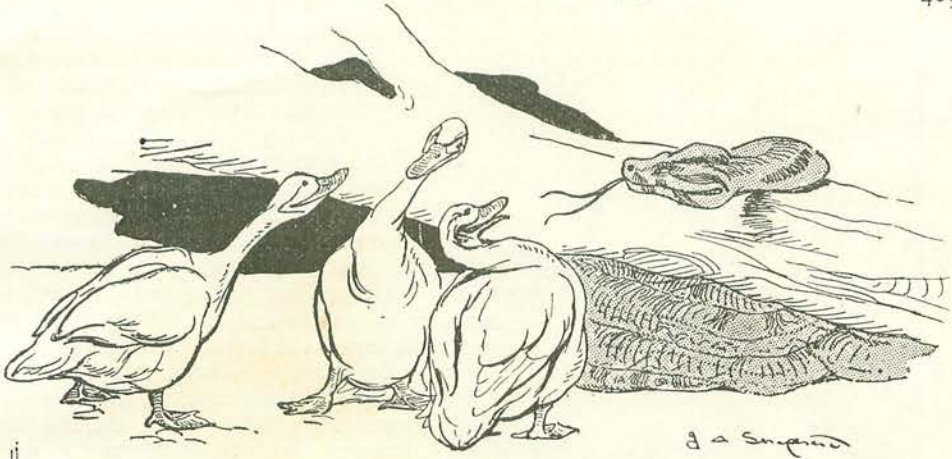
lodger, or from a certainty as to the lodger's goods including claws and a beak, naturalists do not say. Personally, I incline very much to the claw-and-beak theory, having seen an owl kill a snake in a very neat and workmanlike manner; and, indeed, the rattlesnake sometimes catches a Tartar even in the marmot.

It isn't terror of the snake that makes him unpopular; the most harmless snake never acquires the confidence of other creatures; and one hesitates to carry it in his hat. This general repugnance is something like backing a bill or paying a tailor—entirely a matter of form. Nothing



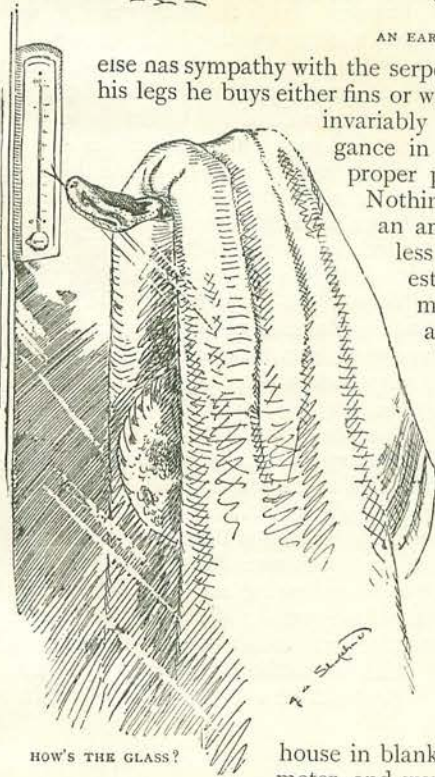
IN POSSESSION.

J. A. Shepherd



AN EARLY WORM.

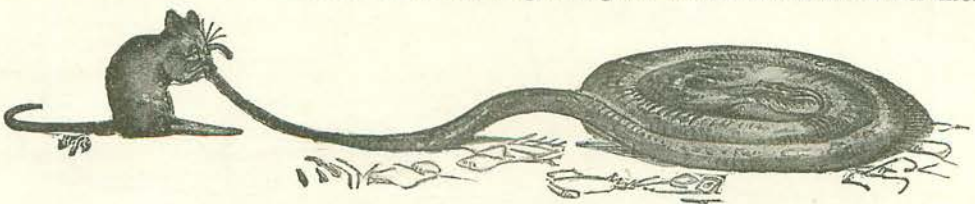
ise nas sympathy with the serpent's shape. When any other animal barter away his legs he buys either fins or wings with them; this is a generally-understood law, invariably respected. But the snake goes in for extravagance in ribs and vertebrae; an eccentric, rakish, and improper proceeding; part of an irregular and raffish life. Nothing can carry within it affection, or even respect, for an animal whose tail begins nowhere in particular, unless it is at the neck; even if any creature may esteem it an animal at all that is but a tail with a mouth and eyes at one end. Dignify the mouth and eyes into a head, and still you have nothing wherewith to refute those who shall call the snake tribe naught but heads and tails; a vulgar and raffish condition of life, of pot-house and Tommy-Dod suggestion.



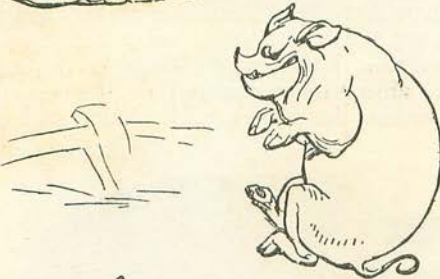
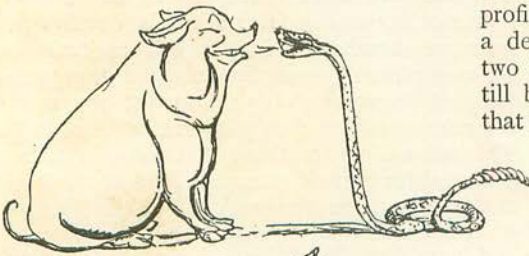
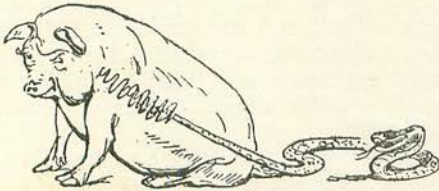
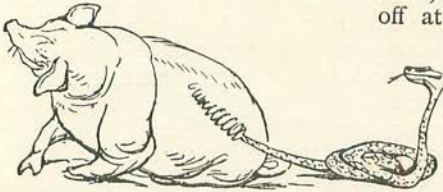
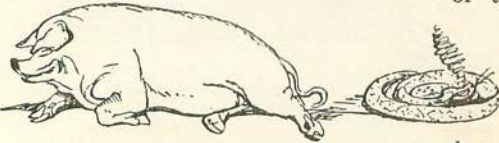
HOW'S THE GLASS?

And this is why nothing loves a snake. It is not because the snake is feared, but because it is incomprehensible. The talk of its upas-like influence, its deadly fascination, is chiefly picturesque humbug. Ducks will approach a snake curiously, inwardly debating the possibility of digesting so big a worm at one meal; the moving tail-tip they will peck at cheerfully. This was the sort of thing that one might have observed for himself years ago, here at the Zoo; at the time when the snakes lived in the old

house in blankets, because of the unsteadiness of the thermometer, and were fed in public. Now the snakes are fed in strict privacy lest the sight overset the morals of visitors; the killing of a bird, a rabbit, or a rat by a snake being almost a quarter as unpleasant to look upon as the killing of the same animal by a man in a farmyard or elsewhere. The abject terror inspired by the presence of a snake is such that an innocent rat will set to gnawing the snake's tail in default of more



THE FASCINATED RAT.

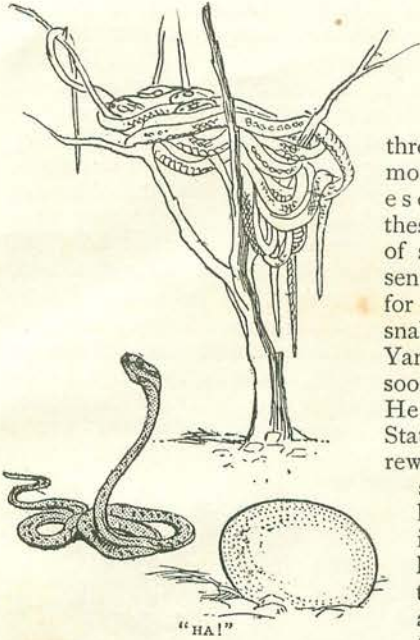


usual provender; while a rabbit placed with a snake near skin-shedding time will placidly nibble the loose rags of epidermis about the snake's sides.

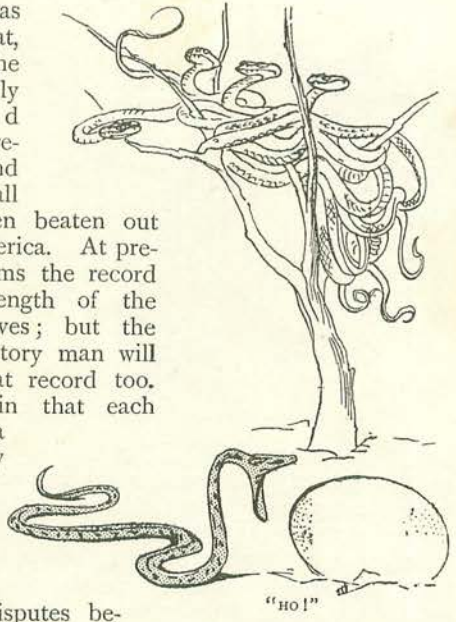
The pig treats the snake with disrespect, not to say insolence; nothing, ophidian or otherwise, can fascinate a pig. If your back garden is infested with rattlesnakes you should keep pigs. The pig dances contemptuously on the rattlesnake, and eats him with much relish, rattles and all. The last emotion of the rattlesnake is intense astonishment; and astonishment is natural, in the circumstances. A respectable and experienced rattlesnake, many years established in business, has been accustomed to spread panic everywhere within ear and eye shot; everything capable of motion has started off at the faintest rustle of his rattles, and his view of animal life from those expressionless eyes has invariably been a back view, and a rapidly diminishing one. After a life-long experience of this sort, to be unceremoniously rushed upon by a common pig, to be jumped upon, to be flouted and snouted, to be treated as so much swill, and finally to be made a snack of—this causes a feeling of very natural and painful surprise in the rattlesnake. But a rattlesnake is only surprised in this way once, and he is said to improve the pork.

As a *tour de force* in the gentle art of lying, the snake-story is justly esteemed. All the records in this particular branch of sport are held in the United States of America, where proficiency at snakes is the first qualification of a descriptive reporter. The old story of the two snakes swallowing each other from the tail till both disappeared; the story of the snake that took its own tail in its mouth and trundled after its victim like a hoop; the story of the man who chopped a snake in half





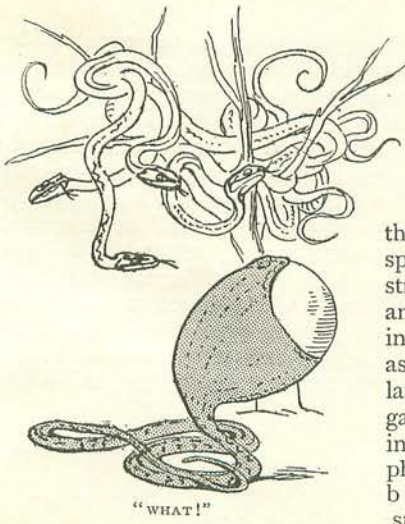
just as it was bolting a rat, so that the rat merely toddled through the foremost half and escaped — all these have been beaten out of sight in America. At present Brazil claims the record for absolute length of the snakes themselves; but the Yankee snake-story man will soon claim that record too. He will explain that each State pays a reward for every snake killed within its own limits; but that there are always disputes between the different States as to payment; because



most of the snakes killed are rather large, crawling across several States at once.

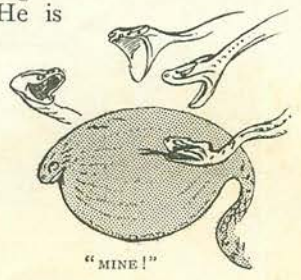
Here, among a number of viperine snakes of about the same size, is a snake that lives on eggs. He is about as thick as a lead pencil, but that doesn't prevent his swallowing a large

pigeon's egg whole, nor even a hen's egg at a pinch. It dislocates his jaw, but that is a part of his professional system, and when the business is over he calmly joints up his jaw again and goes to sleep. He is



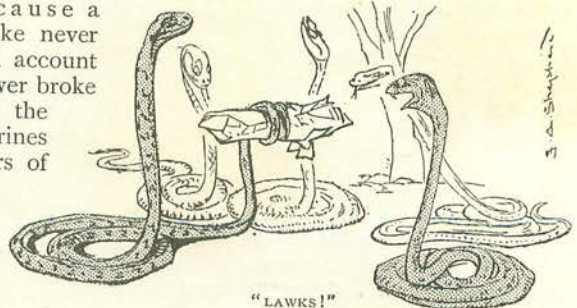
eccentric, even for a snake, and wears his teeth on his backbone, where they may break

the egg-shell so that he may spit it away. When he first stretched his head round an egg, the viperine snakes in the same case hastily assumed him to be a very large tadpole; and since tadpoles are regarded with gastronomical affection by viperine snakes, they began an instant chase, each prepared to swallow the entire phenomenon, because a snake never

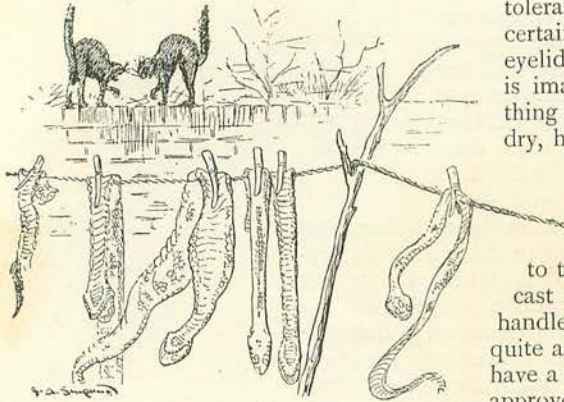


hesitates to swallow anything merely on account of its size. When finally the egg-swallower broke the egg, and presented to their gaze the crumpled shell, the perplexed viperines subsided, and retired to remote corners of the case to think the matter over and forget it—like the crowd dispersed by the circulating hat of the street-conjuror.

Familiarity with the snake breeds



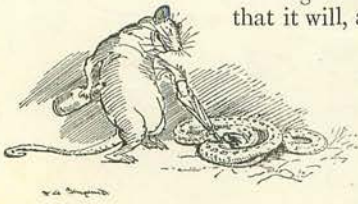
J. A. S. 1911



OLD CLO'.

very pleasant company. It is a pity that these snakes have no pet names. I would suggest The Pirate as a suitable name for any snake from Robben Island.

For anybody who has been bitten by a cobra, or a rattlesnake, or a puff-adder, there are many remedies, but few people who can recommend them from personal experience. It is to be feared that most of them unfortunately die before writing their testimonials. Perhaps they were too long deciding which thing to take. The most famous of these remedies, and probably the best, on the whole, is to get excessively drunk. It is expensive to get drunk after a poisonous snake-bite, because something in the veins fortifies the head against the first bottle or two of whisky. Getting drunk before the bite won't do,

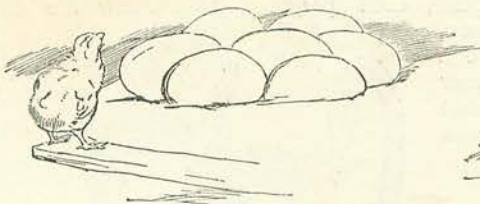


DRUNK TOO SOON.



RESULT.

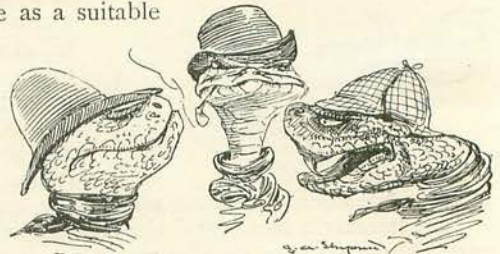
sort of white parchment or leather instead of shell. All the rest go further, and refuse to lay eggs at all.



FIRST THIS TIME, I THINK!

The snake insists on having his food fresh; you must let him do his own killing. Many carry this sort of fastidiousness so far as to

toleration. He is a lawless sort of creature, certainly, with too many vertebræ and no eyelids; but he is not always so horrible as he is imagined. A snake is rather a pleasant thing to handle than otherwise. Warm, firm, dry, hard and smooth on the scales, rather like ivory to the touch. He is also a deal heavier than you expect. When for good behaviour I have been admitted to Tyrrell's inner sanctum here, and to the corridors behind the lairs, where hang cast skins like stockings on a line, I have handled many of his pets. I have never got quite as far as rattlesnakes, because rattlesnakes have a blackguardly, welshing look that I don't approve. But there is a Robben Island snake, about five feet long, with no poison, who is



WELSHERS.

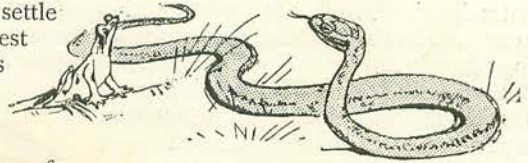
although there would appear to be a very widely prevalent impression that it will, and a very common resolve to lay up a good store of cure against possible accidents in the future. This may be misdirected prudence, and nothing else, but there is often a difficulty in persuading a magistrate to think so.

The snake *will* be eccentric, even in the matter of its eggs. Most snakes secure originality and independence in this matter by laying eggs like an elongated tennis-ball—eggs covered with a

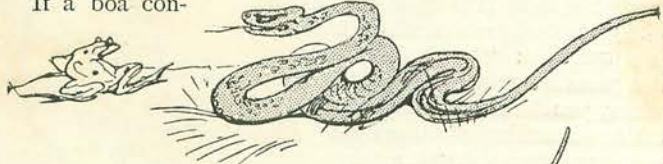


LOR!

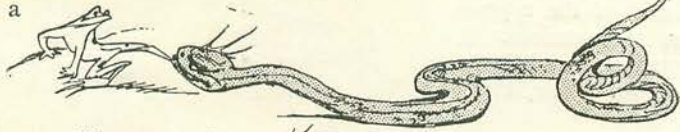
prefer taking it in alive, and leaving it to settle matters with the digestive machinery as best it may. A snake of this sort has lost his dinner before now by gaping too soon; a frog takes a deal of swallowing before he forgets how to jump.



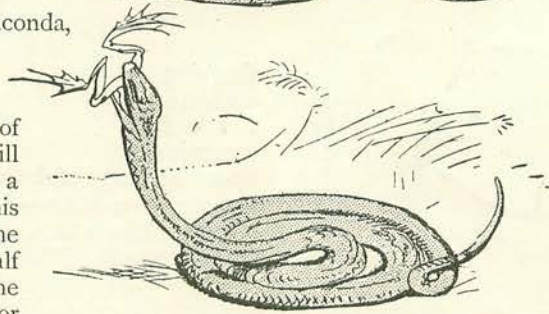
It is well to remember what to do in case of attack by a formidable snake. If a boa constrictor or a python begin to curl himself about you, you should pinch him vigorously, and he will loosen his folds and get away from you.



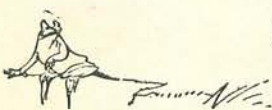
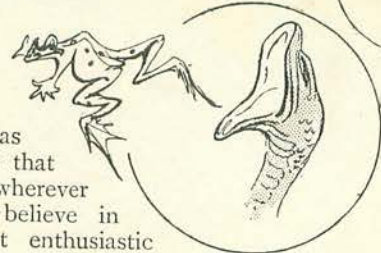
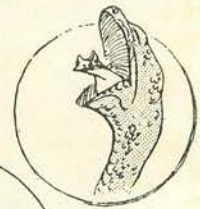
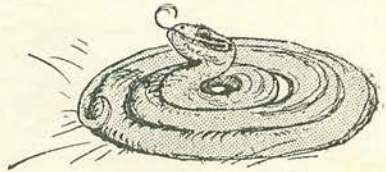
Some may prefer to blow his head off with a pistol, but it is largely a matter of taste, and one doesn't want to



damage a good specimen. The anaconda, however, who is the biggest of the constrictors, won't let go for pinching; in this case the best thing is not to let him get hold of you at all. Tobacco-juice will kill a puff-adder. If you come across a puff-adder, you should open his mouth gently, remembering that the scratch of a fang means death in half an hour or so, and give him the tobacco-juice in a suitable dose; or you can run away as fast as possible, which is kinder to the snake and much healthier for yourself.

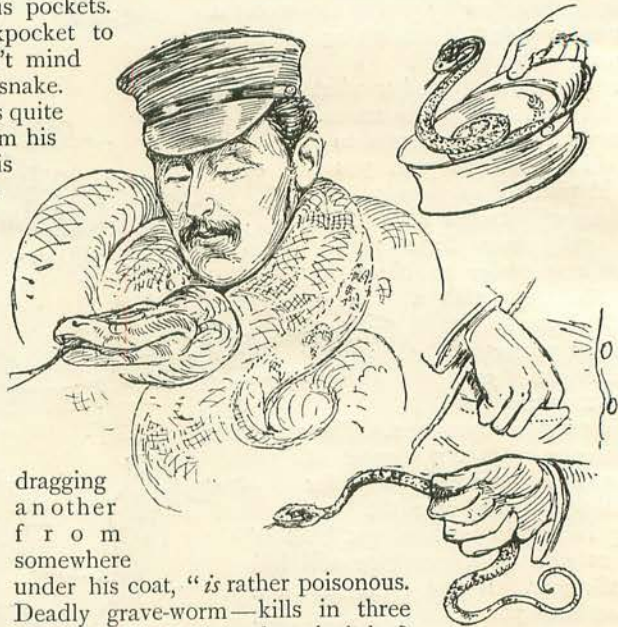


By far the biggest snake here is the python, in the case opposite the door; he is more than twenty feet long, and is seriously thinking of growing longer still. Tyrrell picks him up unceremoniously by the neck and shoves him head first into a tank of water, when he seems to need a little stir and amusement. I think, perhaps, after all, the most remarkable being exhibited in the reptile house is Tyrrell. I don't think much of the Indian snake-charmers now. See a cobra raise its head and flatten out its neck till it looks like a demoniac flounder set on end; keep in mind that a bite means death in a few minutes; presently you will feel yourself possessed with a certain respect for a snake-charmer who tootles on a flute while the thing crawls about him. But Tyrrell comes along, without a flute — without as much as a jew's-harp — and carelessly grabs that cobra by the neck and strolls off with it wherever he thinks it ought to go, and you believe in the European after all. He is a most enthusiastic



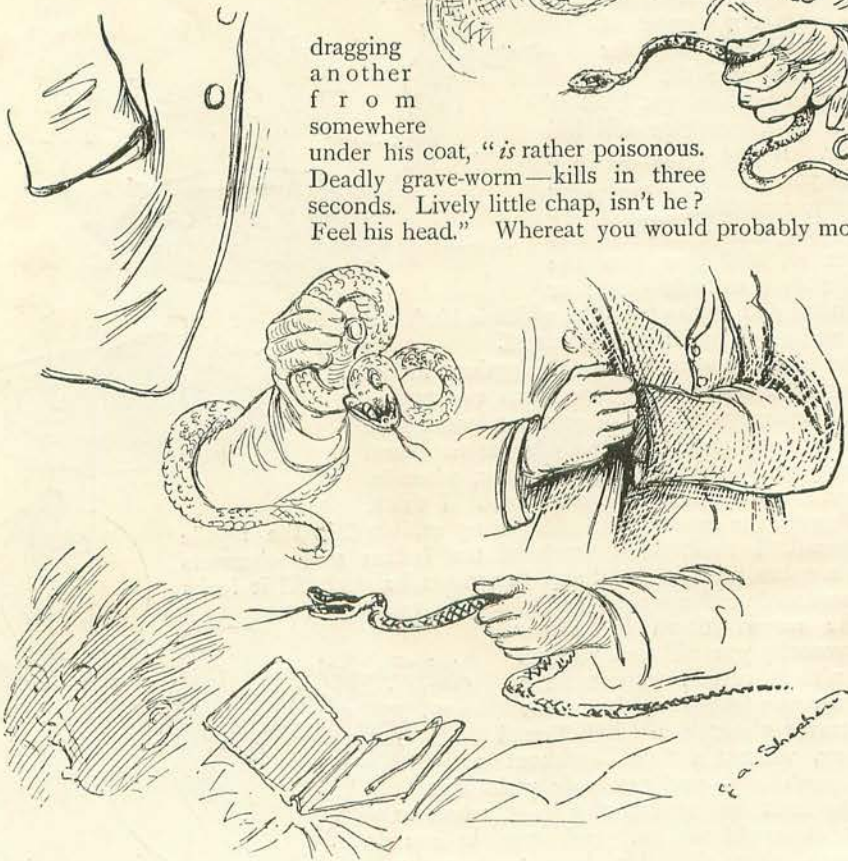
THE SNAKE THAT GAPED: A MORAL LESSON.

naturalist, is Tyrrell. He thinks nothing of festooning a boa constrictor about his neck and arms, and in his sanctum he keeps young crocodiles in sundry watering-pots, and other crawling things in unexpected places. You never quite know where the next surprise is coming from. I always feel doubtful about his pockets. I shouldn't recommend a pickpocket to try them, unless he really doesn't mind running against a casual rattlesnake. Tyrrell is the sort of man who is quite likely to produce something from his cap and say: "By-the-bye, this is a promising youngster—death adder, you know. And here," taking something else from his coat or vest pocket, "is a very fine specimen of the spotted coffin-filler, rather curious. It isn't *very* poisonous—kills in an hour or so. Now, this,"



dragging
a n o t h e r
f r o m
s o m e w h e r e

under his coat, "is rather poisonous. Deadly grave-worm—kills in three seconds. Lively little chap, isn't he? Feel his head." Whereat you would probably move on.



F. A. Shepherd