

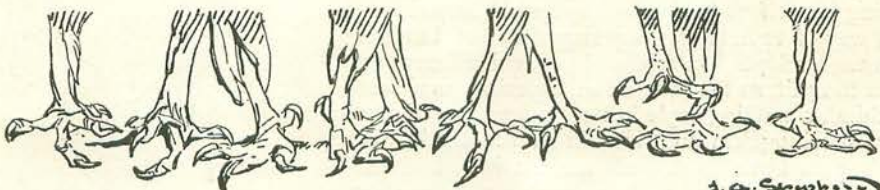


XII.—ZIG-ZAG ACCIPITRAL.

THE accipitral birds are the eagles, the vultures, the falcons, the owls—all those birds that bite and tear unhappy mammals as well as birds of more peaceful habits than themselves. They have all, it will be observed, Roman noses, which may be the reason why the Romans



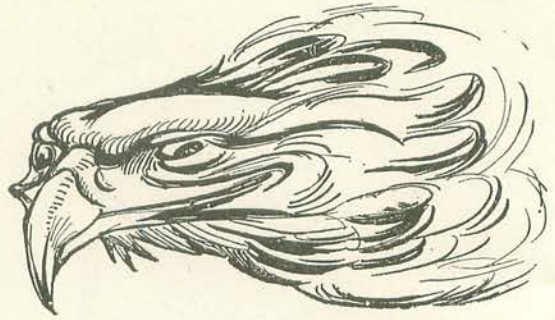
adopted the eagle as a standard; as also it may not. They have striking characteristics of their own, and have been found very useful by poets and other people who have to wander off the main subject to make plain what they mean. The owl is the wisecrack of Nature, the vulture is a vile harpy, and the eagle is the embodiment of everything great and mighty, and glorious and free, and swooping and catoptical. There is very little to say against the eagle, except that he looks a deal the better a long way off, like an impressionist picture or a volcano. When the eagle is flying and swooping, or soaring and staring impudently at the sun, or reproaching an old feather of his own in the arrow that sticks in his chest, or mewing his mighty youth (a process I never quite understood)—when he is doing noble and poetical things of this class at an elevation of a great many thousand feet above the sea level he is



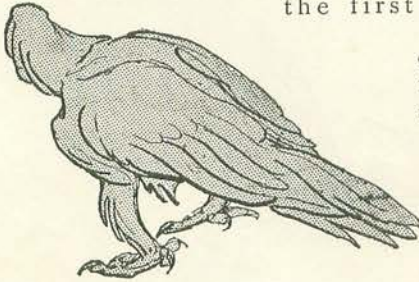
J. A. Shepherd

sublime. When you meet him down below, on his feet, much of the sublimity is rubbed off.

There is only one eagle in the world with whom I can claim anything like a confidential friendship, although I know many. His name is Charley. If, after a chat with Bob the Bactrian, you will turn your back to the camel-house and walk past the band-stand toward the eagles' aviaries, you will observe that the first



CHARLEY.

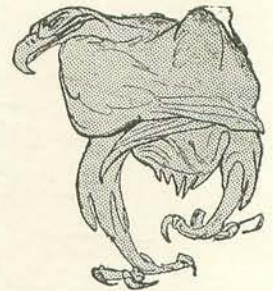


CORNS,—

to take up passengers, and looks out keenly for cats. That is Charley. He is all right when you know him, is Charley, and

corner cage is occupied by wedge-tailed eagles—a most disrespectful name, by-the-bye, I think. There are various perches, including

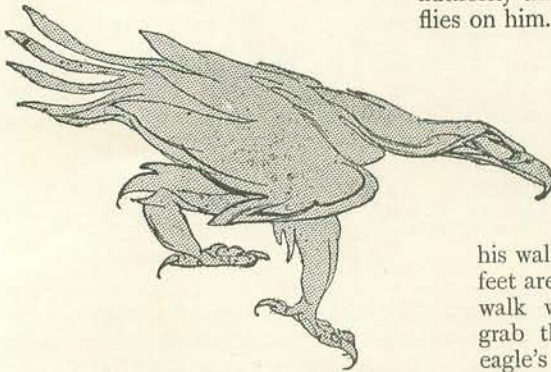
a large tree-trunk, for these birds; but one bird, the oldest in the cage, doesn't use them. He keeps on the floor by the bars facing the place where Suffa Culli and Jung Perchad stand



BUNIONS,—

I have it on the best authority that there are no flies on him. A rat on the

straggle has been known to turn up in this aviary and run the gauntlet of all the cages—till he reached Charley; nothing alive and eatable ever got past *him*. I have all the esteem and friendship for Charley that any eagle has a right to expect; but I can't admit the least impressiveness in



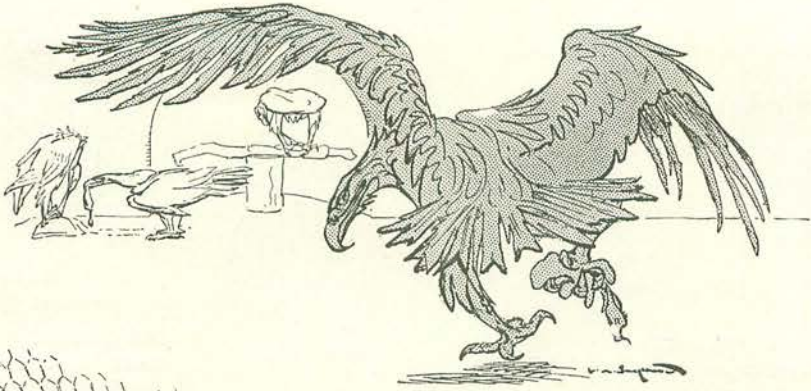
CHILBLAINS, OR—

his walk. An eagle's feet are not meant to walk with, but to grab things. An eagle's walk betrays a lamentable bandy-

leggedness, and his toe-nails click awkwardly against the ground. This makes him plant his feet gingerly and lift them quickly, so that worthy old ladies suppose him to be afflicted with lameness or bunions, an opinion which disgusts the bird, as you may observe for yourself; for you will never find an eagle in these Gardens submitting himself to be fondled by an old lady visitor. It is by way of repudiating any suggestion of bunions that the eagle adopts a raffish, off-hand, chickaleary sort of roll in the gait, so that altogether, especially as viewed from behind, a walking eagle has an appearance of perpetually knocking 'em in the Old Kent Road. On Charley's next birthday I shall present him, I think, with a proper pearly suit, with kicksies cut saucy over



IKINESS?



A PASSING SNACK.

the trotters, and an artful fakement down the side, if the Society will allow me.

There is nothing in the world that pleases an eagle better at dinner-time than a prime piece of cat. Charley tells me that, upon the whole, he prefers a good, plump, mouse-fed tabby; he adds that he never yet heard of a tame eagle being kept at a sausage shop, though he would like a situation of that sort himself, very much. The stoop of a free eagle as it takes a living victim is, no doubt, a fine thing, except for the victim; but the grabbing of cut-up food here in captivity is merely comic. The eagle, with his Whitechapel lurch, makes for the morsel and takes it in his stride; then he stands on it in a manner somehow suggesting pattens, and pecks away at the hair—if, luckily, he has secured a furry piece. I am not intimate with any eagle but Charley, but I am very friendly with all of them—golden, tawny, white-tailed, and the rest, with their scowls and their odd winks—all but one other of the wedge-tailers, who stays for ever at the top of the tree trunk and looks out westward, trying to distinguish the cats in the gardens of St. John's Wood; he is reserved as well as uppish, and I don't know him to speak to.

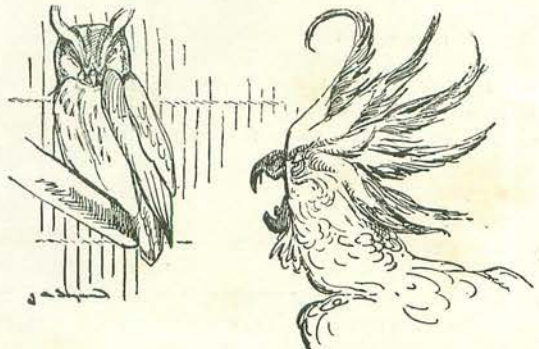
I am pretty intimate with many of the owls. The owl I know least is a little Scops owl, kept alone in the insect-house.

He has for next-door neighbour a sad old reprobate—Cocky, the

big Triton cockatoo—who abuses him horribly. The fact is, they both occupy a recess which once Cocky had all to himself, and now Cocky bullies the intruder up hill and down dale; although little Scops would gladly go somewhere else if he could, and takes no notice of Cocky's uncivil bawlings further than to lift his near wing apprehensively at each outburst.



DINNER AHOY!



UNCIVIL BAWLINGS.



WHAT!



WELL—



DID YOU EVER!



OF ALL THE—!

He and I have not been able to improve our acquaintance greatly, partly because he is out of reach, and partly because Cocky's conversation occupies most of his time.

The Zoo owls are a lamentably scattered family. Another Scops owl, with one eye, lives in the eastern aviary, in Church's care. He is a charming, furious little ruffian (I am speaking of the owl, and not of Church), and perfectly ready to peck any living thing, quite irrespective of size. Where he lost his eye is a story of his own, for he was first met with but one. He sits on his perch with a furious cock of the ears—which are not ears at all, but feathers—with the aspect of being permanently prepared to repel boarders; and the only thing that could possibly add to his fierceness of appearance would be a patch over the sight of the demolished eye; a little present I would gladly make myself, if he would let me.

He lives just underneath a much less savage little Naked-foot Owl, who doesn't resent your existence with his beak,

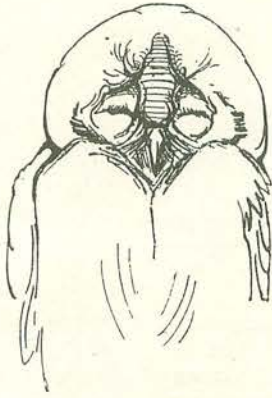


THE SCOWLING SCOPS.

but gazes at you with a most extreme air of shocked surprise. He doesn't attack you bodily for standing on this earth on your own feet—he is too much grieved and scandalized.

He looks at you as a teetotal lady of the Anti-Gambling League would look at her nephew if he offered to toss her for whiskies. He follows you with his glare of outraged propriety till you shrink behind Church and sneak away, with an indescribable feeling of personal depravity previously unknown. Why should this pharisaical little bird make one feel a criminal? As a matter of fact, he is nothing but a raffish fly-by-night himself; and his pious horror is assumed, I believe, as much to keep his eyes wide open and him awake as to impose on one.

The owls' cages proper are away behind the llamas' house, and here you may study owl nature in plenty; and you may observe the owls, like people sitting through a long sermon, affecting various concealments and excuses for going to sleep in



MILKY REPOSE.

parent deception so long that he does it now mechanically, and sleeps, I believe, or nearly so, through the whole process. The oriental owl does it rather differently. He

He has practised the trans-

doesn't open his eyes when you first wake him—this in order to give

greater verisimilitude to his pretence of profound meditation; he wishes you to understand that it is not your presence that causes him to open his eyes, but the natural

course of his philosophical speculations.

As a pundit, he disdains to appear to observe you; so he gazes

solemnly at a vast space with nothing whatever for its centre. He sees

you, but he knows you for a creature that never

carries raw meat with it, like a keeper; a creature beneath the notice of *Bubo orientalis*.

As a song-bird, the owl is not a conspicuous success. Perhaps he has learned this in the Zoo, for he cannot be induced to perform during visiting hours. He is a reserved person, and exclusive.

If you, as a stranger, attempt to scrape his acquaintance, he meets you with an indignant stare—confound your impudence!

Nothing in this world can present such a picture of offended, astounded dignity as an owl. I often wonder what he said when Noah ordered him

peremptorily into the Ark. As for myself, I should as soon think of ordering one of the beadies at the Bank.

Many worthy owls, long since passed away as living things, now exist in their astral forms as pepper-boxes and tobacco-jars. They probably belonged, in life, to the same species as a friend of mine here, who exhibits one of their chief physical features. He sits immovably still, so far as his body—his jar or pepper-reservoir—is concerned; indeed, if he is not disturbed, he sits immovably altogether, and sleeps. When he is disturbed he wakes in



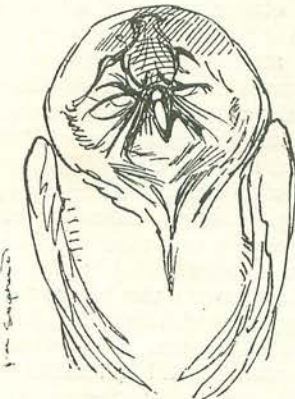
IS HE COMING?



WHAT A NUISANCE!

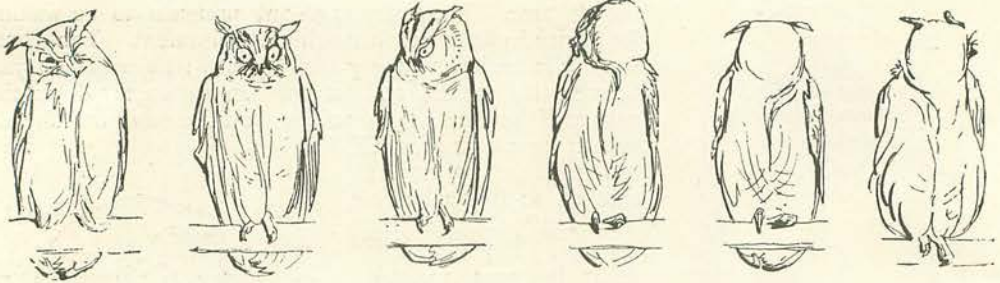


NOT YET?



OH, HANG IT!

so far as his body—his jar or pepper-reservoir—is concerned; indeed, if he is not disturbed, he sits immovably altogether, and sleeps. When he is disturbed he wakes in



instalments, opening one eye at a time. He fixes you with his wild, fiery eye, his indignant stare. Start to walk round him; the head turns, and the stare follows you, with no movement whatever of the part containing the pepper. The head slowly turns and turns, without the smallest indication of stopping anywhere. I never tempted it farther than once round, but walked back the other way, for fear of strangling a valuable bird. Besides, I remembered an owl pepper-box once,

which became loose in the screw through continual turning, so that the head fell off into your plate, and all the pepper after it.

The biggest owls are the eagle-owls. The eagle-owls here occupy a

similar sort of situation to that of the hermit in an old tea-garden. In a secluded nook behind the camel-house a brick-built cave is kept in a wire cage, which not only hinders the owls from escaping, but prevents them taking the cave with them if they do. The cave is fitted up with the proper quantity of weird gloom and several convenient perches; the perches, however, are indistinct, because the gloom is obvious. In the midst of it you may see two fiery eyes, like the fire-balls from a Roman candle, and nothing else. This is the most one often has a chance of seeing here in bright day. Often the eagle-owls are asleep, and then you do not even see the fireworks. I know the big eagle-owl fairly well; that is to say, I am on snarling terms with him. But once he has settled in his cave he won't come out, even when I call him Zadkiel.

There is nothing much more grotesque than a row of small barn owls, just awakened from sleep and curious about the disturber. There is some-

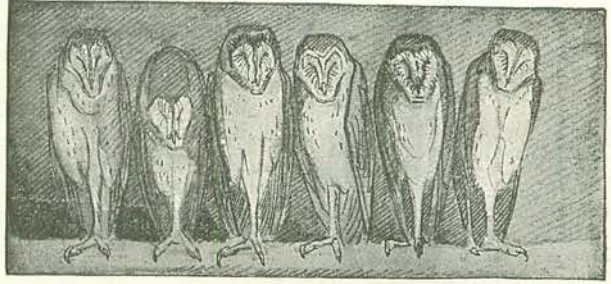


THE EAGLE-OWLS' RETREAT.

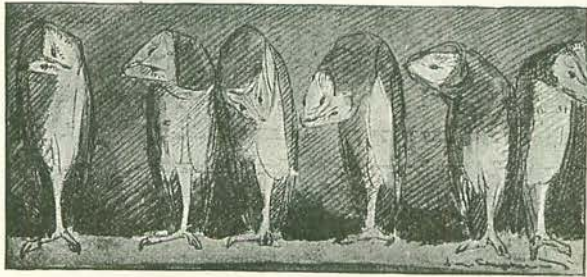
thing about the odd gaze and twist of the neck that irresistibly reminds me of an illustration in an Old Saxon or Early English manuscript.

I am not particularly friendly with any of the vultures. Walk past their cages with the determination to ingratiate yourself with them. You will change your mind. There are very few birds that I should not like to keep as pets if I had the room,

but the vulture is the first of them. I don't know any kind of vulture whose personal appearance wouldn't hang him at a court of Judge Lynch.



SLEEP.



WHO SAID RATS?

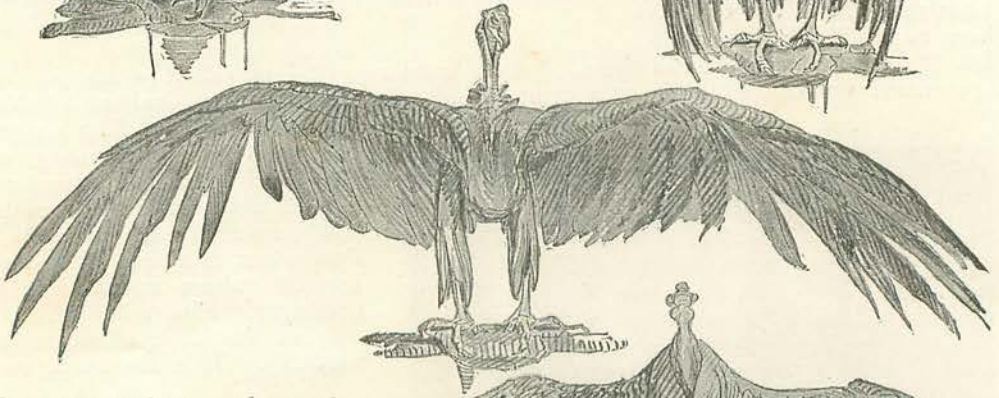
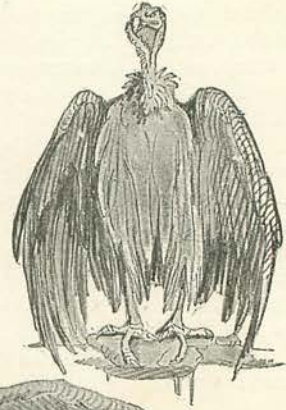
to huri yourself bodily against anybody looking over a precipice and unaware of your presence, so as to break him up on the rocks below, and dine off his prime cuts. I have no doubt that Self—(Self, by-the-by, keeps eagles and vultures as well as camels)—has any amount of sympathy for his charges, but who *could* make a pet of a turkey-vulture, with its nasty, raw-looking red head, or of a cinereous vulture, with its unwholesome eyes and its unclean-looking blue wattle? No, I am not over-fond of a vulture. He is always a dissipated-looking ruffian, of boiled eye and blotchy complexion, and you know as you look at him that he would prefer to see you dead rather than alive, so that he might safely take your eyes by way of an appetizer, and forthwith proceed to lift away your softer pieces preparatory to strolling under your ribs like a jackdaw in a cage much too small. He sits there placid, unwinsome, and patient; waiting for you to die. But he has his little vanities. He is tremendously



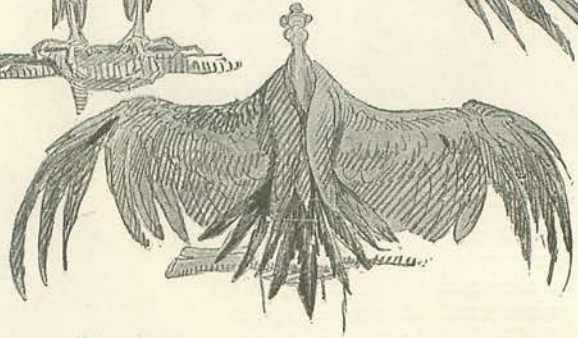
THE ANGOLA.

of the lot is the little Angola vulture, who is put among the kites; and she is bad enough: a horrible eighteenth-century painted and powdered old woman; a Pompadour of ninety. The large bearded vulture is not only an uncompanionable fellow to look at, but he doesn't behave respectably. It is not respectable

proud of his wings—and they certainly are wings to astonish. On a warm day he likes to open them for coolness, but often he makes this a mere excuse for showing off. He waits till some easily-impressed visitor comes along—not a regular frequenter.



Then he stands up and spreads his great pinions abroad, and perhaps turns about, and the visitor is duly impressed. So the vulture stands and receives the admiration, hoping the while that the visitor has heart disease, and will drop dead where he



stands. And when the visitor walks off without dying the old harpy lets his wings fall open, ready for somebody else.

