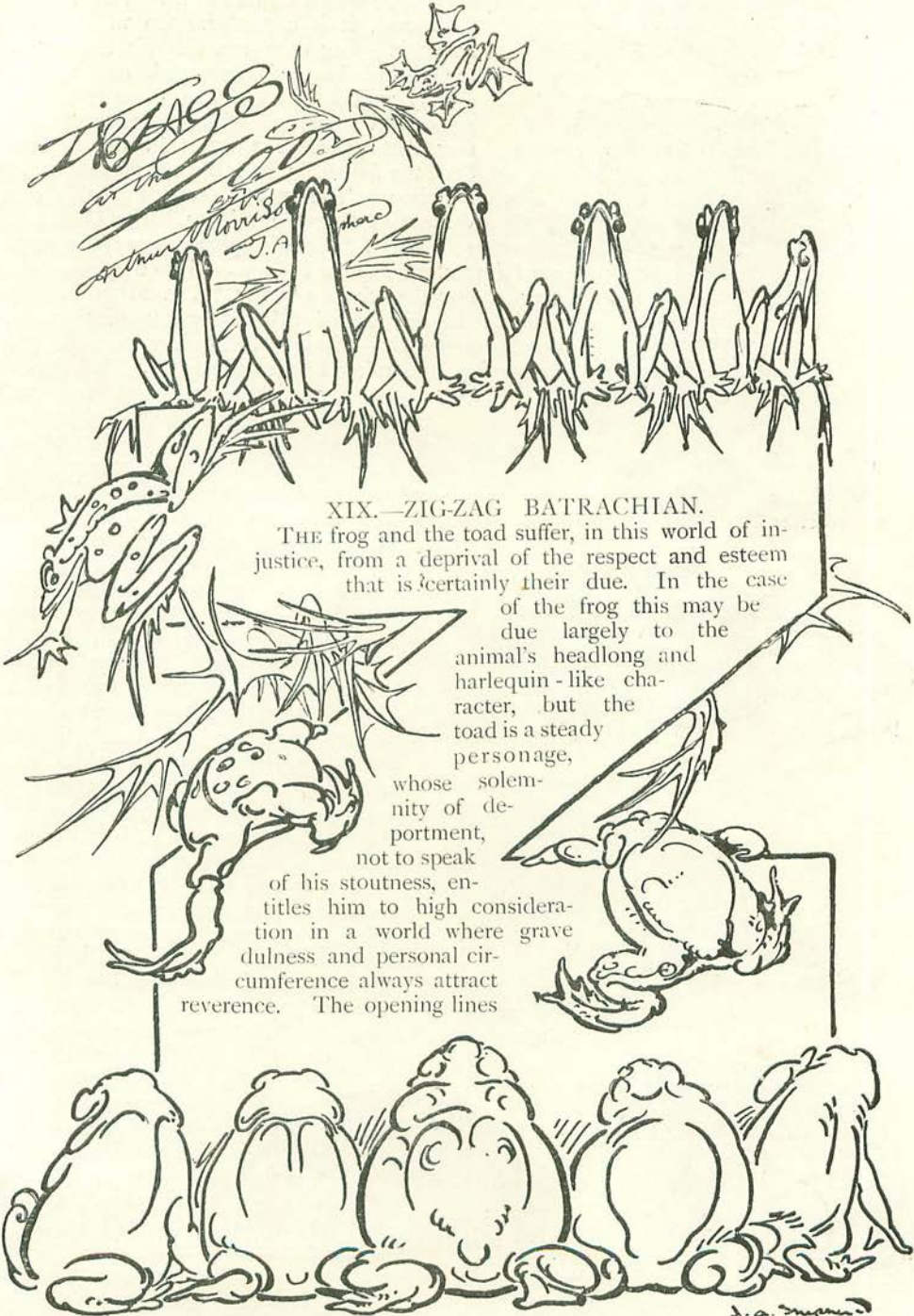


*ZIG-ZAGS*  
*Arthur Morris*  
*J.A. Mac*



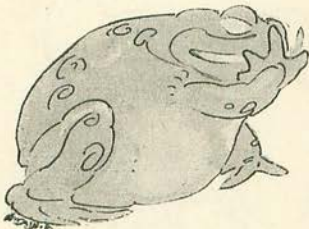
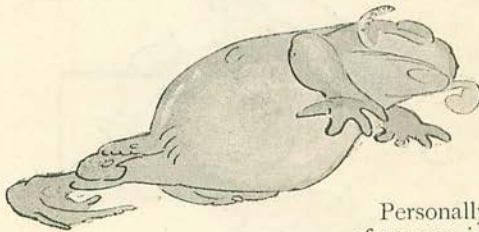
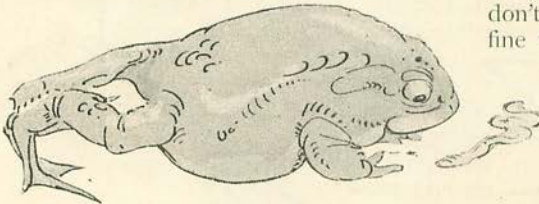
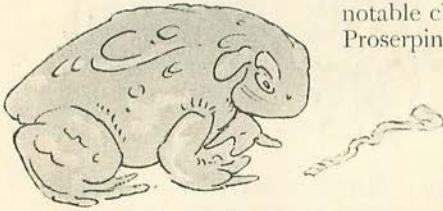
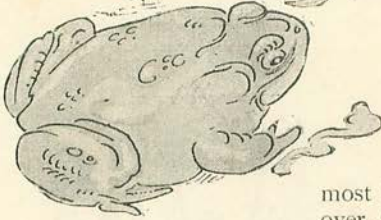
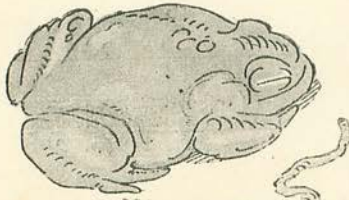
XIX.—ZIG-ZAG BATRACHIAN.

THE frog and the toad suffer, in this world of injustice, from a deprivation of the respect and esteem that is certainly their due. In the case

of the frog this may be due largely to the animal's headlong and harlequin-like character, but the toad is a steady personage,

whose solemnity of deportment, not to speak of his stoutness, entitles him to high consideration in a world where grave dulness and personal circumstance always attract reverence. The opening lines

*J.A. Mac*



A SMALL LUNCH.

of a certain famous poem have without a doubt done much to damage the dignity of the frog. "The frog he would a-wooing go" is not, perhaps, disrespectful, although flippant; but "whether his mother would let him or no" is a gross insult. Of course, it is a matter upon which no self-respecting frog ever consults his mother; but the absurd jingle is immortal, and the frog's dignity suffers by it. Then there is a certain pot-bellied smugness of appearance about the frog that provokes a smile in the irreverent. Still, the frog has received some consideration in his time. The great Homer himself did not disdain to sing the mighty battle of the frogs and mice; and Aristophanes gave the frogs a

most important chorus in one of his comedies; moreover, calling the whole comedy "The Frogs," although he had his choice of title-names among many very notable characters—Æschylus, Euripides, Bacchus, Pluto, Proserpine, and other leaders of society. Still, in every way the frog and the toad are under-esteemed—as though such a thing as a worthy family frog or an honourable toad of business were in Nature impossible. It is not as though they were useless. The frog's hind legs make an excellent dish for those who like it, as well as a joke for those who don't. Powdered toad held in the palm is a fine thing to stop the nose bleeding—or, at any rate, it was a couple of hundred years ago, according to a dear old almanac I have. On the same unimpeachable authority I may fearlessly affirm a smashed frog—smashed on the proper saint's day—in conjunction with hair taken from a ram's forehead and a nail stolen from a piebald mare's shoe, to be a certain remedy for ague, worn in a little leather bag. If it fails it will be because the moon was in the wrong quarter, or the mare was not sufficiently piebald, or the nail was not stolen with sufficient dishonesty, or some mistake of that sort.

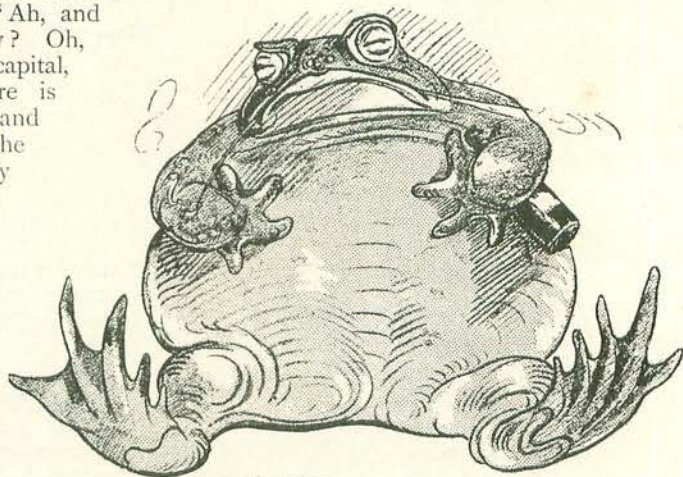
Personally, I am rather fond of frogs and toads. This, of course, in a strictly platonic sense, and entirely apart from dinner. A toad I admire even more than a frog,

because of his gentlemanly calm. He never rushes at his food ravenously, as do so many other creatures. Place a worm near him and you will see. He inspects the worm casually, first with one eye and then with

the other, as who would say: "Luncheon? Certainly. Delighted, I'm sure." Then he sits



placidly awhile, as though thinking of something else altogether. Presently he rises slightly on his feet and looks a little—very little—more attentively at the worm. “Oh, yes,” he is saying—“luncheon, of course. Whenever you like, you know.” And he becomes placid again, as though interested in the general conversation. After a little he suddenly straightens his hind legs and bends down over the worm, like a man saying, “Ah, and what have we got here now? Oh, worm—*ver au naturel*—capital, capital!” After this there is nothing to do but to eat, and this the toad does without the smallest delay. For leisurely indifference, followed by a business-like grab, nothing can beat a toad. Almost before the cover is lifted, figuratively speaking, the worm’s head and tail are wriggling, like a lively moustache, out of the sides of the toad’s mouth. The head and tail he gently pats in with his hands, and there is no longer any worm; after which the toad smiles



“THINK I COULD MANAGE THAT BEETLE, TYRRELL?”

affably and comfortably, possibly meditating a liqueur. I have an especial regard for the giant toad in one of the cases against the inner wall of the reptile-house lobby. There is a pimpliness of countenance and a comfortable capaciousness of waistcoat about him that always make me wonder what he has done with his churchwarden and pewter. He has a serene, confidential, well-old-pal-how-are-you way of regarding Tyrrell, his keeper.

Of late (for some few months, that is) the giant toad has been turning something over in his mind, as one may perceive from his cogitative demeanour. He is thinking, I am convinced, of the new Goliath Beetle. The Goliath Beetle, he is thinking, would make rather a fit supper for the Giant Toad. This because he has never seen the beetle. His mind might be set at rest by an introduction to Goliath, but the acquaintanceship would do no good to the beetle's

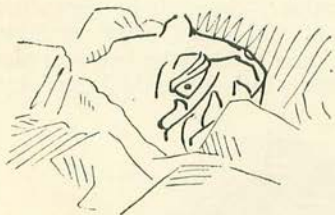


EVIL COMMUNICATIONS.

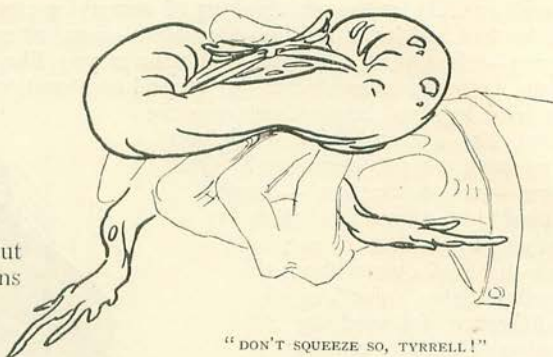
morals. At present Goliath is a most exemplary vegetarian and tea-drinker, but evil communications with that pimply, dissipated toad would wreck his principles.

Why one should speak of the Adorned Ceratophrys when the thing might just as well be called the Barking Frog, I don't know. Let us compromise and call him the Adorned C., in the manner of Mr. Wemmick. I respect the Adorned C. almost as much as if he were a toad instead of a frog, but chiefly I admire his mouth. A crocodile has a very respectable mouth—when it

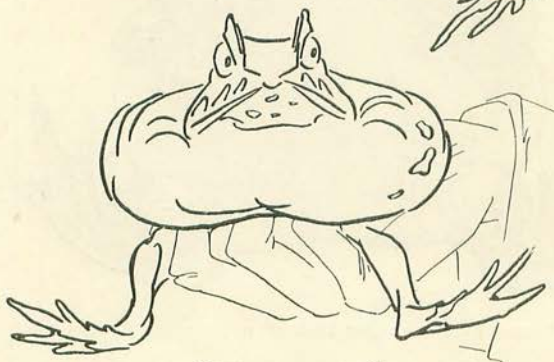




separates its jaws it opens its head. But when the Adorned C. smiles he opens



"DON'T SQUEEZE SO, TYRRELL!"

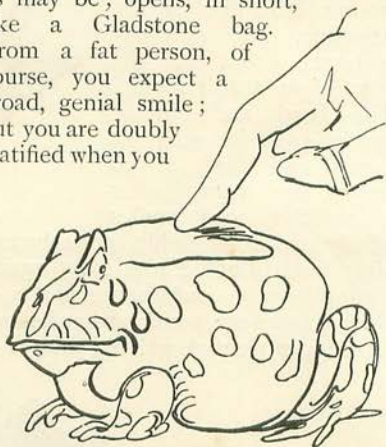


"WANT ME TO BARK?"

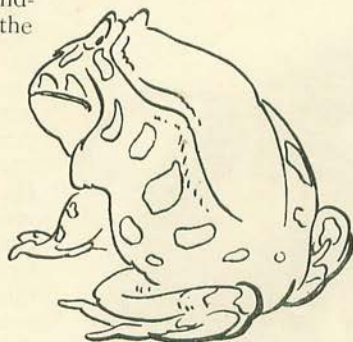
find it extending all round him. That, you feel, is indeed no end of a smile—and that is the smile of the Adorned C.

But, notwithstanding this smile, the

out his entire anatomical bag of tricks—comes as near bisecting himself indeed as may be; opens, in short, like a Gladstone bag. From a fat person, of course, you expect a broad, genial smile; but you are doubly gratified when you

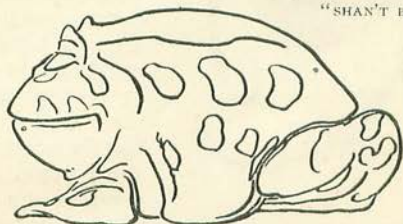


"HE CALLS THIS WINDING ME UP!"

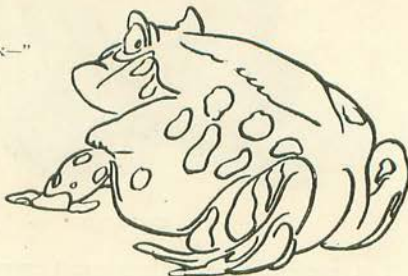


"SHAN'T BARK—"

Adorned C. is short of temper. Indeed, you may only make him bark by practising upon this fact. Tyrrell's private performance with the Adorned C. is one that irresistibly reminds the spectator of Lieutenant Cole's with his figures, and



"SO THERE!"



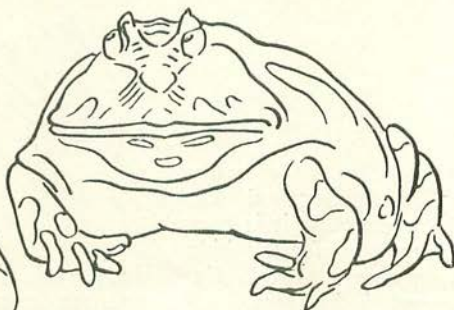
"STOW THAT, TYRRELL!"

would scarcely be improved by ventriloquism itself. The Adorned C. prefers biting to barking, and his bite is worse than his bark—bites always are, except in the proverb. This is why Tyrrell holds the Adorned C. pretty tight whenever he touches him. The one aspira-

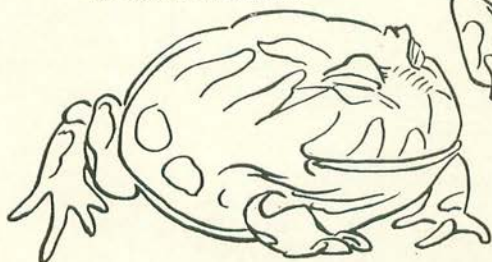


"HE'S ALWAYS DOING THAT."

tion of the Adorned C. is for a quiet life, and he defends his aspiration with bites and barks. Tyrrell touches him gently, cautiously, and repeatedly on the back until the annoyance is no longer to be tolerated, and then the Adorned C. duly barks like a



"I'LL GET SO WILD IN A MINUTE!"



"GUR—R—R—R—."

terrier. Now, the most interesting thing about the Adorned C., after his mouth,

is his bark, and why he should be reluctant to exhibit it except under pressure of irrita-



"wow, wow!"



"SNAP! WOW—WOW!"

tion—why he should hide his light under a bushel of ill-temper—I can't conceive. It is as though Patti wouldn't sing till her manager threw an egg at her, or as though Sir Frederick Leighton would only paint a picture after Mr. Whistler had broken his studio windows with a brick. Even the whistling oyster of London tradition would perform without requiring a preliminary insult or personal assault. But let us account everything good if possible; perhaps the Adorned C. only suffers from a modest dislike for vain display; although this is scarcely consistent with the internal exhibition afforded by his smile.



"WHAT, GOT TO GO BACK?"

With the distinction of residence in the main court of the reptile-house itself, as also with the knowledge of its rarity, the



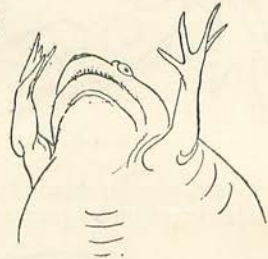
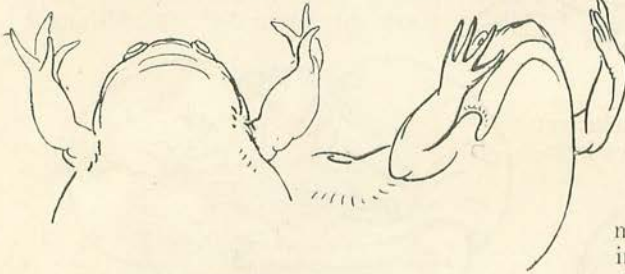
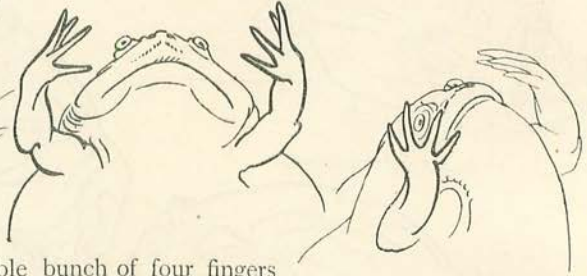
"GOOD NIGHT, TYRRELL!"



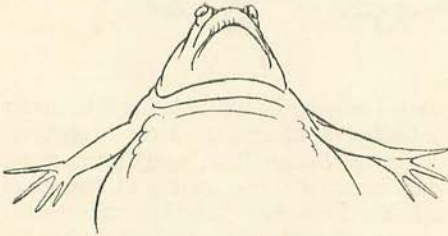
Smooth-clawed Frog sets no small value on himself. He lives in water perpetually, and is always bobbing mysteriously about in it with his four-fingered hands spread out before him. This seems to me to be nothing but a vulgar manifestation of the Smooth-clawed Frog's



self-appreciation. He is like a coster conducting a Dutch auction, except that it is himself that he puts up for the bids of admiring visitors. With his double bunch of four fingers held eagerly before him he says—or means to say—“’Ere—eight! Ain’t that cheap enough? Eight! Going at eight. Who says eight? Now then—eight; for a noble frog like



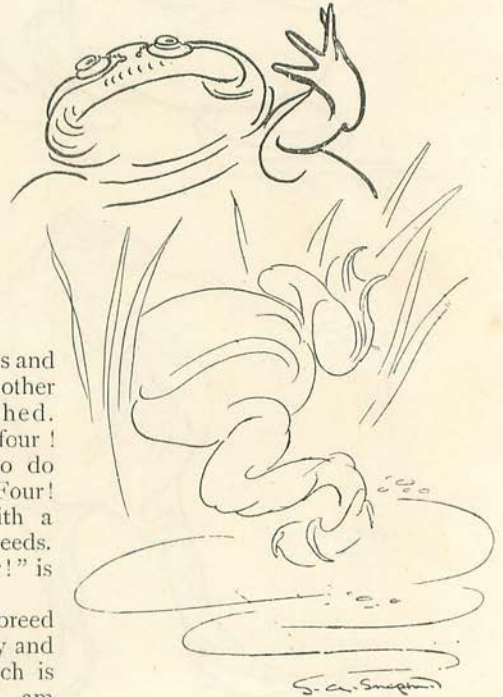
me!” Presently, he wiggles a little in the water, as though vexed at the slackness of offers: then he drops one



of the hands and leaves the other outstretched. “’Ere — four! Anythink to do business. Four!

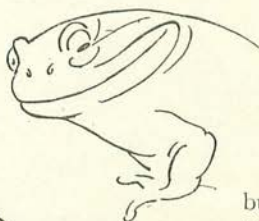
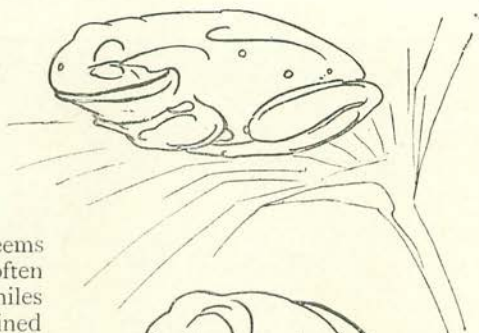
Nobody say four? Oh, blow this!” and with a jerk of one long paddle he dives among the weeds. “Them shiny-lookin’ swells ain’t got no money!” is what I am convinced he reports to his friends.

The Smooth-clawed Frog has lately begun to breed here, a thing before unknown; so that his rarity and value are in danger of depreciation. But such is his inordinate conceit of himself that I am

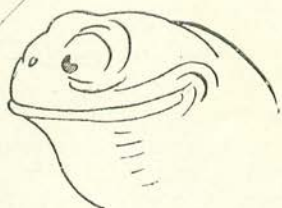


convinced he will always begin the bidding with eight.

If you rejoice in the sight of a really happy, contented frog, you should stand long before White's Green Frog, and study his smile. No other frog has a smile like this; some are wider, perhaps, but that is nothing. A frog is ordained by Nature to smile much, but the smile seems commonly one of hunger merely, though often one of stomach-ache. White's Green Frog smiles broad content and placid felicity. Maintained in comfort, with no necessity to earn his living, this is probably natural; still, the bison enjoys the same advantages, although nobody ever saw him smile;



"I AM HAPPY."



"HAPPY?"

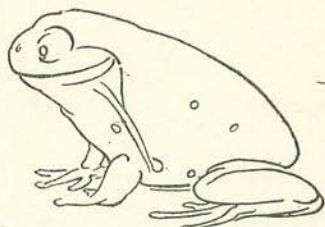


"WHY SHOULDN'T I BE HAPPY?"

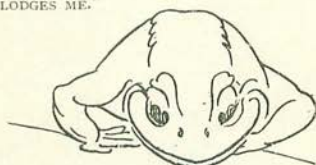


"THE SOCIETY LODGES ME."

he seems to say, "and my wants, which are few and simple, are providentially supplied. Therefore, I am Truly Happy. It is no great merit in my merely batrachian nature that I am Truly



"NO EXPENSE TO ME, YOU KNOW."

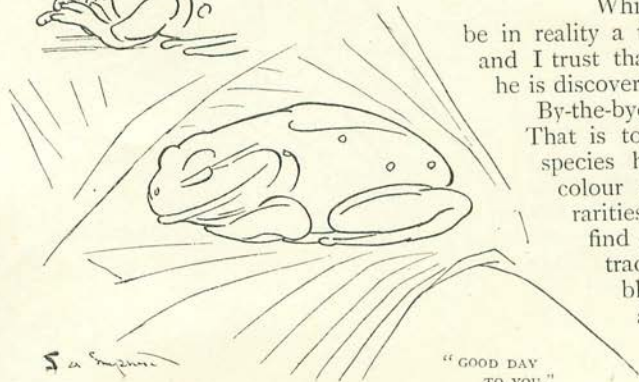


"TYRRELL FEEDS ME."



Happy; a cheerful countenance, my friends, is a duty imposed on me by an indulgent Providence." White's Green Frog may, however, be in reality a frog of excellent moral worth; and I trust that Green's White Frog, if ever he is discovered, will be a moral frog too.

By-the-bye, some green frogs are blue. That is to say, individuals of the green species have been found of the skyey colour and sold at a good price as rarities. When it was not easy to find one already blue, the prudent tradesman kept a green frog in a blue glass vase for a few weeks, and brought it out as blue as you might wish. The colour stayed long enough, as a

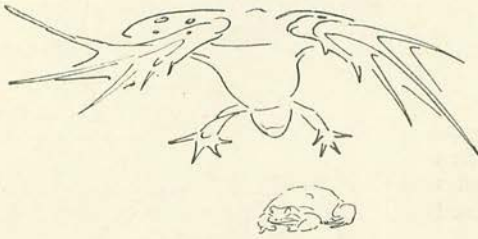


"GOOD DAY TO YOU."

S. A. Simpson



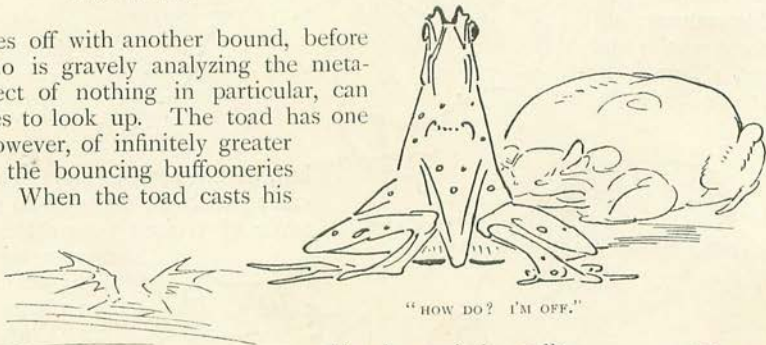
rule, to admit of sale at a decent price, but was said, the toad is distinguished by a placid calm



"HERE WE ARE!"

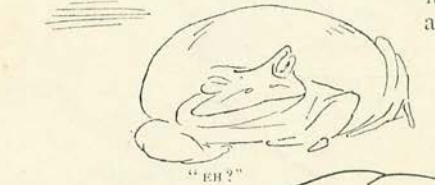
it?" and goes off with another bound, before the toad, who is gravely analyzing the metaphysical aspect of nothing in particular, can open his eyes to look up. The toad has one comic act, however, of infinitely greater humour than the bouncing buffooneries of the frog. When the toad casts his

liable to fade after. As I think I have denied to the frog; therefore it is singular that the ordinary toad's Latin name should be *Bufo vulgaris*—a name suggestive of nothing so much as a low—disgracefully low—comedian. *Bufo vulgaris* should be the name of a very inferior, rowdy clown. The frog is a much nearer approximation to this character than the toad. The frog comes headlong with a bound, a bunch of legs and arms, with his "Here we are again! Fine day to-morrow, wasn't

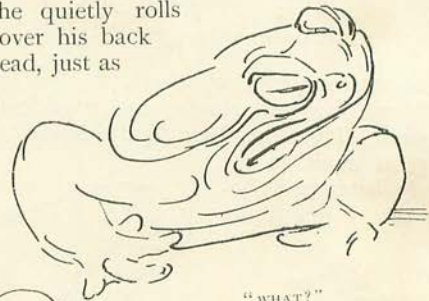


"HOW DO? I'M OFF."

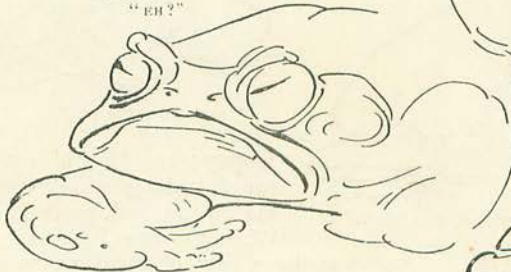
skin he quietly rolls it up over his back and head, just as



"EH?"



"WHAT?"



"WHO'S THAT?"

a man skins off a close-fitting jersey. Once having drawn it well over his nose, however, he immediately proceeds to cram it down his throat with both hands, and so it finally disappears. Now, this is a performance of genuine and grotesque humour, which it is worth keeping a toad to see.

