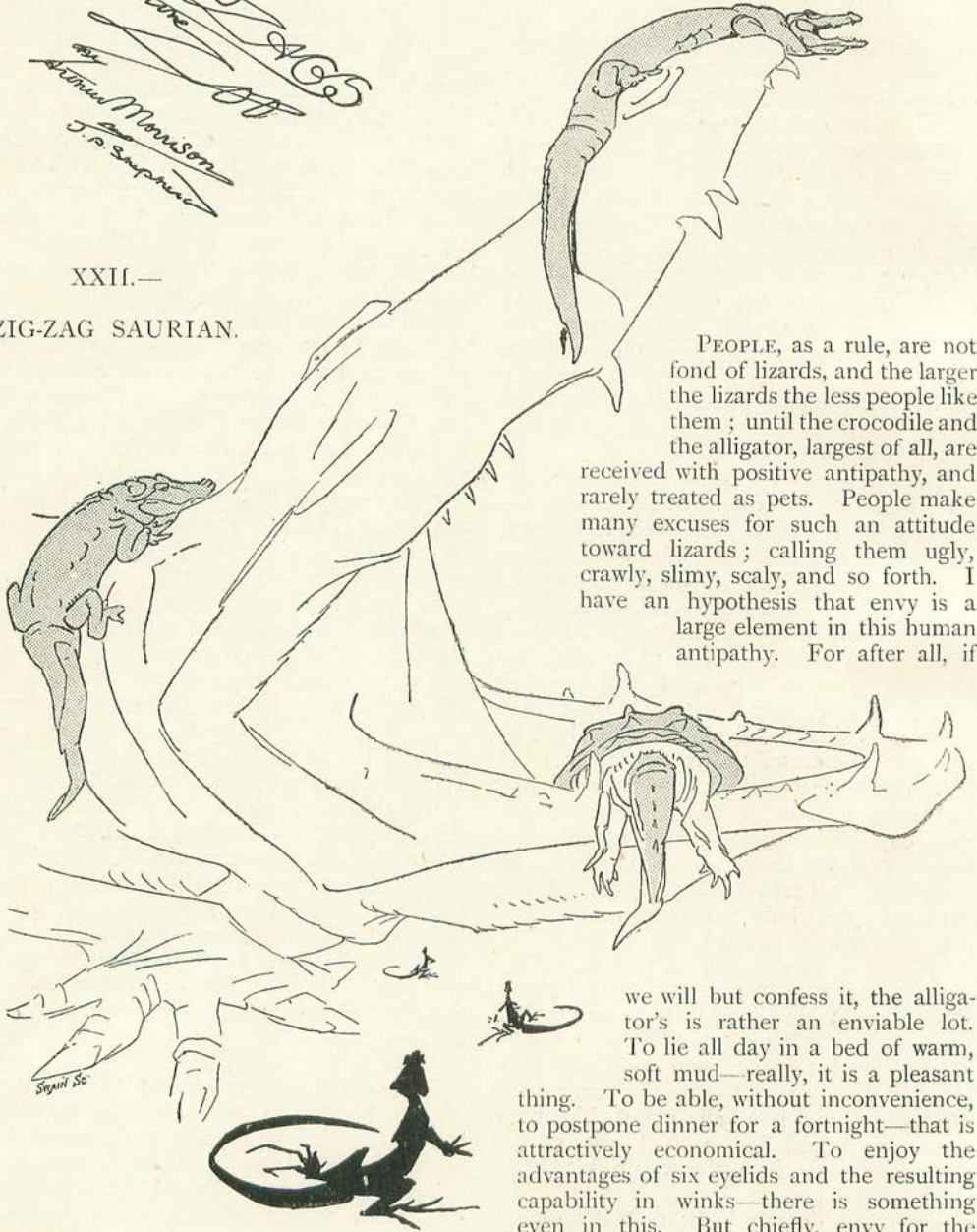


ZIG-ZAGS
by
Arthur Morrison
J. A. Simpson

XXII.—
ZIG-ZAG SAURIAN.



PEOPLE, as a rule, are not fond of lizards, and the larger the lizards the less people like them; until the crocodile and the alligator, largest of all, are received with positive antipathy, and rarely treated as pets. People make many excuses for such an attitude toward lizards; calling them ugly, crawly, slimy, scaly, and so forth. I have an hypothesis that envy is a large element in this human antipathy. For after all, if

we will but confess it, the alligator's is rather an enviable lot. To lie all day in a bed of warm, soft mud—really, it is a pleasant thing. To be able, without inconvenience, to postpone dinner for a fortnight—that is attractively economical. To enjoy the advantages of six eyelids and the resulting capability in winks—there is something even in this. But chiefly, envy for the crocodile has got into the grain of humanity by heredity from those ancients who believed

Sigain So

J. A. Simpson



THE CROCODILE-CREASE.

ability to see others is provided for by the ingenious expedient of having the membrane transparent—and there you are. What could be simpler? Anybody who can run to a transparent membrane fitting for his eyes may dodge his creditors at will, thanks to the tip of the benevolent and ingenious Plutarch.

In the reptile-house at these Gardens, the largest saurian bears the apt name of Little-'un. He is a youthful alligator, although, being rather more than

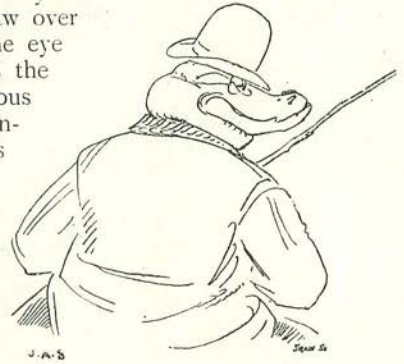
roft. 6in.

long, he has quite grown out of short frocks. Nothing infantile remains about his appearance, and he has in full development that curious cravat of fleshy folds and creases noticeable in no animals but alligators and 'bus-drivers, and among the latter species only in the stout and red-faced variety. Little-'un's name was not given him by way of a joke, but because, nine

years ago, he was only a foot long—which is little for an alligator. Little-'un has always been a good business alligator, however, and by strict industry and invincible perseverance in the pursuit of whatever might be eat-

able, has risen to an honoured and considerable eminence in the higher Zoo circles. To

observe the open countenance of Little-'un bearing down on a piece of meat that ought properly to belong to some other alligator, is to get a sight of a truly original edition of "Smiles's Self-Help." Little-'un's one moral



A PASSING PLEASANTRY.



SHORT FROCKS.

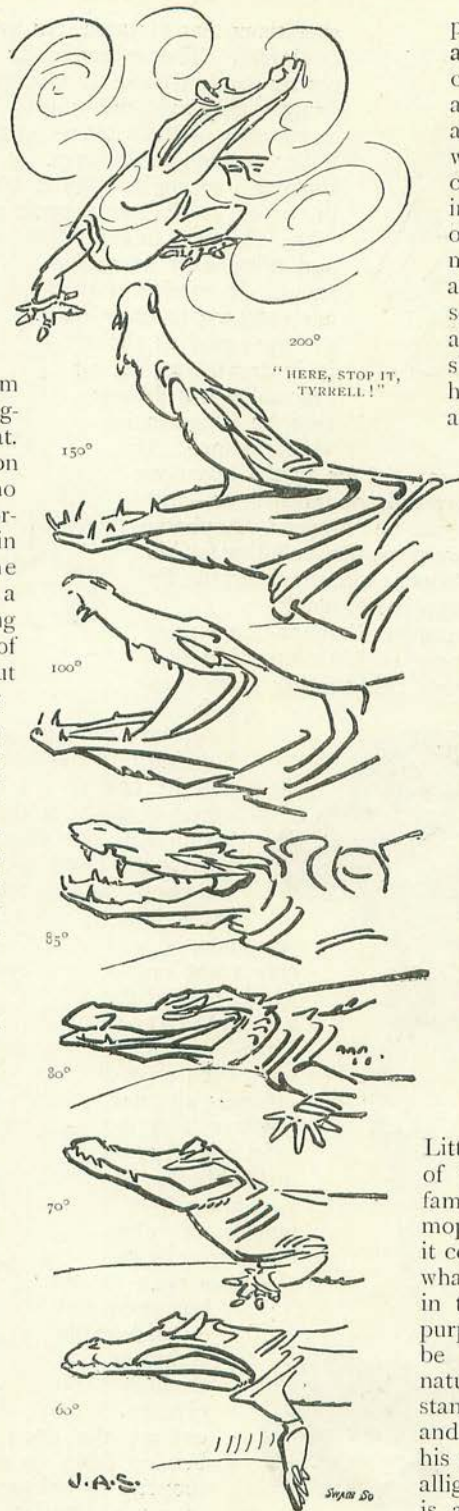


"'EAR THAT, BILL?"

principle is—the greatest good of the greatest alligator. His business maxim is—get something to eat; honestly, if there is no other way, but, anyhow, get it as large as possible, and as often as you can. He would, without the least bashfulness, proceed to eat his friends in the same tank if Tyrrell (the keeper, whom you know already) neglected the commissariat. Indeed, he once began on one fellow-lodger, with no other excuse than opportunity. Feeding was in progress, and, in the scramble and confusion, a smallish crocodile, lunging his nose in the direction of the desired morsel, without particularly noticing where that direction led, found himself up to the eyes in Little-'un's dental establishment. Little-'un's prudent habits rendered it unlikely that he would deliberately fling away anything that Providence had actually thrust into his mouth, even if it were his own grandfather; and only a vigorous application of Tyrrell's pole saved the crocodile from making a meal in a sense he didn't originally intend.

Eighty-five degrees is the temperature prescribed for the water here, and every crocodile is a thermometer unto himself, soon showing signs, notwithstanding his thick hide, of any variation in the rate of his gentle stewing—Little-'un being as sensitive as any, in spite of his assiduous attention to business.

With Tyrrell, by the way, Little-'un is com-



THE CROCODILE THERMOMETER

paratively affable, for an alligator. Tyrrell climbs calmly into the basin, among its inmates, to swill and mop it out at the weekly cleaning, herding crocodiles and alligators into a corner by the flourish of a mop, in a manner more than disrespectful—almost insulting. There is some mysterious influence about that mop. Why should alligators shut their heads and stand meekly aside at its potent waggle?

I would never venture up the Nile without Tyrrell's mop. With one wave of that mystic sceptre I would assume immediate sovereignty over all the crocodiles in

Africa, and drive them into corners. There is no withstanding that mop. If it will intimidate crocodiles, plainly it would be successful with leopards, cobras, lions, and tigers. If I could borrow it I would even try it on the beadle at the Bank of England, and if I could wave *him* aside with it, I should know that thenceforth the world was at my feet; and I'm afraid Tyrrell wouldn't get his mop back.

But I was speaking of Little-'un: his affability; and of Tyrrell: his irreverent familiarity. When Tyrrell mops out the basin, he finds it convenient to leave somewhat under a foot of water in the bottom for cleaning purposes, and as this would be damp (as is water's nature) to tread in, he calmly stands on Little-'un's back and proceeds placidly with his mopping. To wave an alligator aside with a mop is an insult altogether, but to stand on his back for the

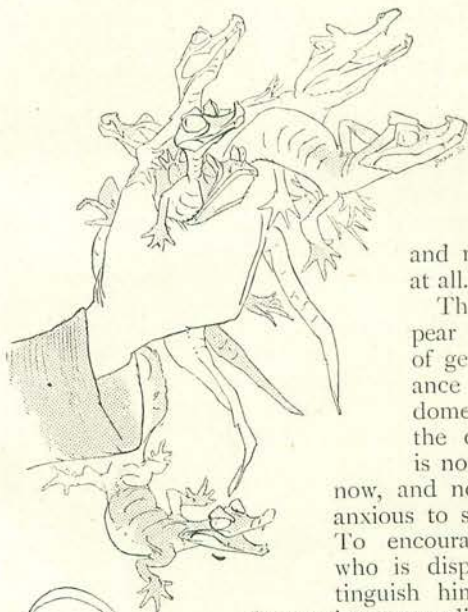


AT NURSE.

be pardoned some impatience in growing; if he is to be ten feet and a half long at nine years of age, there is a deal of lee-way to make up. Most creatures would be discouraged at being born only to a measurement in inches,

sake of dry shoes is an outrage unutterable. Little-un seems a very appropriate name as it stands, but if ever a time should arrive when it must be changed, I think, with every respect and honour to the departed statesman, I should suggest John Bright. "Mr. Speaker," said an honourable member, who spoke before he thought, but whose name I have forgotten, "Mr. Speaker, the right honourable gentleman" (Mr. Bright) "accuses me of making allegations. Why, sir, the right honourable gentleman is the greatest alligator in this House!" Which is precisely what Little-un is now.

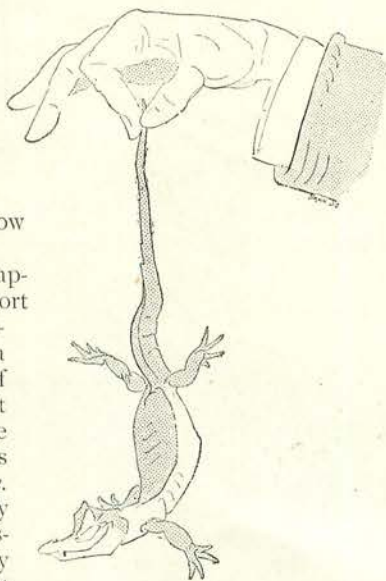
Round at the back, in his private domains, Tyrrell keeps a crocodile and alligator nursery. It is a metal box fixed against a wall and holding about a gallon. Here are all the infants, eight inches to a foot long, squirming, wriggling, and struggling, with a lively activity foreign to the nature of the full-grown alligator. Tyrrell will plunge his hand into the struggling mass and produce a handful for your inspection. They are charming little pets and as ready to bite as if they were twenty feet long. An alligator may be ten feet and a half long at nine years of age, there is a deal of lee-way to make up. Most creatures would be discouraged at being born only to a measurement in inches,



and refuse to grow at all.

There would appear to be a sort of general reluctance to make a domestic pet of the crocodile; it is not fashionable now, and nobody seems anxious to set the *mode*. To encourage anybody who is disposed to distinguish himself, I may

observe that a crocodile is cheapest when young. This is doubly fortunate, because for a less sum you have a longer run for your money—the last expression not being intended in any uncomfortable sense. I believe the usual price of young crocodiles and alligators, up to a certain size, is a guinea a linear foot; at any rate, I know you could buy them at that rate of my old friend Mr. Jamrach, and I have no doubt that the Zoological Society may be able, from time to time, to spare a foot or two of

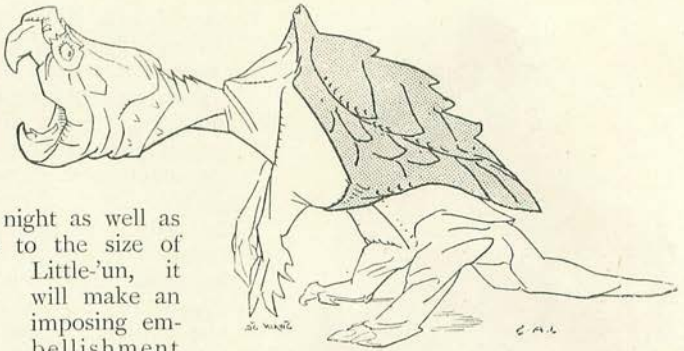


A FINE BABY.



"BITE? NO."

alligator at the price. If you buy a foot—or a yard, as the case may be (the case, of course, will be a little longer, but that is unworthy trifling)—you must be careful to keep it in a warm place, in water at the right temperature, at night as well as



WAITING FOR A BITE.

to the size of Little'un, it will make an imposing embellishment for your entrance-hall,

and useful to receive subscription-collectors. And to take them inside.

It is a bad thing to generalize in a world containing China. China upsets everything. If you venture to put a date to the invention of gunpowder, somebody is sure to remind you to except China; the same with printing and everything else. There is nothing China hasn't got or hasn't had. So that naturally, after America has many years flaunted and gloried in the exclusive possession of the broad-nosed alligator as distinguished from the sharp-snouted crocodile, China, in the old familiar aggravating way, bobs up serenely with *her* alligators—perfectly authentic and genuine, and here some of them are, in the small basin. There's no getting ahead of China.



J.A.S.

SWAN Co

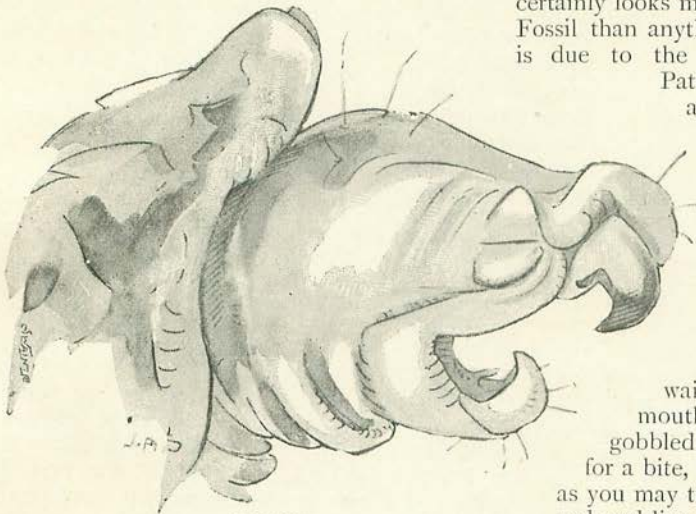
"WELL, OF ALL THE——"

the donkeys. Let him do all this, and then confront him with the Snapper. He will be beaten. "Well, of all the——"

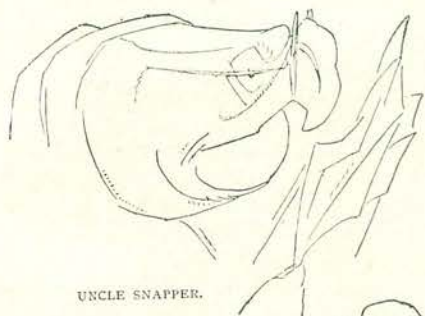
He will probably refuse to believe the thing alive, and it certainly looks more like a fine old Paleozoic Fossil than anything else imaginable. This is due to the operation of Misdirected Patience—a virtue so noticeable as to demand capital letters.

For the Snapper has been in this not very large tank for ten years, and has not yet become convinced that there are no fish in it. Wherefore he laboriously and patiently fishes without a moment's cessation. Fishing, with him, means

waiting immovably with open mouth for a fish to come and be gobbled. He has waited ten years for a bite, but that is nothing unusual, as you may try for yourself, if you buy a rod and line. It is calculated, I believe,



FOSSILIZED.



UNCLE SNAPPER.

that a hundred years more in his present attitude will be sufficient to fossilize him, when, no doubt, he will be passed on to the Geological Society. He has never yet found the need for an individual name; but I am thinking of suggesting a suitable combination—I think it should be Job Walton.

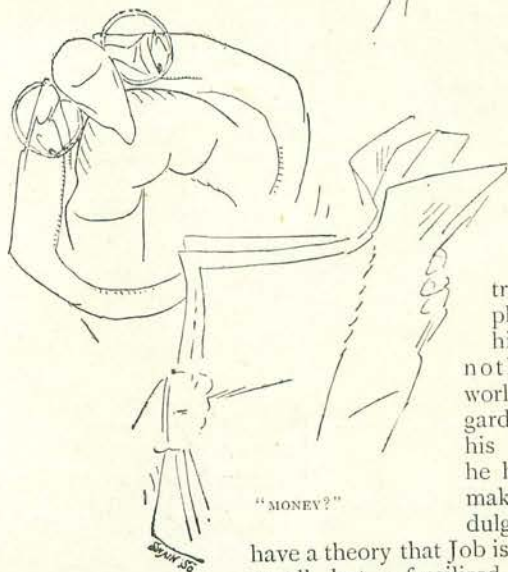
Job is not an emotional person. He never exhibits enthusiasm, even for fishing. I shouldn't myself, after ten years' waiting for a bite. There he floats, with all the mental activity of an ordinary brick, while visitors come and go, nations are convulsed, elections, boat-races are decided, and green weed grows all over his back, but he doesn't care. "A rolling stone gathers no moss" is a capital proverb for the guidance of people who care for moss as a personal adornment. Job avoids all rolling, in common with other forms of movement, and is lavishly rewarded with moss of the greenest, on back, legs, toes, and tail. Beyond his patience (a negative sort of virtue, after all), Job Walton has no par-



"EH?"



"WHAT?"



"MONEY?"

ticular personal characteristic that I can discover, except extreme niggardliness plain and patent in his face. He has

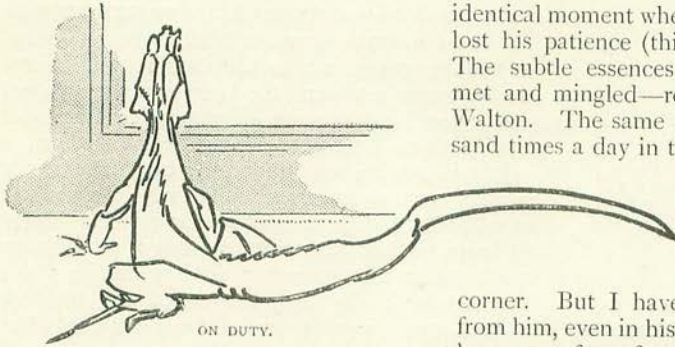
nothing in the world to be niggardly with, except his moss, but if he had, he would make a very indulgent uncle. I

have a theory that Job is not an animal at all, but a fossilized concretion of the twin virtues (or what you like to call them), patience and stinginess; a sort of petrified fungus, produced by the chemical action consequent on the mingling of the two qualities. Probably some very shocking old miser (perhaps it was Scrooge himself) lost all his stinginess at once, just at the



"NOT ANOTHER HALFPENNY."

J. A. S. 1892



ON DUTY.

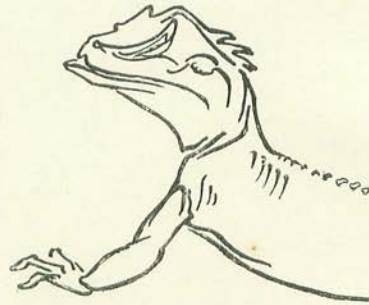
identical moment when some long-suffering person lost his patience (this was, probably, an angler). The subtle essences comprising these qualities met and mingled—result, a fungus growth, Job Walton. The same sort of thing occurs a thousand times a day in the case of toadstools.

I am really friendly with only one of the smaller lizards here—and he is a large one; the big monitor at the

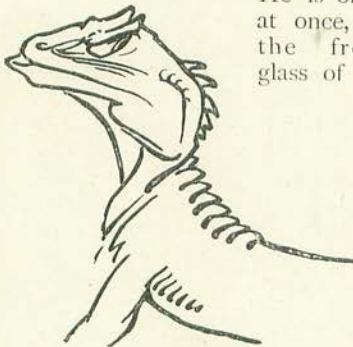
corner. But I have never been able to learn from him, even in his most confidential moments, how many feet of tongue he really has. It is a round, whip-lash sort of tongue, like the ant-eater's, and I have a private superstition in both cases that there actually is no other end to that tongue. The monitor is fond of rats, but the rats are not at all partial to his society.

Lesueur's Water Lizard is a curious specimen. He has not been here long, but has already assumed, on his own nomination, a position of great responsibility and importance. He is Inspector of Visitors. He won't have questionable characters in the reptile-house. When not actively inspecting, he is watching for his victims. He observes a visitor approaching.

He is on guard at once, by the front glass of the



"PAID YOUR SHILLING?"

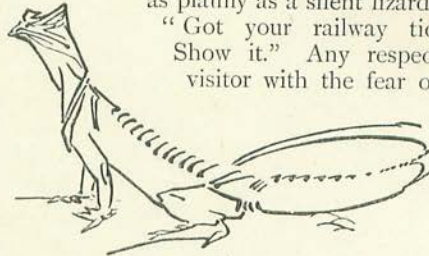


"TICKET?"

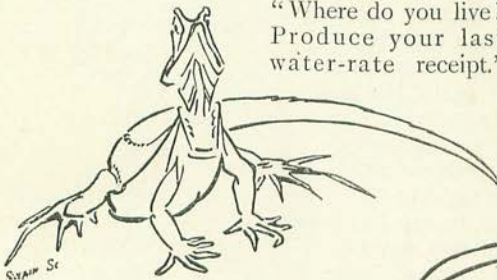
law before his eyes will comply at once. "Where do you live? Produce your last water-rate receipt."

case. His aspect is official and stern, his manner abrupt and peremptory; he is not a lizard to be trifled with. "Paid your shilling?" he demands, as plainly as a silent lizard may.

"Got your railway ticket? Show it." Any respectable visitor with the fear of the



"VACCINATED?"



"?—?—?"

He looks you up and down suspiciously. "Been vaccinated lately? Date? All right. Pass along." And he swings abruptly round to watch for somebody else.

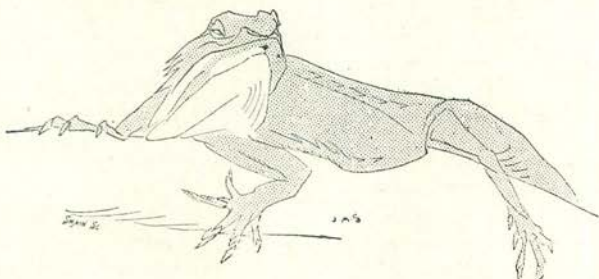


ALL'S WELL.

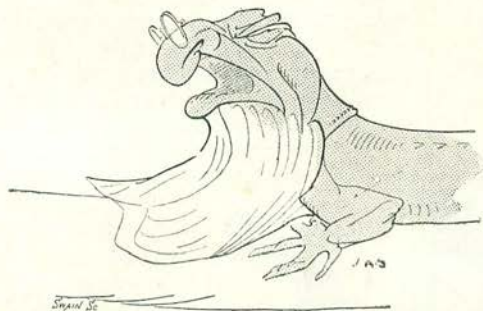


"MINE!"

ship. "Mine," he intimates, "mine, every one of them; and you keep your hands off them, unless you're ready to do business." He would pronounce it



"MINE, I TELL YOU!"



"YESH, MINE, MY TEAR."

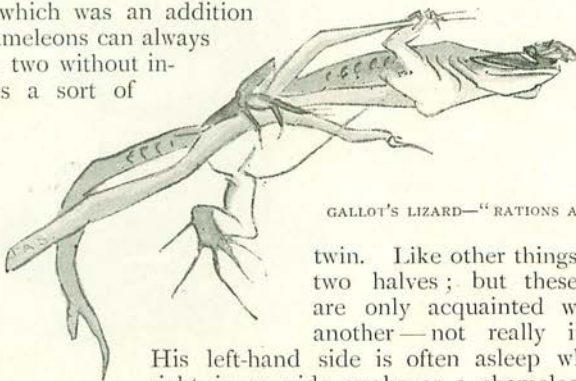
creature alive. If there were a race between a chameleon and a pump, it would be safest to back the pump. An active little Gallot's lizard was placed here lately, with a pair of chameleons, but the contrast was so disgraceful to the chameleons that he was removed, and made to chum with a Gecko, a few cases off. He absorbed all the rations, too, which was an addition of injury to insult, although chameleons can always put off dinner for a month or two without inconvenience. A chameleon is a sort of

"pishnesh" if mere gesture-talk admitted of it. A little irritation goes a long way with the Jew lizard. His beard stands out tremendously, he swells to a rib-threatening degree, and stands at bay with open mouth, ready to smite the Philistines hip and thigh and spoil the Egyptians of their finger-tips—let them but come near enough. But he is a very respectable lizard, not so lazy as most, and pleasant to the touch.

He is not so lazy, for instance, as the chameleon. The chameleon is the slowest



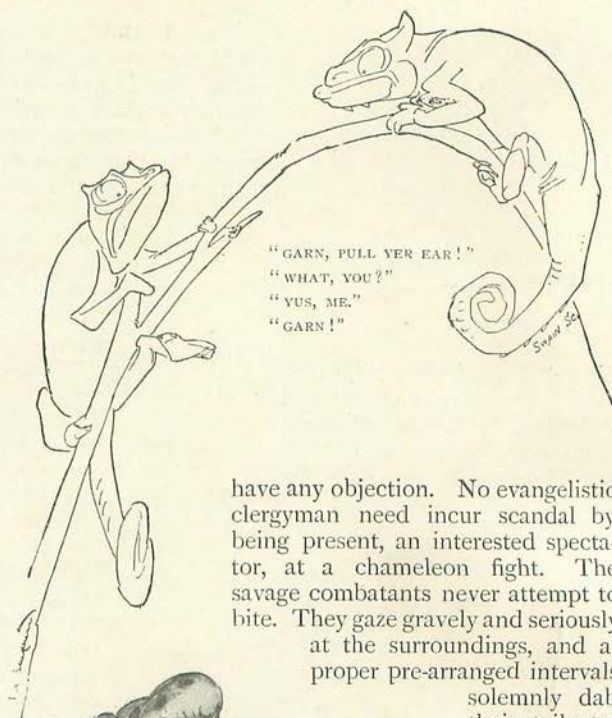
CATCH WHICH?



GALLOT'S LIZARD—"RATIONS AHoy!"

twin. Like other things, he has two halves; but these halves are only acquainted with one another—not really intimate. His left-hand side is often asleep while the right is as wide awake as a chameleon's side can be. His eyes, also, are quite independent of one another, and roll in opposite directions as often as not, so that he would be inconvenient as a Speaker. Everybody would catch his eye at once and there would be quarrels—possibly even fights—a thing impossible in the House of Commons as it is. A chameleon never walks, he proceeds in

this way: After a long and careful deliberation, extending over half an hour or so, he proceeds to lift one foot. You may not be able to see it moving, but it is moving all the same, like the hand of a watch. Take a look round the Gardens and come back, when, if you have not been too hurried in your inspection, you may see the lifted foot in mid-air, and the chameleon probably asleep. He usually takes a nap after any unusual exertion. In an hour or two he will wake up, and proceed to plant that foot, with proper deliberation, before him. Then there will be another nap and a good think, after which the tail will begin to unwind from the branch it clings to. This process, persistently persevered in for many days, will carry the intrepid gymnast quite a number of inches. But a journey of this sort is an enterprise rarely ventured on. Chameleons prefer the less exciting sport of sitting face to face and daring each other to mortal combat, secure in the assurance that neither will think of moving toward the other. They *have* been known to fight. A chameleon fight is an amusement whereunto neither the Peace Society nor the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals need



"GARN, PULL YER EAR!"
 "WHAT, YOU?"
 "YUS, ME."
 "GARN!"

have any objection. No evangelistic clergyman need incur scandal by being present, an interested spectator, at a chameleon fight. The savage combatants never attempt to bite. They gaze gravely and seriously at the surroundings, and at proper pre-arranged intervals

solemnly dab their tails together—not hard, nor with any particular feeling beyond a desire to conduct the rite with proper

formality and decorum. It is the most harmless and dignified scuffle in the animal creation.



"THE OLD FOLKS AT HOME."