

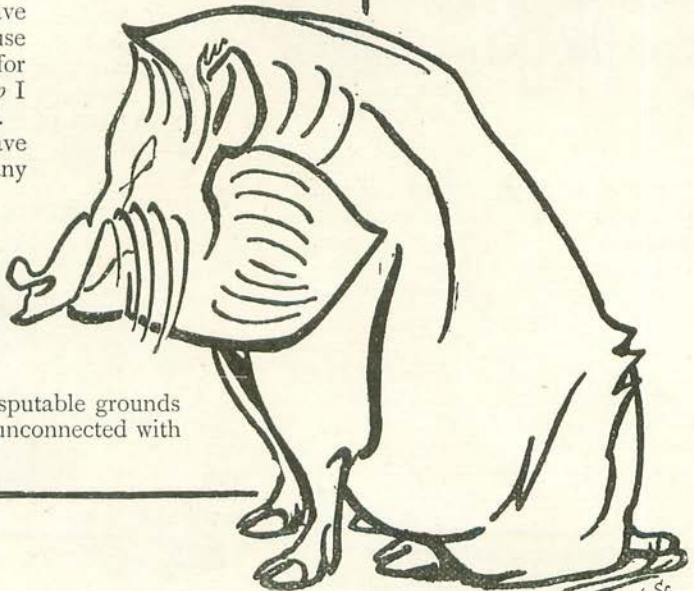
ZIGZAGS  
AT THE  
ZOO

By  
Arthur Morrison & S. A. Shepherd

XXIV.—ZIG-ZAG RODOPORCINE.

"RODOPORCINE" is a portmanteau-word. It is not a regular scientific term, although, as I may claim with modest pride (being its inventor), it is almost ugly enough to be one. I have invented it largely for the benefit of the building (it is only one building) which the Zoological Society numbers six and seven, and divides arbitrarily into "The Swine House" and "The Rodents' House"; but chiefly I have invented it because I wanted a title for this Zig-zag. *Roão* I gnaw, *porcus* a pig.

The Society have old authority for any amount of confusion between the swine and the rodents. The guinea-pig has long ago established its right to its name, on the indisputable grounds of being entirely unconnected with



J.A.S

SWAIN SC

Guinea, and not a pig, but a rodent. The capybara is also called a water-pig (even in its Greek name) in virtue, doubtless, of being a rodent. "Porcupine" means a thorny pig; the name being again found convenient for a rodent, and enunciated with peculiar emphasis by the wag who wrote:—

Each hair will stand on end upon thy wig,  
Like quills upon the frightful porcupig.

Then, by way of pleasant variation, the hedgehog derives its title from the fact of being neither a hog nor a rodent, but only a prickly kind of mole. So that confusion among pigs and rodents is an ancient, time-honoured, and respectable state of affairs, only feebly deferred to by the Zoological Society in placing the two side by side. Let us consider them, therefore, in a proper derangement and with a due regard to confusion.

The thoughtless world is disrespectful to the pig. It even uses its name as a term of reproach. Nobody



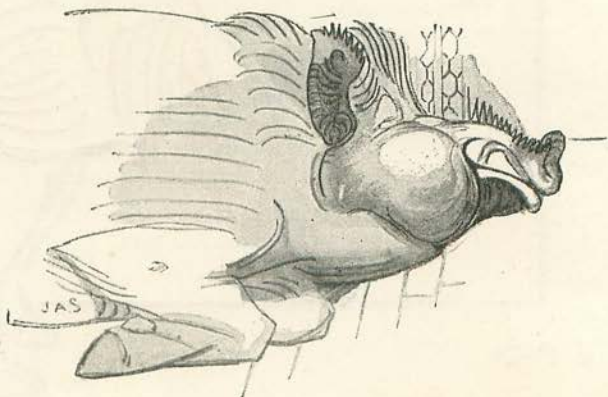
BOHEMIAN.



WELL GROOMED.

likes to be called a pig, and yet if some were to accept the epithet with a good grace, and conscientiously act up to the character, there would be a deal of improvement in their manners. Proverbs abuse and slight the pig. "Pigs may whistle, but they have an ill mouth for it," says one; "Drunk as David's sow," says another; "What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?" asks a third, totally ignoring the existence of such products as bacon, lard, bristles, and saddle-leather. But then proverbs are always perpetrating injustices somewhere, until abuse from a proverb has become a sort of testimonial to the worth of anything—animal, vegetable, or mineral. The pig eats all it can get, certainly,

but that is only a manifestation of what we are apt to call, in ourselves, prudence and business acumen. Once thoroughly fed it regards the world with serene apathy, but that is merely broadmindedness and toleration. The nearest relatives here to the familiar porker of our native agricultural show are the wild swine—European and Asiatic—well set-up creatures, of form and manner not to be considered with disrespect, and carrying with them no more of traditional piggishness than a certain easy Bohemianism of manner and irregularity of bristle,



SERENE APATHY.

It is plain to see that whatever may be found of ill account in the pig is due to the contaminating influence of man. A wiry, well-groomed wild pig is a decent citizen of the animal community, unpleasantly ready with his tusks, of course, but clearly dignified and with intelligence. To me the wart-hog always seems the precise militarist among pigs. His neat, well-fitting feet, his closely-clad legs, and his high carriage of head are alone enough, to say nothing of his warlike tusks, and his mutton-chop side-whiskers, which indeed are only a sort of warts, but look as much like the real thing as they can manage. But, for all the other qualities of the grizzled old soldier, it cannot be concealed that he has a drunken eye.

From the comparatively noble wild swine (who cannot open his mouth without an invariable appearance of being about to sneeze) man has, by long selection and careful breeding, evolved a preposterous cylinder of locomotive pork. This he calls an "improved" pig—as who should speak of improving the heavens by casting advertisements thereon from a magic-lantern. It is a quaint paradox in the pig-fancier's system that the pig with the greatest number of excellent points is, as a matter of fact, the pig whose rotundity presents no point anywhere, nor anything like a point.

There is a deal of



"IMPROVED."



MAJOR WART-HOG.

catholicity of taste in a pig. He is quite prepared to devour the whole animal and vegetable kingdom, and very little hunger would persuade him to admit the mineral kingdom, too. Almost anything will "please the pigs"—which may be the origin of the proverb, although origin-mongers say differently; and yet the pig's senses of taste and smell are particularly acute; witness his use as a beast of chase—for the truffle. He has also an acute weather-wisdom, if countrymen's weather-lore be accepted; for if pigs carry straw in their mouths it will inevitably rain. Wherefore

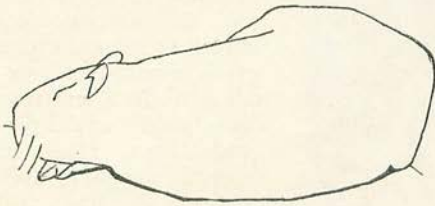
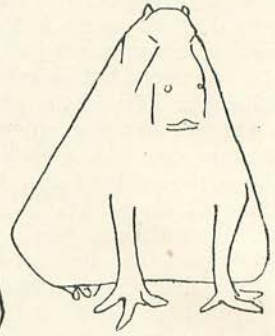
picnic parties will do well to remove all straw from the reach of pigs.

The capybara—the water-pig which is no pig—is a rudimentary sort of structure. He presents a kind of rough outline or experimental draft of a quadruped in its preliminary stages of invention. All the materials are there—more than enough, in fact—and the rough plan of their arrangement is sketched out, but there is no detail—nor, indeed, any other kind of tail—and no finish. The body (and a very liberal body, too), the hair (also liberal, and thick), the head and legs, have been put together tentatively with a shovel, and all the fine work has been omitted; indeed, the operations have never even arrived at the stage at which the tail is stuck on. The

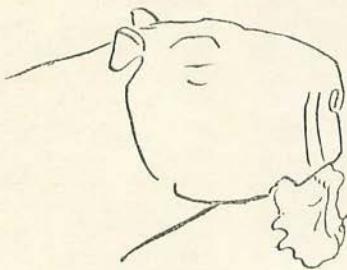


GOING TO SNEEZE.

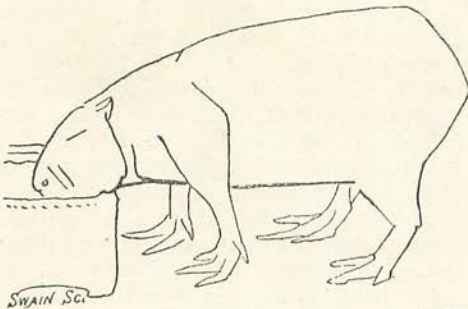
capybara's ideals, notions of life, wants and aspirations are of the rudimentary character appropriate to his figure. He has no particular objection to being tame and docile—so long as he is fed—nor any particular repugnance to being otherwise. He will eat a piece of cabbage if it is there; otherwise he gets on very well with a lump of firewood. He has a drink when the idea occurs to him, and takes it in the ordinary way as a rule, but, sometimes, under the unwonted stimulus of a brilliantly new conception, he sits in his drink as he takes it. This would appear to be his notion of humour; it is the capybara's only joke, and he never varies it in form or spirit. He is not a communicative beast, and never offers a remark to any human creature but Church, his



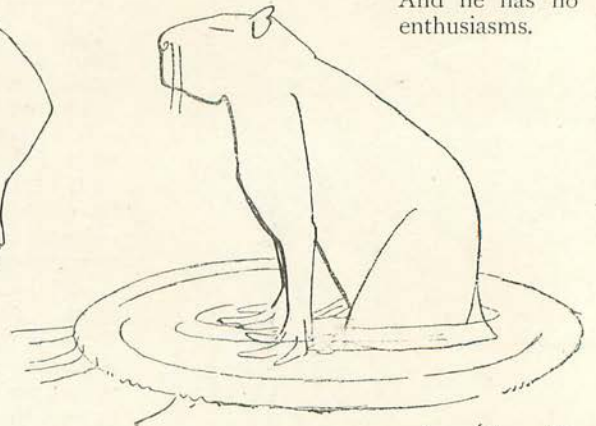
keeper, and then it is by way of extracting something to eat. The



remark is a sort of purring rattle—the rudimentary speech of an animal whose vocal organs have not been tuned. The redeeming feature in the capybara, in these days of hysteric fad, is his utter absence of "views" on any subject in the world. And he has no enthusiasms.



SWAIN SC.



J. A. Shepherd

The tapir is nothing but an ambitious pig—a pig trying to be an elephant. But the most careful cultivation has not succeeded in elongating his trunk beyond a few inches, and the biggest of the tapirs can get no nearer the stature of the elephant than a small donkey. It is probably this that makes the tapir a melancholy animal, silent and despondent. There is no gaiety in the composition of the tapir. In a fatefully unlucky moment he began to try to be an elephant, and thenceforward happiness forsook him. Like the king in the history-book, he never smiled again. His life is one cheerless, hopeless, dreary struggle to be what he can never become. Being a pig, he is obstinate, or he would have given up the attempt long ago. Elephantine ambition in particular is not born in the tapir, though ambition of a vague sort is. The young tapir always



THE GIDDY MALAYAN.

begins by trying to be a tiger or a zebra; breaking out in brilliant stripes and spots; but in due time he regularly settles down, after the manner of his kind, to achieve rank as an elephant. He is a melancholy example of discontent in humble circumstances.

Still, there is a deal of human nature in the tapir. Plainly it is largely Hebrew human nature, notwithstanding his porcine connections. The ordinary tapir is a grave, respectable, and judicious Israelitish financier, prudent and careful; but the Malayan tapir here is a giddy young person who makes the



PRUDENT FINANCE.

money fly. See his short white covert coat, with the little black bob-tail visible below it, and note his vacant eye. How badly he wants a crook-handled stick and a high collar! But you may despise the tapir, his restless ambition, and his immature trunk as you please—all your contempt will be reciprocated, and with interest. He is almost the only animal here who knows that sightseers don't usually carry about with them his particular sort of food, and he is, therefore, loftily indifferent to the tenderest blandishments. He despises you for having neither trunk nor tusks; in his matured philosophy, only an elephant is admirable; as a baby, he admires the zebra and tries to be one of them. And so he



RECIPROCAL CONTEMPT.

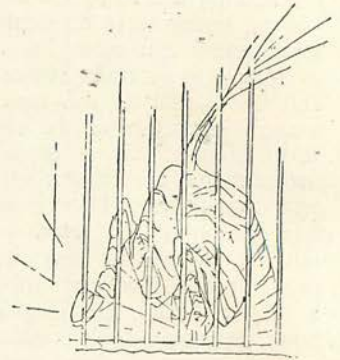


THE DOCILE FORE.

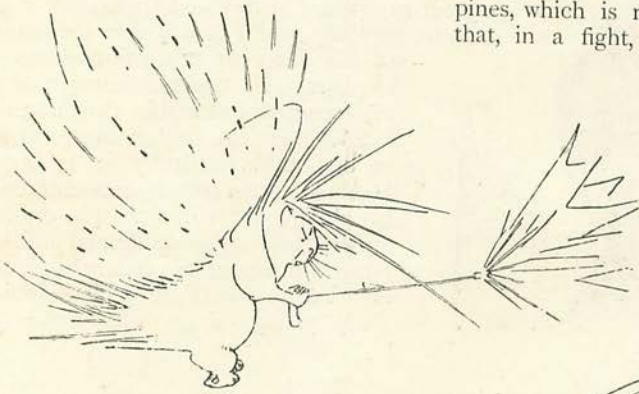
lives here, in house number sixty, equidistant between the zebras and the elephants, and as likely to become one as the other. Though he could ensure his juvenile stripes being fast colours (which he cannot), the tapir would fail as a zebra in the hinder end. The docility of the zebra's head he might easily attain to—indeed, he has it now—but the inconsistent friskiness of his heels would be beyond him.

There are a good many fine points about the porcupine. Church, the keeper, once got half-a-dozen of them in his calf, and went to bed for a week to celebrate the occasion.

The porcupine is one of those animals that look pleasantest from the front. There his bristles all lie back smoothly from his forehead, giving him an aspect as aesthetically and Wildely tame as may be. But behind—well, you get a view of all his fine points. A little irritation—a very little—brings up his fine points in a spiky array, as though he were caught from behind in a gale of wind. There are no Irish porcupines, which is remarkable when you consider that, in a fight, the porcupine invariably advances backward, most valorously retreating to the front in pursuit of the enemy to which he turns his back, and pressing forward courageously to



THE FRISKY HIND.

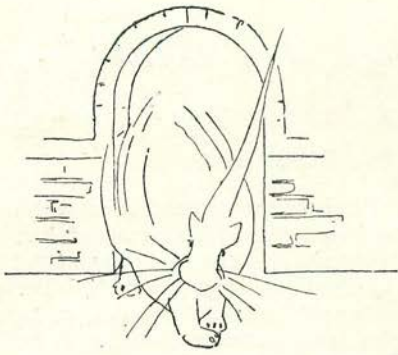


A GALE.

the rear. That is to say, in a manner less mixed, that the porcupine always attacks an enemy by springing backward at him, with spines extended. He has a tremendous set of teeth, like chisels, but these he never uses except to chew up timber with. He will never fight with his teeth, being apprehensive of a punch on the nose, where he is tender. But in his advance to the rear he is formidable, and wonderfully quick. I have already mentioned Church's experience. The night is the time of the porcupines' greatest activity, and then they are apt to fight, springing backward at one another,

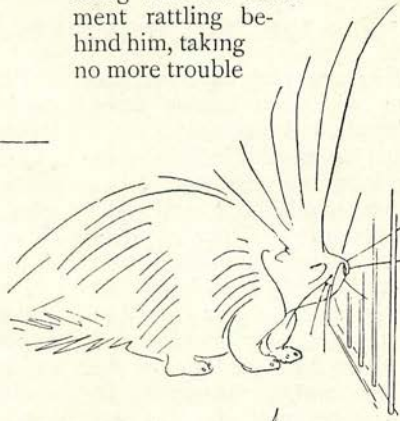


WILDELY TAME



losing quills and tearing out specimen lumps of anatomy at a terrific rate. In the daytime the porcupine is not an active creature. He drags himself clumsily along with his armament rattling behind him, taking no more trouble

than to glance at Church on the chance of a donation of the adamantine biscuits and similarly inflexible food that most delights



him, and receiving disappointment or the refreshment with equal equanimity.

