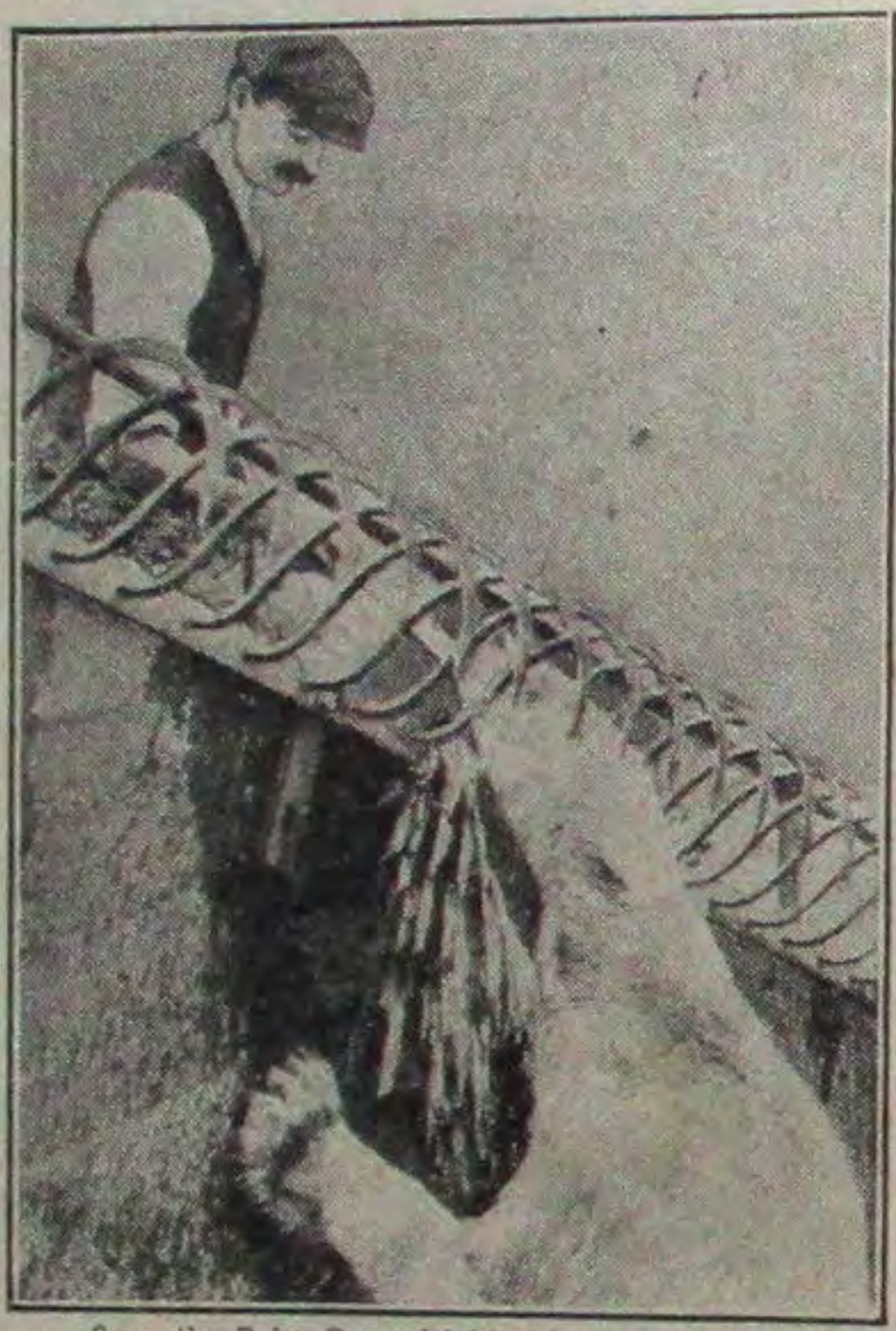
SOME ZOO STORIES



Sam, the Polar Bear, drinking from a hose-pipe

Wonderful, True Tales of Animal Heroes, Bullies, Villains and Tricksters

By LESLIE G. MAINLAND

Illustrated by drawings and photographs reproduced by permisson of "Daily Mail."

To really enjoy the Zoo to the utmost you want to know something about the *characters* of these interesting prisoners, so here are some stories of things I have seen and heard there during the last twenty years which will help you to know the most interesting things to look out for.

To look at old Sam, the giant polar bear, for example, you would imagine he was a plain, honest fellow. Of course, he would eat you if he could get at you, but as the bars stop *that* little game, you would not think he would bother his head much about visitors.

JUST like a great school, and just like the outside world, the Zoological Gardens has its heroes, its bad characters, its truants and escaped prisoners, its bullies, and its cunning tricksters.

Some of the creatures are wise and clever, some *very* silly, some are comic, others lazy; and many seem to be blessed with more commonsense than half the people who go there.

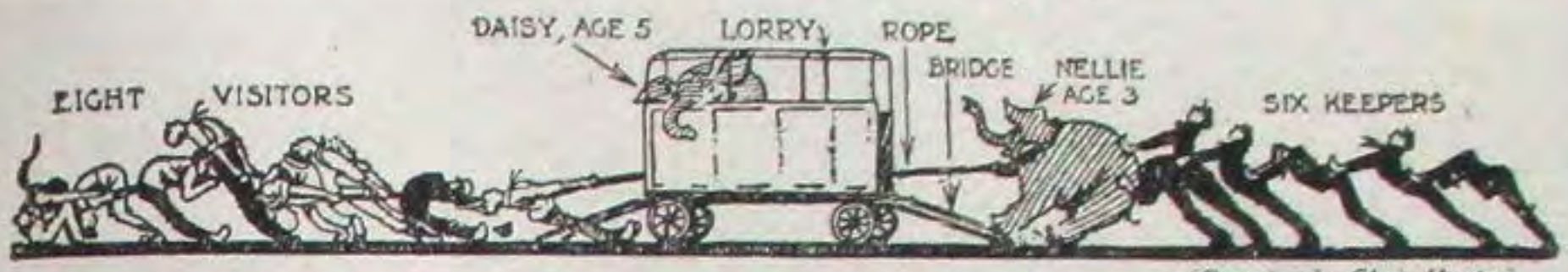
As a matter of fact, Sam has always had a great passion for collecting umbrellas and walking-sticks. He kept them at the bottom of his pond until the keeper cleaned it out, and this is how he got them by a piece of cunning trickery.

He can stand on his hind legs and stretch to a height of *eleven feet*. When no one was looking he used to take a piece of fish and perch it on a high ledge. When visitors came he

would crouch under the fish and make an awful fuss—sniffing and whining, and pretending he wanted it tremendously, and could not reach it.

Visitors could get up a path near this piece of fish, and they used to say :

Not long ago, two girl-elephants, named Daisy and Nellie, went to the Zoo as visitors while their owner was looking out for a nice school for them where they could learn to carry children, or to walk through streets of people without being frightened.



[*Drawing by Chris Heaps.*]

The six keepers pushed Nellie from behind and the eight visitors pulled from the front. (See this page)

" What a shame to tease the poor brute ! " And Sam would look so grateful, the cunning old brute. Then the old lady visitor would try and poke the fish down with her umbrella.

As soon as it was pushed inside the cage, Sam would leap, and show how far he really *could* reach. Once the umbrella was gripped in his jaws, the poor visitor had a short tug-of-war, which Sam *always* won. When the keeper got the wreck of the umbrella out of Sam's pond, the owner usually unscrewed the silver handle and went away with it ; nothing else was worth taking.

One polar bear used to have arguments with his wife, which he finished up by ducking her in the pond. When he got her in the water, he used to sit on her head till she was " good." The last time he did this he sat on her head rather too long, and his wife became so " good " that she turned into an angel—at any rate, she died.

Barbara, Sam's present wife, once had a box of oysters sent to her by a visitor who was interested in her little twin cubs. She was a very bad mother, however, and left them lying about in the cold till they died. Some animals go to the Zoo for a stay, just like a family of children going to the seaside for a holiday. They do not belong to the Zoological Gardens, but are just guests needing lodgings for the time being.

The Tiger Mosquitoes are fed on human blood ; they refuse to lay any eggs unless they get their meals directly out of a live person's veins. (See page 166)

He found a good place at which to educate them, so Daisy and Nellie were sent for. A heavy covered van with a sort of drawbridge was taken to their cage at the Zoo, and Daisy, aged five, went in like a lamb.

Everyone thought that three-year-old Nellie would be just as good, but it seems that she simply hated the idea of going to school.

Though she was no taller than a good-sized donkey, she was ten times heavier, and perhaps twenty times more obstinate.

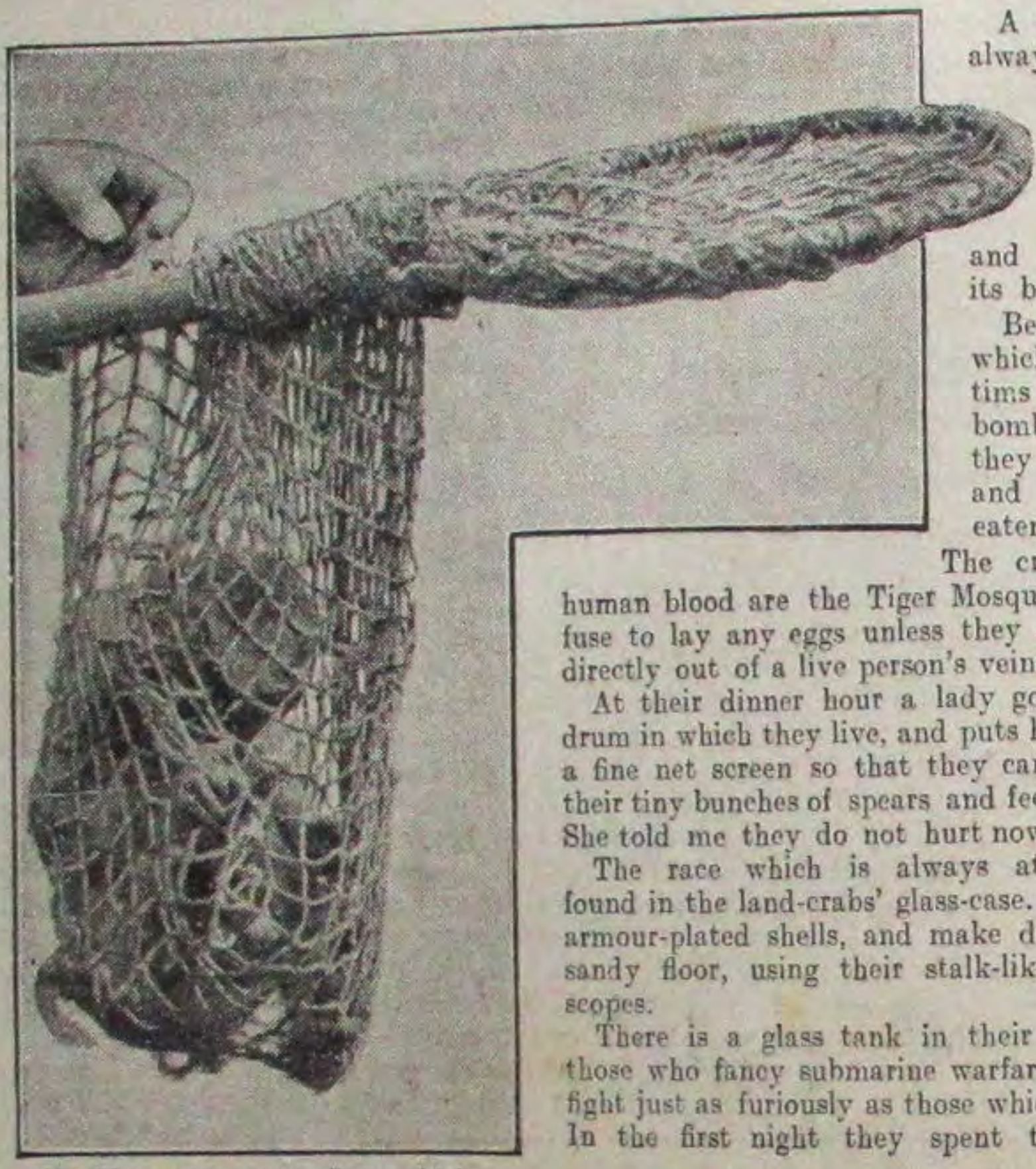
She broke a thick rope necklace which had been thrown round her neck, and squealed like a magnified pig. For half an hour she had a great game of touch, hide-and-seek, and puss-in-the-corner with six hot and tired keepers.

Then a stronger rope was slid over her ears, and the six keepers said, " Heave ! " and tried to pull her into the van. Nellie turned her back and walked off, dragging all six men after her.

So the keepers asked the visitors, who were looking on and laughing, to " *please* stop giggling and help."

Eight men visitors said " All right ! " and the rope was passed *through* the van to them. The six keepers pushed Nellie from behind and the eight visitors pulled from the front. That imp of an elephant got on the drawbridge and then sat down.

This was the moment for brains.



The Weeper was eventually caught in a big strong net on a pole, like a heavy butterfly net. (See page 168)

Everyone rushed to the drawbridge and started to lift it up. Nellie squealed for all she was worth, but up she went, and finally sprawled in the van, waving her tail in a perfect fury.

One of the most interesting spots in the Zoo is the Caird Insect House, which most people dash through because the "crawlies" that live there seem too small to be worth looking at.

There you will find:

Creatures that are fed daily on human blood.

A race that is always at war and uses dugouts, armour-plate, ambushes, submarines and periscopes in its battles.

Beasts of prey which trap live victims in pitfalls, and bombard them till they are helpless and ready to be eaten.

The creatures fed on human blood are the Tiger Mosquitoes, which refuse to lay any eggs unless they get their meals directly out of a live person's veins.

At their dinner hour a lady goes to the glass drum in which they live, and puts her arm through a fine net screen so that they can stab her with their tiny bunches of spears and feed on her blood. She told me they do not hurt now—just a tickle.

The race which is always at war will be found in the land-crabs' glass-case. They all wear armour-plated shells, and make dug-outs in their sandy floor, using their stalk-like eyes as periscopes.

There is a glass tank in their cage in which those who fancy submarine warfare can dive and fight just as furiously as those which live on land. In the first night they spent there three disappeared, for they are terrible cannibals.

The Tarantula argues to himself like this: Here is a soft, warm, pink thing, which picks me up gently and seems much too big to eat. (See opposite page)

They now appear to be pretty well matched and do not kill each other, but they have tremendous duels and wrestling matches at feeding-time.

The dangerous moment for a land-crab is when he grows too big for his shell. It splits, and he comes out all soft. He gets hard again very quickly, but woe betide him if he has to fight while he is still flabby.

Two big chaps were placed in a cage by themselves. One shed his armour during the night, and his "friend" left nothing of him by morning except the very tips of his claws.

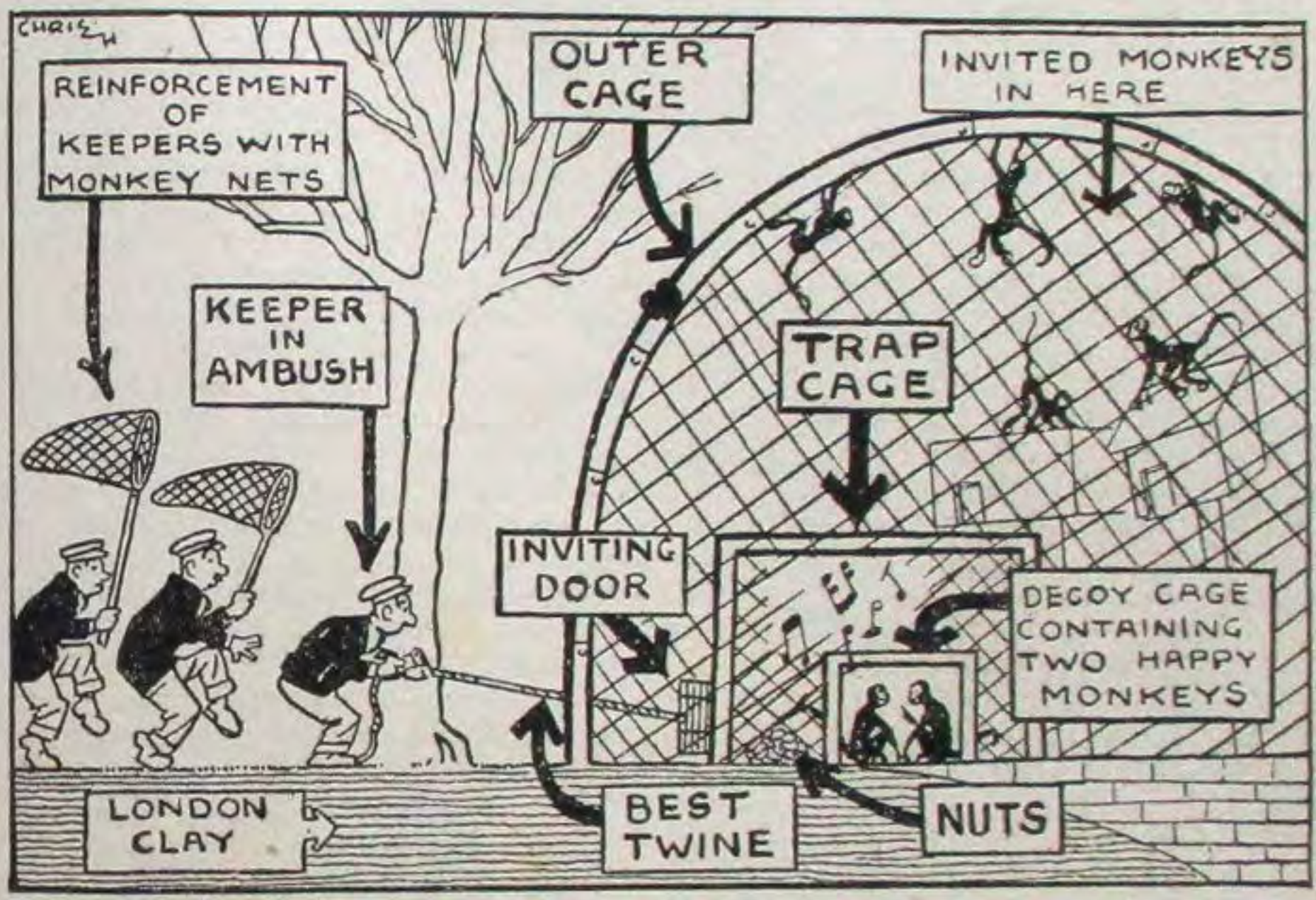
The creatures which trap victims in pitfalls are the ant-lions. They have a sandy desert to live in, and lie in wait buried at the bottom of the round pits they make for themselves. Watch them when some ants have been dropped into the desert. Round rush the ants until one of them stumbles at the edge of a pit. He falls half-way down, and then starts a scramble—all six legs working to help him escape.

Then the hidden ant-lion gets busy.

With a sort of butting movement with the head, he throws a little shower of sand at the ant. It is just like pelting a man with bricks, for the grains of sand stun and bewilder the ant and he slips a little lower down. More bombardments follow, until the poor ant falls within reach of the ant-lion's hidden jaws, and *that* is the end of the chapter.

The lady who feeds the Tiger Mosquitoes is great friends with a very wise old tarantula. The tarantula is the great hairy, poisonous, bird-eating spider, and this chap came over to England in a bunch of bananas. He gave the girls at a fruit merchant's warehouse a frightful scare, but he was caught and sent to the Zoo. The lady picks him up and lets him run over her hand and arm without a moment's hesitation. She says the tarantula argues to himself like this:

"Here is a soft, warm, pink thing which picks me up very gently and seems much too big to eat. It does not hurt me a bit, so why should I bite it and waste my good poison?"



[*Drawing by Chris Heaps.*]

A cunning trap is used when it is necessary to catch one of the monkeys in the big cage. (See page 168)

Go on past the crawlies in the Insect House, and you will find the spider monkeys, capuchins, and other delicate South American monkeys which need special "looking after."

You will find there that miserable fraud the "Weeper Capuchin." This is a long-tailed, leggy, sorrowful-looking chap with a most piteous cry like a baby that has been hurt and terrified.

Ladies see a "Weeper," and feel they *must* buy him and be kind to him. The lady that first bought the fellow now in the Zoo was very badly bitten, and got rid of the deceitful little wretch with a thankful heart. When he arrived, he looked such a pitiful bundle of misery that his keeper opened the cage to give him an extra bunch of grapes. The ungrateful little beast snatched the grapes and jumped out of the cage over the keeper's shoulder like a streak of lightning.

The hunt for him started at once, but darkness came and there was not a trace of the Weeper to be found. If he were left out in the cold all night it would mean the death of that imp of mischief, so a senior keeper kept on searching until very late.

Looking into a furnace-room, he saw a grimy "something" dart into a dark corner. It was the Weeper.

The keeper got a big strong net on a pole (like a heavy butterfly net) and started to try and catch him. The Weeper loved the new game of "Here we go round the furnace-room on a cold and frosty evening." The Weeper wept with laughter when the poor keeper climbed up to the top of a mountain of coke, made a swoop with the net—which missed—and then fell head over heels into the messy dust.

Half an hour later the keeper got him with a lucky swish of the net, grabbed him so that he could not use his needle-sharp teeth, and crammed him into a basket for the rest of the night.

In the large open-air monkey cage by the Elephant House you will see a biggish fellow who is treated with great respect by the others. He is easily the strongest of the lot, and now and then you will find him behaving like a regular bully. The curious thing is that he is *meant* to be there to bully the others.

Monkeys in captivity are a very lazy lot. They do not have to hunt for their food, they are safe from enemies (such as snakes), and there is nothing to force them to take enough exercise to keep themselves fit and alert.

They used to die too early just because they had too easy a time, for continual laziness and slackness kills—really kills—just like a disease.

Then someone thought of putting a big brutal chap in the cage to keep them "stirred up." He does not injure them badly (for the Zoo does not want a murderer for the cage "bully"), but he chases them and bangs them about if he catches them, and so keeps them in good health.

Something of the same kind is done in fishing trawlers. Turbot and choice flat-fish are sometimes brought to market alive in tanks. They very often used to die on the voyage, until the fishermen hit on the scheme of putting a dog-fish (like a small shark) in the tank with them. The dog-fish bullies the turbot, and they get so interested in keeping away from his jaws that they forget to die.

Sometimes it is necessary to catch some of the monkeys in the big open-air cage, and a very clever trap is used.

A biggish cage with a trap-door is pushed in the great enclosure, and inside is a smaller cage with a pair of well-fed, happy monkeys which are used to decoy the others. A lot of bananas, nuts, and other dainties are placed in the trap, and whenever a monkey goes in for a feed, a hidden keeper pulls a string and shuts the door.

The butterfly-net (such as was used to capture the Weeper) soon makes short work of the prisoner, and the trap is set once more.

Although the monkeys *see* what happens to those who walk into the trap, they are so piggish and inquisitive that they walk into the trap themselves soon after.

And the decoy monkeys thoroughly enjoy themselves!