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FACT AGAINST FICTION.

The Habits and Treatment of Animals Practically Considered;

HYDROPHOBIA AND DISTEMPER;

WITH SOME REMARKS ON DARWIN.

BY THE

Hon. Grantley F. Berkeley.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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FACT AGAINST FICTION.

CHAPTER I.

SHOOTING AS IT WAS, AND AS IT IS.


It will be in the memory of many of us born within the present century, that "since the days when we were young," the whole system of our sylvan sports has undergone a violent change—a "violent change, very," and one that in my opinion tends not to the real art of venery, its poetry, or pleasure.

To sum up the unsportsman-like vagary to which I allude, all—everything, the training and the beautiful and mysterious sagacity of pointer and setter—are all merged in a restless run, enormous
haste, and a furious desire to let off the barrels of three double guns as fast as they can be handed to you and you can pull the trigger, so that there may be no cessation of noise, headache, tobacco-smoke, and folly.

In the olden time, two sportsmen went out in company, attended by one keeper to carry the bag, and, perhaps, by a brace of setters, pointers, or spaniels, as the case might be.

Each sportsman carried a gun, and loaded it when discharged. There was no undue haste. If a winged bird of any sort fell, time was accorded for a minute search, and scarce anything was ever lost. Setter, pointer, or spaniel, did all that was required in retrieving stricken or running game, and a large black dog, of the Newfoundland cross, often miscalled "a retriever," was neither known nor wanted.

In the present day, from three to six or ten gunners sally forth together, no earthly thing in their heads but one of the two or three guns that are carried at their tails. They have a man or two behind them to load and hand their guns as fast as they can discharge them, and not one of these modern sportsmen ever think of picking up a dead
bird or looking for a wounded one; they sally forth to pull the trigger, and they care nothing for the interest of the manor or spoiling of the game.

As a sportsman and a lover of game, I deemed that when a breech-loader was invented and brought into use, a "loader," or a man to load for his master, when two muzzle-loaders were in hand, would be done away with; but such was the growth of the appetite for unrelenting and continuous slaughter, noise, and fire, that then three breech-loaders at a time were used, so that not half a second with a gun unloaded should be lost to the panting and headaching destroyer. In former times, a sportsman, or, perhaps, two sportsmen, in every sense of the word, went out partridge shooting, as I have previously said, with a brace of setters or pointers, attended by one keeper to carry the bag. In those days, the knowledge of the habits of the game they were after led the true sportsman to know that the cleanest and quietest stepper in high turnips, and who made the least noise, got the most shots; that is, that from his hushed method of stepping between the roots he got nearer to his birds.
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Observe the difference now! Pointers and setters are not used; but from three to four or five gunners—I can give them no more apt definition, mingled with nine, ten, or twelve beaters—tramp in a line of march across the turnip fields, and as the beaters behead the doomed turnips with clumsy large-nailed shoes, they make a noise like the roar of a surging tide or the tramp of soldiers on a march, vainly expecting that if they take short beats backwards and forwards, leaving it to the selection of the much wiser old cock partridges, without using their wings, to run and double round them, that they will thus "tramp up" every bird in a given field and get a shot at him.

They do not, however, tramp them up as wanted; they do not induce the birds to lie; for the coveys, hearing this measured tread of many feet and a noise of human voices so unusual approaching them, take to their legs before the strange advance, and then to their wings, ere their drilled assailants come within shot.

When a party of this description, so drilled and armed, commence a "tramp" against wild birds, they seem to lay aside all thoughts of the birds having any sense at all. Keepers, very likely
three or four of them, have black dogs miscalled retrievers, with *tight collars on*, to which a cord is attached, on whose unhappy ribs the keepers keep drumming with a sufficiently thick stick. Though they have the poor dear dog in a line, they perpetually bid him to be "steady"—the word "steady" to him, or "keep back," either expression being superfluous, when the dogs are led. If birds fall and the dogs are sent to pick up, all the keepers whistle, *as* a bystander might suppose, in imitation of the Italian Opera where heroes and heroines sing loudest on the eve of death, and men murder to harmonious strains, with some crotchets, of course, but without a quaver of consternation.

It is an extraordinary fact, but fact it is, that those lords of manors who are most anxious to show their friends a bloody day,—I will not call it a good day's sport, though they go to an immense expense to do so, in the preservation of game, watching it, and feeding it,—at the moment that their wished-for success arrives, kick the whole thing down by shouting to their men, and ordering halts in the line of march, giving different directions to boys with flags and followers, &c.

*The most fatal fact* that militates against part-
ridge, grouse, or snipes lying for the gun, is the sound of the human voice, or, which is nearly as bad, that wretched pea-whistle, which is always deemed an accompaniment to a dog.

If one or two footfalls are heard in turnips, or in any considerable cover, by partridges, if neither voice nor whistle is heard, the step in the turnips or cover may proceed from horse or cow, when, as the partridge cannot see above the cover, they are not directly alarmed. If, at the same time, the light, ranging, but cautious approach of well-trained dogs is heard on the far side of the game, the birds, in listening to both, get pinned between man and dog, and lie till their enemy's foot is almost on them.

In "tramping" up partridge in this line of march fashion, my late noble and gallant friend, Lord Cardigan, was peculiar, for he treated his beaters to a species of drill and words of command that pertained only to regimental manoeuvres.

"Halt! take up your dressing; bring your right shoulders forward at the word, and keep the line."

"Now—forward; no halt. Here—you; I've some orders as to the markers; come here."

Then followed a conversation between my noble
friend and a head keeper, during all which time on one occasion eleven coveys of partridges were seen collectively to rise at the further end of that turnip field, and to fly from the dreaded, and, by noise, known danger.

To me there is this disagreeable contingency appertaining to the "tramp" for partridges, unaided by the curiously graceful accompaniment of pointers or setters.

You are forced into line, and forced to keep step with your right and left-hand man. You are scolded if you get a trifle in advance, and the same if a trifle in the rear. Your heavy gun (mine are heavy) and of the eleven gauge, whichever I shoot with,—old John Manton, of Dover Street, Pope, of Newcastle, or that now unrivalled gun producer, Grant, of St. James's Street, London,—held in readiness across the chest for an unexpected or a long shot. For there is in this fashion of tramping up game no indication of the proximity of birds, and nothing to draw your attention till the rushing of wings is heard, drowned in a roar of "mark" from every open mouth in your vicinity.

At whatever distance a partridge may rise, he
is frightened with the united roars of a dozen or more of men, all of whom shout the word "mark," although they well know that there are men told off at stations in different hedges to do the very thing without noise that they so vociferously shout about. When once you enter a turnip-field, and by so doing have to some slight extent elicited the notice of game, the worst thing you can do, with a view to sport, is to stand still, and give the birds time to think and run. Then, if that injurious pause is accompanied by human voice or whistle, the game is, indeed, up, for the coveys get to their legs and then fly away.

I neither talk nor whistle to my setters when they are at work; they know their duty and I know them. To uphold my hand is caution enough, and a short, sharp "Ho!" is ample to stop one setter if the other has come to a point unseen by his ranging companion. They are perfectly steady from the chase of hare or rabbit; yet if I see and feel quite sure that a hare or rabbit is seriously stricken, I bid them to "seek dead," and I have known them foot at three parts speed a hare for half a mile and bring her back, each having a light hold of her in their so united mouths. The next
moment, if a hare or rabbit gets up under their feet, or if the same is shot at and missed, the setters drop or stop to the gun, and never attempt to chase. All this is very beautiful, and to go out by myself with these setters, or with a second gun as my companion who will attend to my suggestions, is to me the very bliss of that kind of sport.

How much more agreeable it is to have this curious canine conduct to watch, and to be warned by it of the immediate presence of game, than to go tramping and plodding on in a line of march, perhaps for a considerable distance, without a shot—reveries and speculations on matters far removed from the feathered tribes and fields rendering you unmindful of the gun, and careless of, or unprepared for, the instantaneous demand for unerring aim that a small, brown, swift-winged bird so suddenly requires.

I know not why, but through my long and constant experience, in all my endeavours, I have never been able to make the Lords and Commons, and thence the keepers, aware of the mischief occasioned by permitting the human voice or whistle to be heard by creatures thoroughly
conversant with the sound, and to whom a nearer approach is desired.

It positively enrages me to see a stupid man take a sensible dog up to the spot where a bird has fallen. There is the man, and there is the dog, on the exact spot where the fall took place; the eyes of the man ought to convince him that the bird is not there, and the nose of the dog does convince him that the bird has run away; yet for all this, the moment the dog essays to foot the lost game, the foolish biped calls him back, and puts him on the spot on which the bird would have been if he had been dead. If not there, he must have run away; yet the dog is not permitted to overtake him, but is told to seek dead, when the dog really knows that the bird is no more dead than he is. A really good retriever has, or should have, his brains as free to his own use as his nose, and both should be uninterruptedly assigned to him for the purpose he is told to effect. If you don't want him to effect it, don't tell him to try. If his mind is disconcerted by constant verbal interference, and he is not free to make use of his mysterious powers in every possible way, why, the wiser quadruped must fail, through
the folly of his biped master. It has been my lot constantly to see retrievers (so called) brought out with collars round their necks so tight, as really to interfere with respiration, more particularly when, as I have but too often observed, there is a couple of yards of cord attached to their collars, to stint their breath, to impede their feet, and to catch in every obstacle they pass over. Now if bipeds would only use their inferior brains in ascertaining that to choke a dog and half strangulate him is to diminish the free inspiration of the laden air that reaches his intelligent brain through the nasal power, and directs him where to find the bird he is in quest of, they—the bipeds—would then take care that their foolish artificial impediments should not send him, choking, half-strangled, and panting along over ground. His mouth should be shut, and his mind at command to test through his nostrils the slight taint on the ground left by a running bird, whose steps had very likely followed the line of others, or been crossed by different game, the latter a very great addition to the difficulty.

In the olden time sportsmen liked to pick up or take in hand every bird they killed, to view
its beautiful feathers, and to mark its age or condition—the latter quite necessary, as giving an insight into the amount of artificial feeding the bird had received, if any had been deemed necessary; but now men, in the most unsportsman-like manner, hasten forth to murder and to destroy all that rises or runs before them, unheeding sex, condition, or future utility in the kitchen. Smashed limbs fall in a cloud of dislodged feathers, the result of three or four barrels being zealously fired into the same bird. "Cooking distance, if you please," used to be called out if a man blew a bird to pieces; but now there is no restraint—all is to be killed anyhow, and as fast as possible, and when killed the game is flung down like a heap of rubbish. It is curious and very distasteful to me to observe this, and to see how soon keepers, as they are called, fall into the lamentable ways of their betters. At the end of a turnip-field the men are apt to assemble, each flinging from his stifling pockets the birds and their ruffled feathers unsmoothed, the limbs, set in their last agony of death, not pulled straight, but everything tossed together in sanguinary disparagement,—the birds flung thus
with idle force to the earth, as if they were so many useless stones, and without a particle of reflection, that every knock upon their bodies while warm, from being recently killed, added bruises to the wounds that had bereft them of life. Yet, so the powder and shot world wags on. This manner and method of careless slaughter, I firmly believe to be the result of the fashionable insanity of shooting pigeons, to which the attention of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is so greatly needed. Ho! I was nearly suggesting that a twin society for the protection of young females, as well as doves, was as much required in its attentions at Hurlingham; but if dowagers can't look after their own doves, why, no association ever formed will do it for them, and humanity, morality, and the slang term "slow" will have to linger on, hand in hand, till the "fast" world runs itself wildly to an end.

Arrived at my time of life, when "the heart" is no longer "hot and restless," but its pulse "subdued and slow," it often happens to me to have a bird or hare rise or get up, or run almost beneath my feet, when out with the fast man of the day, and while my cool and deliberate aim
is on it, abstaining from the trigger till the game is at sufficient distance to be simply and cleanly killed, to see that bird or hare blown by a gunner, who had no business to shoot at it, into a mass of fractured limbs, of fur or feathers, of no use to any one, but simply so exterminated to add to the bag of the day and to the headachy pleasure of letting a petard off under a gunner’s nose. Of course I exclaim, on the part of the lord of the manor, to the owner of the intruding gun, “Cooking distance, if you please,” and “what business had you to shoot that bird?”

“My dear fellow,” cries the shooter or shooters,—for probably several had lent their aid to spoil the game,—“you were so long in letting off your gun, that we thought you weren’t going to pull the trigger.”

This, when “subdued and slow,” angers me not at all. I laugh at these eager men, and pity the spoiling of the game; if their stand in a cover was near mine, I could, if I chose it, give them scarce a chance of pulling a trigger, save at a falling bird.

I see that it gives men, many younger, some as old as myself, so much pleasure to let off their gun, that I ofter abstain from an opportunity,
undoubtedly mine, of firing, to give them the coveted shot, intensely amused at times when they have missed the bird after all. They often miss, when my gun is aimed, from their own haste to be the first to fire; and it has very frequently happened, that if we have fired together, particularly in cases where my neighbour has been an uncertain shot, and that when the bird was dead, he or they have turned to ask "if I had let off my gun," I have simply shaken my head and abstained from loading, to give them, at least, all the pleasure in my power to afford, in permitting them to think they had the shot all to themselves.

One thing in these fast days strikes me as very strange, it is, that so few shooters—I can't call them sportsmen—are added to the dead-bag of the game. I constantly see men fire in covers or in hedgerows, right into spots wherein any human creature might be, but into which they had seen no human creature go; a boy or a girl, most likely both, may be there accidentally, or as "stops," or a brother gunner may have got there, or a beater wandered from the line. None of these possible considerations, however, intervene between the eager, covetous eye of the gunner and the
risen bird he sees, but on the instant bang goes the breach-loader, and the chance is run of animal or bird destruction licensed, or human accidental death. For myself, if a bird rises near me, or a hare starts up close by, I call out to friend or beater, "Where are you?" and then, even with that delay, often have more than plenty of time to fire. I do not go out simply to destroy, nor can I bear to endanger anybody who is with me, and therefore I am neither nervous nor put out in any way by the dangerous folly of others.*

While telling this, and in order to give those on whom I may lay the fair lash, a rise out of which to laugh at me, it behoves me to tell an occurrence that chanced to me at Prestwood, on the borders of Worcestershire, the residence of Mr. Foley.

We had assembled to shoot the covers there, on a beat where, for incautious shots, the ground was dangerous, inasmuch as there were hollows in the woods, with rather high ridges on either side of them. It was necessary, where these hollows were, to have a gun on each ridge, so as to command

* In this, the close of the shooting season, 1874, I have been shot twice. Once in the hand, and once about 6 inches above the knee; in the latter place two shots went to the bone, where they remain.
the rises from the lower ground. Caution, therefore, was to be more particularly used, as though the dip in the ground was considerable, cutting across as a bird flies, the gunners were not very far off each other, and therefore well within danger.

From my friends having arrived at, to me, a very complimentary opinion, that as a shot (as I trust in all other things) caution was my habitual custom, it chanced that the selection fell on me to take one hill above a hollow, while Foley, the then heir-apparent and a young man, took the other, so as to keep him, for that time at least, in an assured place of safety.

Foley, now the owner of Prestwood,—as I hope in all happiness and health, while life lasts, he ever will be,—was attended by a rammer-bearer, one of the first innovations on the original rammer borne beneath the barrels of the gun, in the shape of a very small boy.

A pheasant rose directly in front of me, and flew pretty straight away, but inclining to Foley's side the "gully," out of all possibly-to-be-computed danger in regard to where Foley stood, and in every way a safe shot for me. I killed the
pheasant with one of my eleven-gauge, old muzzle-loading John Mantons, but with the usual forcible shooting of that splendid gun. A tall-growing ash sapling intervened between me and the pheasant, but the blow by which the gun cut down the impediment occasioned extraordinary diversion in the charge, for the boy immediately at the heels of Foley tumbled over, ramrod and all, and cried out that "he was shot." From our respective positions, the exclamation of the boy was beyond my conception, yet there he lay on his back, his hand up to his face, and Foley standing over him. To add to my unspeakable mystification, the late Mr. Foley rushed up, and, staring with spectacles on nose into the boy's face, rather relieved my mind by loudly asseverating that "the boy was in a fit, and speechless, at the point of death." Of course, being totally unable to account for any mischief from my gun, I rushed into the hollow and up the other side, just in time to share in the following comedy. There stood Henry Foley, and there leaned his father, bending himself over the supposed-to-be-dying urchin, who still retained possession of the extra ramrod, but from whom not one syllable of
speech could be elicited. There was blood on the boy’s chin and lips, evidently from his mouth, while in silence he continued to set a fixed gaze on Mr. Foley’s spectacles, and to move his cheeks in strange evolutions, which Mr. Foley’s horrified glance immediately construed into convulsions.

“He’s in convulsions,” exclaimed Mr. Foley. Then, as if to arouse the boy to some more healthful effort, he cried, “Why don’t you speak?”

The boy’s cheeks rolled about more than ever, and his lips became violently agitated, his unoccupied hand arose, it met his mouth, and ’twixt his finger and thumb, and from his hitherto occupied tongue, he knipped a shot, a little flattened on its sides, and, holding it up to Mr. Foley’s face, he uttered, in considerable and in triumphant mirth, to his patron, “Here a is.” The shot cannoning off the tree, from the rest of the charge the shot had severed, cut the boy’s lip, and stuck between two of his front teeth, his prisoner. This the boy’s tongue had been busy with, and first or last he was resolved not to speak till he had dislodged and captured it.

“Well, my little man,” I said, giving him half-a-crown, “then you are not hurt?”
"Nooa," he said, grinning.

"Will you be shot again," I asked him, "if I give you another half-crown to-morrow?"

"Ees," was the response, to the great gratification of the head gamekeeper, the gigantic Beard, for whom I always entertained, and still entertain, the highest respect, as no man ever did his duty better, or proved himself a more faithful servant, to the late as well as to the present Mr. Foley.

Beard was, if I remember rightly, over six feet three in height, and not being able to swim, he used to walk, after a fashion, under water, when the river or canal was deep and narrow, and somehow or other always came up on the side he desired.

In these fast and heedless days, let me here propose a caution to my brother shooters: It is this: if they cannot afford to keep a servant of their own to load their second gun, then never borrow from your entertainer a keeper of that particular manor to load the spare gun, for instead of his attention being strictly confined to the charging and care of the second gun, his ideas will be ranging to the rise of the game, the flight of wild
fowl, or the line of beaters, and ten to one but he explodes the weapon he is supposed to have charge of in the very waistcoat, or at the waist-buttons, of the shooter for whom he is loading.

It is strange, but it has actually come within my notice, that at the present day, not only unpractised shooters, but mere idiots, are at times sent out with shooting-parties armed with a gun.

I have known it asked of a fond mother, "What, you do not mean to say he (her son) is going out shooting with us?"

"Oh, yes; poor dear George, he is very safe, I assure you; he can't hurt himself with a breech-loader, as there is no pouring down powder and ramming it with the gun on cock; he knows how to slip it into the breech; so you need not be afraid—unless by great accident he pulled the trigger before putting the gun to his shoulder."

"Humph!" said the sportsman to himself to whom this comfortable assurance was addressed. "He won't hurt himself; that may be, but if he lets his gun look at his companion, and gets at play with the trigger, there is no saying what he might do."

The dangerous shooting-party to which I now
allude sallied forth; it was in the earliest part of October, and the beat was in the fields, with an occasional double hedge or spinny. The guns at one time were divided, some to walk the turnips, while two others took either side of a thick hedge. While proceeding thus, an under-keeper, who had been told off to mark, came running up to us in a state of considerable excitement. As he approached he was damned by the master of the party for quitting his post; but resolutely, terrifically breathless, he came on, and when close to his master, in enormous consternation, blurted forth, as far as I could make out, the following words,—

"Oh, Lard! oh, Lard! Measter G.'s a squatted down in t'e dike, a rived 'isself of 's duds, and 's a dressing on 'isself in a wuzzle lef."

"What?" roared all within hearing, not being able to comprehend the local language of the excited under-keeper—"What?"

The master of the party, however, knew the import of the blurted-out intelligence, and bidding us all stand still, hastened away with his informant. The fact was, that Master G. had bethought himself of the very warm day, and, desiring cooler raiment, he had undressed himself, and was endea-
vouring to construct an Adamish clothing from the leaf of the mangold-wurzel.

So blind were the parents to the idiotic peculiarities of this their only son, that they took him to the mansions of their friends, and trusted him as if he was soundly in possession of his senses, totally forgetting that while with them, or in company with any one of whom he was afraid, the weak-minded young man might only by chance conduct himself with propriety; but, of course, opportunities arose when for a short time he became free of all surveillance, and on one occasion I saw him drive, or, at least, I saw the butler whom he had driven into a state of speechless surprise, under the following circumstances.

The mansion had become vacated by the shooting-party; the lord of the house had gone away, and with a few ladies only one guest remained that day to dinner. The ladies had left the dining-room, and Master G. and this gentleman were tête-à-tête. A message having been sent in which called the gentleman for a short time to the steward's room, Master G. was left to himself in the full enjoyment of company to which, when
opportunity occurred, he was much addicted—viz., three parts of three bottles of wine—of port, of claret, and sherry. He had not been left many minutes alone when the butler chanced to go into the dining-room, and coming out, labouring under a bewildered look of amazement, was met in the passage by the gentleman who, not five minutes before, had left that apartment and the nothing-like emptied bottles.

"Would you wish any more wine, sir?" gasped the butler.

"More wine! No, there is ample on the table."

"I beg pardon, sir," rejoined the butler; "but there's none on the table now; every bottle's empty except the decanter of water."

"Empty! Why, I left three bottles nearly full with your young gentleman! Where is he?"

"Gone to the drawing-room, sir, a singing—

'The sessions at 'sizes are all a farce,
And the judge and the jury may—'

He slammed the door, and I couldn't hear what it was he told the ladies they was to do when the sessions was over. Since then there's been a deal of hustling 'twixt him and his mamma to get him upstairs to bed."
And such was the man, in these fast days, supposed to be safe to send with a large party out shooting.

When keepers are appointed by their employers to load the additional gun, when muzzle-loaders are shot with, I often have seen, and no doubt I shall still see, the loader walking along after his master with the gun held in a slanting position, and the charge being rammed vigorously down in that position, with that hateful new-fangled thing, the "loading rod"—concussion enough given to knock out the breeches, and by the slant, half the powder lost by damply sticking in the barrel, clinging to the slanting sides, and at length 'balling' beneath the ill-directed wad. The order ought to be, "stand still while you load." To stand still, in these days, or to take your time about anything, is utterly beside the go-a-head fashion of the hour: everything is at railway pace, and much, if not all, that was once in high repute is irresistibly run down.

There is now another phase of shooting which is fast going a-head of the tramping in armies through the fields, and that is, the driving of partridges as well as of grouse. This new idea is far
preferable to the last, as noise and scaring of the winged game is turned into some use, and besides this it saves fine gentlemen the trouble of walking. They can take out a garden-stool with them, and sit and smoke with their loader and their three guns resting upon the bank beside them, and if the weather should be too hot or too wet, their loader can carry an umbrella.

I prefer "the drive" infinitely to the "tramping" in a noisy line, and generally in a "drive" on the moors or fields, the space requires guns to be stationed at comfortable distance from each other, and there is no clashing of shots at the same doomed bird. The shots themselves, to some men, are much more difficult, and that, too, enhances the pleasure of the sport; and what is more, the shooters only run the risk of being shot by one man, their own loader, instead of eight or ten.*

In closing this chapter I must give my friends a caution—at least those of my friends who, like myself, can't afford to take about with them their own loader in charge of the cartridge-bag. It has,

* Alas, the accidents which have happened, and which might have been avoided, in the shooting season closing in 1874, have been of a horrifying description.
of course, fallen to my lot to have some beater or boy appointed to bear my spare cartridges over and above those I carry in a belt round my waist—a belt made for me by my haberdasher in the country, Mr. Budden, of Wimborne, on a very good plan of his own.

On returning home, I have on such occasions been astonished at the amount of shooting I seem to have had, from the diminution of ammunition, and have felt perfectly certain that I had never expended it in shots. I would, therefore, recommend all my friends situated as to followers, in the field or wood, as I am,—for I can't take my own keeper from his duty,—to have the spare cartridge pouch fitted with a lock and two keys: one key worn tied to the waistcoat button-hole, for immediate use, the other to be carried in the waistcoat-pocket in case of accident. The theft of cartridges first began among boys appointed to carry a pouch; they stole them for use on the period of the Gunpowder Plot, and for rejoicings at Christmas, or to have a lark with at other times. Upon this grew a suggestion from poaching thieves to their sons or relations, that the boys should steal the cartridges for the powder and shot they contained, as that could be
made serviceable in the old flint-lock gun or muzzle-loader of any kind.

This instigation to robbery on the part of the men to their sons and boys, is sure to increase with the increase of breech-loading guns, for at times the cartridges so stolen will have a value besides the amount of powder and shot contained in them, as old breech-loaders will be cast aside and become of common use among thieves, and cartridges and poachers may surreptitiously come together.

Grant, of St. James's Street, has made a bag for cartridges with lock and key, and to him I would refer my readers for anything of a similar kind.

The breed of partridges has of late signally failed, and failed from some acute disease; this has nothing whatever to do with mere atmospheric effects, or the weather. I speak from close practice and personal supervision. Very early in the breeding seasons, as soon as the young partridges were able to fly, when the covey rose, one, two, and three or four young birds were observed by me to drop very soon, and to be unable to fly as far as the rest of the covey. When next I saw the coveys in which this inability to continue the flight existed, these birds were missing, and
the number in the covey proportionately diminished. After some little time hatches of from eighteen to twenty young birds dwindled down to two or three, and then also I observed in very many cases but one old bird with the covey, and sometimes none.

The breeding season, or rather the dying seasons, wore on, and my keepers reported some good coveys, numerically speaking, though all pronounced them to be the worst seasons ever known. In the second week in one September I shot on my own manor; and in a field in which a covey of fourteen was reported, there they were, and at the first rise some elucidation was afforded, for in a left and right shot out of the same covey I killed two different-sized young birds. Eventually I killed three different-sized young birds, and on extending my beat I met with small coveys of young birds of different sizes, without any old birds, proving that in many cases the old birds as well as many young ones had died, and hence the packing together of the orphan birds.

In the immediate precincts of my house, in one of these seasons, I knew of nine old birds sitting on full nests of eggs, all of them hatched off splendidly
save one, who sat in a place accessible to rain, and she went off with only five. The pheasants, too, had been hatching off most successfully, yet as time went on I saw old hen pheasants with only one or two young ones, and occasionally with none. There were no young dead birds found in the cover rides, and when the earlier crops were cut, such as grass, rye, peas, &c., not the vestige of a dead bird was found, other than might have arisen from some casualty. This puzzled me in the rides and in the grass, but on arable land in a light soil, the "sexton beetle," in his black gown and red scarf, buries any comparatively small bird, hare, or rabbit, that he and his fellows cannot at once eat up, therefore no remains of small game can on such a site be found. The pheasants with me, both hand bred and wild, did well, particularly the former; but the partridges, old and young, decreased every day; and there was no help for it. As the month of September advanced, we picked up what had been fine full-grown, full-feathered young partridges, with the horseshoe on their breast, dwindled to the merest skeletons—some dead, others almost dead; and we examined them anatomically, but all in vain. Neither nostril, brain, nor crop, nor gizzard, afforded us the
slightest clue to the cause of death, and to the
day of the publication of this work, I know no
more about the cause of this ravaging disease
than the child unborn. Of this I am convinced,
that in manors where this pestilence exists, if it
still exists, there ought to be no partridge shooting
for a year. I should abstain from it at home, and
I advise all my friends to do the same, or that
best of all game will become extinct.

I am told that a similar disease has been and
still is rife in some of the moors and mountains of
Scotland, and that red and black grouse and ptarmi-
gan have been and are dying by thousands. If
this is the case, and if, according to Lord Radnor,
the "foot and mouth disease," hitherto confined to
cattle, has broken out or breaks out in our kennels
of hounds and sporting dogs, there will be an end
to the sylvan joys of what once was called Merry
England, and we shall be driven abroad to seek for
those amusements for which the United Kingdom
had been famous.
CHAPTER II.

THE RENTED MANOR.

Sporting Rights—Tenant Farmers and Rabbits—Eggs of Game Birds—Prevention of Theft—Unwise Leniency shown to Thieves —Rabbits as Food—Tenancy at Will—Gamekeepers—Cockney Orators.

Among the many perplexing occurrences of country life, there is nothing more difficult to manage with satisfaction to yourself, and with justice to all around you, than a mansion rented as tenant of the sporting rights and game as well as of the mansion, said tenant thus being the third person, and coming between the real proprietor of the soil and the farmers of the estate, and of course, by this, creating a third interest, not always contemplated by either of the two parties with whom the tenant for sport has to deal. If the tenants of the farms are really respectable and well-conditioned men, then life among them as the renter of the game is easy enough, by giving to
each man due consideration; but if a mistaken laxity in the landlord as regards his tenants had given, or, for the time, assigned to them any sort of sporting permission to course hares or to kill rabbits, then the very instant a stranger takes from their landlord those rights exclusively, and pays for them a heavy rent, war is proclaimed; and in many instances tenants, forgetfully ungrateful of the mere permission they had for some time enjoyed, do all they can to annoy the newcomer or tenant of the mansion, and to prevent their landlord from obtaining an increase to his income, perhaps really needed, by the letting of his house and his shooting, and his park and grounds.

On the other hand, if the landlord had been of the opinion of the Cobbett "gridiron," namely, that farming and the pursuits of agriculture were so interesting and agreeable in themselves "as to need no other amusement" on the acres, and if he had kept his tenants strictly to their asserted occupations, giving no leave of any kind to sport, then the third man coming in would find all smooth to his taking and to his liking, and it would be his own fault, or the fault of some very
litigious tenant, if things did not continue happily between all parties.

There has been a vast deal of nonsense talked, at farmers' clubs and meetings, about the mischief done by what is called "an over-preservation of game." Now, what is really meant by an "over-preservation of game?" It is not the mere quantity kept, but the fact that the people who make the outcry are not themselves allowed to assist in its destruction. Game, that is, pheasants, hares, and partridges, may be present and protected in the strictest manner, and yet not be in anything like such quantities as to overrun or damage the farmer's crops.* Rabbits are not game, but they should always be reserved by the landlord. No landlord with a grain of sense would preserve or encourage too many rabbits, although he would be quite right in strictly protecting from depredators such rabbits as were on his manor or lands, so as to keep off illicit company.

There is nothing which so tends to misunderstandings and ill-will as the assignment of coursing.

* The real fact is, that no proprietor can "over-preserve game," for an over-preservation would bring disease, as we all know, and the winged game would die if increased beyond the natural average.
of hares and killing of rabbits to the tenantry; such liberty is for ever attended with unsatisfactory results. A tenant himself, or his good and valuable farming men, have no time to destroy rabbits, and rabbits cannot be destroyed except in the woods; the consequence is, therefore, that they, the tenants, assign the killing of the few rabbits really within their power, in banks and hedgerows, to ratcatchers or poaching thieves, who are willing enough to accept a footing on the lands without payment, in order to have opportunities for illegal depredations, and to carry off game as well as rabbits and foxes, leaving with the farmer a few rabbits for eating by way of cloak to the mischief which they have really been doing to all parties.

I have seen a great deal of this in instances when I have been asked to re-arrange affairs, and to obviate abuses upon estates left in the possession and under the control of ladies; and in almost every instance in which farmers have been given the right to the rabbits, and where they had been exercising the right to preserve them under plea of their "destruction," I have found not only the farmer's crops suffering from
the number of rabbits he himself kept, but even his neighbours were loud in their complaints of the nuisance he, their brother-agriculturist, occasioned. To such an extent have I found rabbits preserved by tenant-farmers, when they were given the right to kill them, that in the orchards attached to the farm I have known large log piles built up on purpose for the rabbits to breed in; and upon notice of a repeal of the permission to kill rabbits, the tenant-farmer has requested me to let him keep his rabbits until the following spring, in order that he might be able to take off the crop of rabbits he had so long fostered; in fact, the head of rabbits he had been getting up for years! I have often stood on a tenant-farmer's devastated field, and wondered to myself what he would have said had his landlord's or my rabbits caused half so much destruction!

Then, again, as to the unrestricted leave to keep greyhounds and to course hares, restricted merely so far that the coursing was to be confined to the proper season, beginning in November and ending on the 1st of March. In such cases, when the hares have been so constantly disturbed as to leave their "forms" out upon the fields, I have known the
tenant-farmer seat himself at dusk under his landlord's wood, and slip his lurching greyhound as the hares cantered forth to disport themselves on the open downs or fields. Of all dogs there are none so mischievous as a greyhound at large upon a farm during the spring and summer. With a nose equal to any sort of sporting dog, and a speed beyond all other kinds, the greyhound soon learns, when left at large, to become a most crafty and efficient lurcher, killing hares and rabbits by speed, and springing on or chapping hen pheasants on their nests, as well as destroying the young birds even while they are unable to fly, and eating the unhatched eggs. All the most destructive lurchers in the possession of thieves and poachers are thoroughbred greyhounds, with their sterns cut—cut for the now obsolete design of cheating the Excise of the tax on greyhounds, by saying the dog is for sheep.

Here let me mention a most erroneous mistake which some game-preserving landlords fall into. They give the rabbits to the keepers. A keeper should look to no perquisites; his wages should be ample, for his is a hard life, if he does his duty, and he should be so well paid by his
employer as to need no additions. When the rabbits are the perquisite of the keeper, he is sure to keep as many as he can, and the tenant is certain to have the dissatisfaction of seeing damage by rabbits done to his crops, his loss giving to his landlord no pleasure whatever.

As a renter of manor and game, as it has been my fate to be for the greater portion of my life, my system is as follows: to preserve all the manorial rights exclusively as they were let to me, to guard all the rights belonging to the estates, and to give the strictest orders to my keepers, by night and day, to protect the farmers' stock, fences, roots, and crops from depredation, and to watch over the herds and flocks, cows, oxen, horses, mares and foals, sheep, and pigs, as if they were my own, and at once to report any accident to any of them to the farmer, and to render him all the assistance in their power, night and day, to remedy the evil. I remember more than one instance in which the tenant-farmer over whose land I held the exclusive rights has come to me and complained of the trespassing of the cattle from squatters on their crops by night, purposely turned in upon them by their
more needy neighbours or by tramping gipsies. In reply, I told them, "that the remedy was in their own hands, and that they could pound and charge for all cattle so at large."

Their answer has been, "That is all very well, sir—I know what the law is; but the first time I put it in force, one of my ricks was fired by an incendiary at night; and I am not going to excite the revenge of tramps or gipsies, nor that of the needy possessors of a hut-kept cow, and so to risk it again."

On all the farms over which the exclusive sporting rights are mine, my keepers are strictly charged to prevent, by poundage, the damage arising from stray cattle, and to guard the root crops from molestation. The consequence of this fair conduct is, that the gamekeepers and the tenant-farmers under me have lived happily together, and my men are regarded by them as a most efficient rural police.

As to the rabbits, each tenant-farmer is requested by me to report any spot on his holding where he thinks there are too many rabbits. The moment that report reaches me or my head keeper, my men, nets, and ferrets obey
the farmer; and if he wishes to join in the sport, and has not a gun of his own, I lend him one for that occasion, and thus all parties have ever been contented.

As respects the labourers on the farm, and the nests of pheasants and partridges, my system is this: if they find a nest, and show it to my keepers (the nest is not disturbed, if not too close upon any public footway or road), and when hatched safely off, the farm-labourer who found it receives a shilling; and if I am pleased with the general conduct of the labourers on the farm, I often make a present at Christmas to the foreman, for the benefit of all the hands employed. There is one thing, however, which my readers, if in possession of a manor, must guard against, and it is this, that, after a bird has hatched, if the shells of the eggs are left in the nest, it is possible that the eggs of some other known nest may be stolen, and the shells of the one that has been hatched put in the place of the stolen ones, so as to get another shilling. The shells should, therefore, always be destroyed by the keeper, to prevent this dishonesty.

It is also a rule with me, supposing some
man, known to be dishonest, brings me eggs or a very small leveret (both eggs and animal being useless to him for food or sale), showing thereby a desire to please me, to reward him in return to a far greater degree than any use by him of such things could have won for him; and I do this to show both rich and poor that it is my wish not to tyrannize over the said-to-be working classes (but often no workers at all), but to teach them to see (to use a homely old saying) upon which "side their bread is really buttered." By the system which I have always pursued, the very men who set themselves up against me have in the end, and, after punishment, left off their dishonest aggressions, and come to me for both advice and protection, when put upon by others, or robbed and swindled by their own associates.

I am perfectly certain that, in sundry vicinities, well known to my experience in game-preserving, but for the culpable folly of the magisterial bench at petty sessions in dealing with convictions, I could have made many an idle villain support himself, his wife, and children, by honest means and fair wages, rather than starve, as he
does, both wife and children by refusing to
labour, and by going out at night or in the day
to steal game or rabbits, or anything he can lay
his hands on, the monetary proceeds of which,
by all such thieves, being regarded, not as a fund
for the support of their families, but as pocket-
money for the man to spend in gambling or in
beer. As an instance of the culpable leniency
in magistrates, I select the following from a
vast number of similar cases:

Two notorious thieves went out, one winter
morning, at daybreak, on a maiden snowfall, to
trace hares and rabbits to their forms in the
furze and heather. Both of these men were old
offenders, and had been previously convicted in
full penalties; and one of them had treated with
contempt in a former case the last summons
served upon him, as well as the warrant issued
against him, having frightened away, so it was
said, two policemen (which I do not believe)
who came to take him, threatening to murder
them with a stone hammer. Having been thus
left at large, in defiance of summons and warrant,
for a considerable time,—but keeping out of the
way, of course,—he continued all his misdeeds
until the snowy morning came which I have previously alluded to. He then went forth with another man, who was armed with a heavy bludgeon, amounting to a small tree, and was regarded as an invincible bully by all his confrères.

Two keepers (they were mine) fell in with these villains, and took them in the act of poaching and of theft; for dead hares and rabbits are the private property of the owner of the land and manor on which they are found. The champion bully brandished his club, and threatened the brains of any man who attempted to lay hands upon him; so, thus put to his weapon, the under-keeper at once delivered a blow with his own stick, and broke the cowardly bully's head, when he immediately threw down his bludgeon, cried, and surrendered. Upon these thieves were found a net and four dead rabbits.

Summoned for this offence before the Bench that same week, these two fellows refused to appear, so of course they were convicted. In what? Why, in a moiety of the penalty, twenty shillings instead of forty, and that, too, in the face of their previous convictions, and defiance of
summons and warrants. On warrants against them being immediately issued, they ran away on the day of their conviction, Friday; they stayed away on Saturday, came back on Sunday, and on Monday paid their fines, laughing at the inadequate penalty, which they had not expected when they failed to appear, and borrowing the money to pay the fines from the receivers of stolen game, poulterers and public-house keepers, under the conditions that by their future depredations and drinking they were to pay off the score.

The purchasers of the stolen game fix their own price for each head of game, and a far higher rate of interest than usual for the money advanced, as they desire to pay themselves for the risk which they know they run of never seeing their money again.

There are a great many beer and public house keepers who receive stolen game in this way, advancing beer at an extortionate price when it is to be paid for in game; and as a country gentleman and justice of the peace, as well as a game-preserver, I have been and am cognizant of this grievous abuse; but it is most difficult to bring home conviction to the villain most deserving
of punishment, viz., the receiver. The law as it stands, in this instance, as in many others, opens a door by which the worst criminal can escape detection, crowned by the fact that the great "unpaid" upon the Bench, mostly parsons, invariably do all in their power to let off a villain with as little punishment as possible, while they, at the same time, make themselves amusingly remarkable by the funny character they get for impartiality, in committing themselves much more frequently than they commit the prisoners brought before them.

If we had "stipendiary magistrates," as they have in Ireland, the laws would be acted up to (though Ireland is no example for that) and crime of all sorts largely decreased. We see the good effect of a professional judge in the County Courts; but there again the legislators have stepped in with a mischievous infliction, called "a special jury," of five men, selected from much the same class as the thieves and poachers, save that they are "householders," and are not absolutely in rags. It is a farce for a gentleman to attempt to defend himself in some localities if charged as a "Lord of the Manor" with wrongfully seizing
engines or lurchers, illegally used by uncertificated persons for the destruction of game, for the jury care nothing for their oaths, nor for the Judge's charge; they really have made up their minds to find for the plaintiff before they go into Court.

Neither do the working classes, when addicted to theft, care anything for their oath: they will swear just what they think will save them or their friends from punishment. I have seen a villain let off by offering an *alibi*, bringing three people to swear that he was in their company throughout the entire day of the alleged depredation, and eleven miles from the spot where it was sworn to have been committed. His two companions in the attempted theft of game, shooting a partridge without a licence and out of season, were convicted in a mitigated penalty, but so inadequate was the fine, that the Excise was moved to come upon them for the cumulative penalty. When had up by the Excise, the two previously convicted thieves produced their companion, who had got off *through the "alibi, to swear that "he really had been with them on the occasion upon which all his witnesses swore he was eleven miles away, and that he could, there-
fore, prove that they did not shoot a partridge." This perjury failed; yet in this case, as in many others, perjury was allowed to go unpunished; and things have now come to such a pass, that old Mr. Weller's advice to his son Samuel to induce Mr. Pickwick to prove an "alibi," in the action of "Bardell v. Pickwick," has been adopted by every scoundrel who has become amenable to the law.

It is perfectly clear to me that punishment should not only follow close upon the heels of detected crime, but that, upon the first offence, the highest and most severe penalties should be awarded. I am not by any means sure that any good result is obtained by a light punishment for a first offence, for the punishment is often so light that it brings contempt upon the sentence, and hardens, rather than deters, a first offender. The law has very often to deal with juvenile offenders who think a gaol is a fine place, and committal thereto a feather in their caps,—making them, so to speak, as good a man as their father, or equal to their brothers, who have been, perhaps, many times under lock and key.

As we have seen that whipping deters from murder more than hanging by the neck, and
that, too, in offences directed against the life of the highest person in the realm, so a severe and degrading punishment on a first offence would greatly deter from the commission of a second, when carried out in the rural districts against the thieves of game and offenders of any description.

I have seen, in the close of the year 1869, that there have been blatant men at farmers' meetings exclaiming against game and rabbits, the latter as "useless vermin." Game and rabbits are now made to serve as food for the people; and those dupes of the legislative folly of Mr. Bright, Ogger, Dodger, Dilk and Co., would be astonished if they went into statistics, and saw the enormous amount of "food for the people" sold and given away to them from the warrens and manors, making up an immense weight of food, and obtained at a far lower price than meat sold by the butchers. I never refused rabbits to any honest man who asked for them; and at one of my residences I used to give them frequently to the coast-guard men. I had not done this very long when the men asked me to let them buy the rabbits, because, they said, although I was so kind in occasionally giving them
rabbits, they could not expect me to do so continually, therefore they hoped I would not be offended at their asking me to sell them rabbits, for, "at fourteen-pence a couple, with the skins," they could give a far better dinner of rabbits to their families than they could get for that sum as meat from any butcher.

The endeavour made at these farmers' clubs, to move the Legislature to interfere between landlord and tenant with respect to game and rabbits, is part and parcel of the old dodge put in force by Mr. Bright in his abortive attack upon the game laws, when he did all in his power to sow discord between landlord and tenant in the counties to suit his parliamentary party, and to obtain votes for those men who have now ruined Ireland. "Tenant right" must, and ever will, be based upon the spontaneous act of the tenant, that is, on his accepting terms offered to him by the proprietors of the land, without which acceptance the landlord would refuse to let his acres. The would-be tenant can refuse the proffered terms if he likes, and the landlord, unless there is a revolution in England as well as in Ireland, can offer what terms he pleases; and as Mr. Bright has always
said that "the poor man ought to be allowed to do what he likes with his own little garden plot," just so the same right to do what he likes with his larger possession, his larger garden (as much his own as the "garden plot" is the poor man's), is justly vested in the owners and lords of estates and manors.

If I had a thousand estates, I would not let one farm upon them on lease. Landed property has drawbacks enough upon it, without the owner of the property being saddled with a disagreeable tenant,—a man established close to his own door, who has, perhaps, a temper which is never satisfied except when it is in hot water. I have seen as good farming done by tenants at will as I ever saw done under a lease; and, moreover, I have known tenants at will remain on their farms as long and very frequently for a longer period than any lease would be granted. I have known the same family go on from sire to son in the same farm for more than one hundred years, without the slightest approach to ill will between them and the landlord; and I never knew so much ill will arise between landlord and tenant, and so much discomfort exist, as in cases where leases
had been granted. A tenant at will can leave a farm if he thinks his landlord is unjust or disagreeable, and the land bad; and the same alternative is also open to the landlord—he can get rid of a tenant who has rendered himself in any way objectionable. A tenant at will can receive compensation for money expended in improvements, and being liable to be turned out of his farm, he is, for that reason, if he likes his position, kept to his good behaviour.

I know an instance which occurred in the first Lord Fitzhardinge's time at Berkeley Castle, and which proves the good resulting to the tenant from the system of tenancy at will. A tenant, whose family before him had for years rented under the Castle, came to me to ask me to intercede for him, and to get his landlord, Lord Fitzhardinge, to take the right of killing rabbits away from the keepers. I have already given my opinion respecting the doubtful wisdom shown by a master in granting this perquisite to his keeper.

In this instance, the tenant of Lugg's Farm told me, "that he would not have cared for the damage done to his crops if it had been done
through pheasants or foxes, in which he knew his lordship had a personal pleasure; but to see his crops eaten down, and to see the keeper carting off the rabbits to market for his (the keeper’s) own profit, in addition to his already good wages, was more than he could endure; and if such a state of things was to go on, he must quit his farm.” I did my best to have the abuse altered, but in vain; as a good tenant, finding himself under a thus disagreeable landlord, he availed himself of his yearly tenancy, and, I am sorry to say, ceased to rent under the Castle. In this instance, then, the tenant found that being a holder at will was advantageous to him; he knew in his own mind that he intended quitting, and that he could go by giving sufficient notice whenever he pleased; he had time at his command to look for another farm, and he was not obliged to make his communication to the steward until he had secured another agricultural home. Now, if he had had his farm on lease, I care not what were the stipulations contained in that lease as to his farm and the rabbits thereon, the woods being in his landlord’s hands, and the keepers having a right to protect the grounds from illicit
depredators, he would have been without the means of redress, his homestead would have become anything but comfortable, so he was much better off by being a tenant at will.

We have now before us a pretty plain sample of what tenant-right means in Ireland. Not many years ago, in America, an idea was started, that if a tenant rented a house and land for a certain number of years, and expended toil and dollars upon them, that house and land was then to be lost to the landlord, and to become the property of the tenant. It is much the same in Ireland; agrarian murderers, abetted by a domineering priesthood, have long since driven many landowners from their estates, and thus created an absenteeism which has ruined the country; and now the idea has arisen in the naturally shrewd, but, alas! priest-muddled heads of the people, that "Ireland is for the Irish," which, being translated by those who have nothing to lose but everything to gain by savage irruption, means that the "Saxon" is to be dispossessed of his property, which he has inherited or bought, as the Irish Protestant Church has been plundered of hers, and that the farms and the large landed estates should
be parcelled off to the labourers—the original landlord sent a-begging!

Surely that is not a state of things to be desired by the great body of English, Scotch, and Irish landowners and farmers; nor ought any of them to allow themselves to be deluded by revolutionists and blatant men, such as Odger, Podger and Co., to whom any sort of political mischief is agreeable! But I am not without hope that the true yeomanry of England will still cherish and protect that wholesome feeling for their landlords, if I may so express myself, which has so long existed and kept both classes together in one common bond of obligation.

But to return to the management of an estate. When the landlord preserves the game, great care should be taken respecting the characters and habits of the men appointed as gamekeepers. A gamekeeper being more out of his master's sight and more his own master than a butler is, should, for that reason, be even more trustworthy in character than the keeper of the cellar. A master can count his bottles and keep a cellar-book, and have besides a personal knowledge of the exact quantity of wine in each bin; but he cannot count his
pheasants and hares, nor can he know what his keepers are doing both by night and day; but his butler, being always beneath his roof, can at any time be found in his pantry or in the housekeeper's room. A gamekeeper has it in his power, if he is a rogue, dishonestly to make away with his master's game; but a butler is so near his master, and his truth is so easily tested, that he cannot covertly consume the contents of many bottles without being speedily discovered, that is, if his master makes use of a little precaution. For my own part, I would discharge any keeper on the very first proof of drunkenness, and I should do the same if I ever knew him to go into a public-house for the purpose of drinking. My head keeper also would report his under-men if they transgressed in this particular. If they want beer, they can drink it at their lodges. An habitual drunkard is not fit for any place of trust and when in liquor he is very apt to create ill feeling or discontent with those farmers over whose lands he is supposed to hold supervision.

As in the course of my book, and in another chapter, I shall have to allude to gamekeepers, and the choice of keepers, as well as their respec-
tive duties, I shall, for the present, close my notice of the rented manor with the following remarks on passing circumstances of very recent occurrence.

Some blatant demagogues, at a late out-door meeting in London, stigmatized the present modified laws relating to the preservation of a proprietor's own things on his own lands as wicked and "bloody"; but these Cockney orators, I take it, knew as little about the subject on which they so foolishly descanted as they did of the lunar constellation. They threw overboard the fact as to how many thousands of the poor were maintained the year throughout on wholesome food—upon the millions of pounds of the much-abused rabbit; and they roared and screamed emphatically against the sin of retaining such expanses of heaths and moors tenantless and uncultivated, as these blatant babblers asserted, "simply for the preservation of game."

Now, I take it on myself to say, that there is not a proprietor in England who would not give any just facilities to any rash man or men who would undertake to cultivate and rent, on the most moderate terms, those portions of the estates lying idle. But corn or useful produce of any kind will
not grow on these barren lands, unless you give them, so to speak, a subsoil of golden guineas, all of which gold would vanish with the first crop cut from above it, and the application of gold must, therefore, amount to an annual outlay, which would in no way be remunerated by an annual return. We, as sportsmen, would be glad to see these useless acres, as far as game goes, in cultivation; for to the proprietors of heaths and moors, if there are no moor-game, there is no sporting enjoyment save as a snipe, a hare, or rabbit.

I should like to lay hold of one of those political bleaters, and set him down on many a heath within my knowledge, and even giving him a sum of money, with good sureties against bolting, tell him to raise crops out of white sand and shingle, with an iron pan beneath it, under which again there was any depth of sand, sparkling when dry like glass, and whiter still than the flints and sand of the superstructure. I think he would be very glad to let such sites return to the state in which they were in when he lavished on them and their proprietors the senseless verbiage of his violent invective, and return to the more lucrative culture to him, but not to the working classes generally, of
unfounded discontent and dissatisfaction towards those employers under whom they so long had had their fair share of gain. As long as there are men in this world possessed of evil tongues and no real wish to benefit their fellow-creatures, without one useful quality by which to rise to the notice of their fellow-men, such prating demagogues will, as putridity ever does from the bottom of a river, rise to the surface of the waters, after all to be looked on but as "scum."

In Scotland they very often make a great outcry against the game laws and the deer forests; but there is a fact that has come within my notice, and that is, that a deer forest in Scotland often affords more employment to the labouring classes, in the shape of gillies, than the forest would do if turned into a walk for sheep. All heathery moors and mountains will not carry sheep, but men who know nothing of what they prate about, think that corn and sheep will grow like grass on a moistened piece of flannel.

In the course of my experience from among the thousands of mortal-men-bubbles that I have seen force themselves to the surface, and seek some notice from better men than themselves, I have not
seen more than a very few continue as aqueous blisters on the political surface or become more than a transient bubble. Of these I have seen one or two make themselves so troublesome to the existing Government, that their pretended philanthropy has been utterly extinguished or bought off by the gift of place: one or two may have held their own for a time, but all very soon grew stale and unprofitable, or were bribed.

We do not meet those men on fair grounds, for having nothing to lose they cannot be assailed by loss; and besides, there is an old saying as to the consequent defilement on the touch of pitch. The very little they have is in their pocket,—they have no large estates, nor do they labour under difficulties ever attached to landed property: so, like a vernal frog who revels in weeds and mud, they can kick up as much dirt as they please, and rise to croak over the filthy confusion they themselves have created.
CHAPTER III.

FARMING AND ROTATION OF CROPS.

The Superintendent should be well acquainted with the Nature of the Soil—Difficulties in getting Remunerative Crops—Remedy for "The Fly"—Wages of Labourers—Piece-work—Employment of Boys never Profitable—Artificial Manures and Farm-yard Manure—Scientific Crotchets—Cows, their Kindly Treatment—Injurious Effect of Artificial Manures on Game—Legal Penalties against Laying Poison—New Vegetation which sprang up after the Fire at Alderney Manor—Game Preserver and Farmer.

When ladies and gentlemen have farms thrown on their own hands, and are obliged to cultivate them while in search of new tenantry, they are forced, particularly where there is a landlady only, to call in aid to direct their proceedings over the land; and, in such instances as those I now refer to, they are apt to be taken by some scientific advertisement which may catch their attention, and to call in a periodical supervisor from some distant county, not suited to the occasion nor
the soil, and by no means the master of work in hand. Soils are as varied in their exigencies as are the constitutions of men.

The requirements of soils are essentially different. What will suit one soil will not suit another; and you cannot, with any reasonable hope of success, catch from the northern counties and heavy rich loams, a visiting bailiff, or auditing steward, used to, and bred up, say, in Yorkshire, who will at once understand the poorer, light, and stony qualities of Buckinghamshire, portions of Dorsetshire, and Surrey. If I knew any one wanting a supervision over a home bailiff,—supposing the capabilities of that home bailiff were not deemed sufficient for the assumption of exclusive direction,—I should advise a county man to be called in, as the best calculated to know what would be right to do in the locality of his practical experience and exercise of his daily life.

Though the steam plough is a most useful invention when well directed and closely looked after by the owner or manager of the estate, yet, if not so looked after, and the depth of its needful action strictly enforced, it is only a
cause of considerable pecuniary loss, and also becomes an unsightly and discordant nuisance. It frightens cattle, drives away game, and at some seasons destroys the nests of partridges and pheasants, while on some soils it simply loosens the flints and immensely encourages the growth of weeds.

To send for a stranger, and to ask him what it is best to do for the good cultivation of a farm, is nonsense. There are some farms on which even the tenant of years, born and bred in the vicinity, does not know what is best to be done all over adjoining acres, or the extent to which the soil may differ within the fence of one field. There are some spots, perhaps, on that farm, where you cannot plough too lightly, for if you go an inch too deep you give to the sun the dormant seeds that have long been hidden from the light in innocuous obscurity, but, when exposed to vivifying re-action, come forth like giants refreshed, in such quantities as to choke and smother the seeds or corn but recently sown. The instance thus referred to is not the only one that exists to fetter the designs of husbandry when working by the plough.
The farmer, not aware of the danger of the deceitful nature of the acreage on which he has embarked, perhaps, his all, may think that he will plough beneath the latent wild oats, or other seedling obstacles, and, by throwing them on the surface, crush them from existence, turning up a better mould that lies beneath.

Here, again, a pan of iron or of conglomerated flint may stop him, and an obstacle is offered to his eyes which holds the water, or, by its durability and hardness, walls him up from further action, while, at the same time, it suggests to him the idea that he must break through the iron pan to attain a better drainage and a better soil.

To this end, he goes to the heavy outlay of spade husbandry and double trenching to break up the pan, and to find, what? Why, that beneath the iron or intervening pan there is no other soil—in fact, no soil of a productive nature, but simply fine pulverized sand, of no service to any one save for scouring grates. I enumerate these as facts very well known to myself, and to show how many more difficulties there are in the path
of the most industrious farmer than are dreamed of in the philosophy of casual observers. You cannot lay down a law to suit the varying soils in counties and estates; but a locally practical man is infinitely more capable than is a stranger from a distance to judge of what is necessary or most likely to benefit the land, the uncertainty of the peculiarities in which he has been conversant with all his life.

When the difficulties of producing remunerative crops are put before us,—entomological, atmospheric, and arising from a combination of both,—it is almost surprising that in some counties such a thing as a man seeking to live by farming should exist. To me it is certainly, so to speak, an occupation of great pleasure, when all goes well; but when you see your wheat or corn, of whatever description, turn from its fresh and vernal green hue, and, becoming yellow, droop stalk by stalk, and, losing its stamina, fall to the ground, having been eaten from beneath, in its germ of existence, by the "wire worm," then there is not much that is "beautiful" in thwarted husbandry, and little else than disappointment left.
Again, when the expected turnip crop shows its innumerable little green leaves above the ground, and the farmer dreams of one day folding his sheep in turnips two feet high, remarking to himself, on an afternoon, how nicely the turnips are coming up, to go to the spot the next morning, and then to see that the little green spots, that had once so rejoiced his eyes, had in a night, or not much more, totally disappeared, for they had all been devoured by "the fly."

While speaking of "the fly," I can most confidently recommend a remedy against this devastating insect, and that remedy is as follows. Over the newly-sown turnips and rape, put in with a view to "spring feed," when the seeds are just beginning to appear, let the customary roller be at work, but with this addition. Behind the roller there should be attached a flat light plank or board, protruding from behind the roller, I should say, five or six feet on either side. To this board or plank, to its full length, there should be attached a piece or pieces of old sacking or carpet joined together, in length from the plank about from three to four or five feet, and this thickly sprinkled on
its lower side with liquid gas-tar, spread on it with an old broom dipped into an iron kettle hard by. The action of the roller crushes the inequalities of the soil, and dislodges the flies, who, trying to escape to the rear, are caught beneath the tarred sacking, and, stuck by its tenacious qualities, to die from the powerful nature of the texture that holds them. The tar should be sprinkled over the sacking about every twenty minutes, or as often as the wear and tear of it requires. The very intelligent farm-servant and shepherd, whom I first saw using this simple remedy in Surrey, on the property of Lord Lovelace, assured me that it thoroughly answered the purpose to which it had been put. My brother agriculturists may have been previously aware of what to me once was certainly a novelty, but I now tell them in case it should be of service. It certainly is not a costly remedy as against "the fly," and it may be most useful to some of my friends who have not money at command.

The rate of wages in different counties varies very much, as also the conditions of "piece-work." In many instances, among amateurs in agriculture, I have observed that in granting
to a labourer a task to be accomplished for a stipulated sum, it has been omitted to tie him down to the time at which this task is to be accomplished. It is, in such instances, in the labourer's power to work or not as he likes, and to keep his "piece-work" in hand, if he leaves or neglects it, for some short and, perhaps, more remunerative job offered him by a neighbour. By this he neglects, at harvest time, the reaping or mowing, or any other job he has undertaken to do, and loses for his permanent employer the golden opportunity of the sunny day. In "piece-work" the labourer should be tied to time, as much as to the amount of money for which the job is to be done.

Again, in some counties, the labourers "knock off" on a Saturday at four o'clock; but it is perfectly at the employer's option to insist or not on the old system of twelve hours' work for a given amount of pay. In Dorsetshire, in the vicinity of Alderney Manor, the usual amount of wages varies from eight to ten or twelve shillings a week; I give twelve, but then I insist on twelve hours' actual work each day, and no "short time." My servants must work from six till six, when
light enough, with two cessations for breakfast and dinner if I pay them accordingly.

To see men, in the midst of harvest, quit their work early on a Saturday, when the week’s industry requires the most perseverance, in case of a sudden change in weather, in no way meets with my approval; and it is diametrically opposite to the interests of fair play if the labourer undertakes, for a certain sum, to do, by a certain day, what his employer requires. In piece-work they should be tied to time; in harvest they should consider the exigencies that might arise to crops that are cut from threatening weather. The worst species of untrustworthy labour that can be employed on a farm, is that which may be expected, but in value is never realized, at the hands of boys. They cannot be trusted, if there is more than one, with horses, cows, pigs, or poultry; nor with anything like an economical care of corn or food of any kind.

If ladies and gentlemen choose to employ boys, they ought to have an additional man to every two boys, to look after them. One grown man would do the labour of four boys easily
and well; and to that amount would the expense of a farm be lessened if none but men were employed. I have elsewhere alluded to the fact that an old gamekeeper at Ashdown Park, of the late Lord Craven's, on meeting three boys together, used to draw from his pocket a heavy dog-whip of the kind carried by keepers, but which ought to be exploded from the annals of dog-breaking, and commence an indiscriminate flagellation of the astounded youths. On my asking his reason for this, to me, apparently unprovoked assault, he invariably replied, "I always does it, sir, for, rely on it, you never sees three boys together, but they be bent on some mischief or other, so I likes to be beforehand with 'em."

If you employ labour, let the source of it be reliable; be liberal in the amount of hire, and let there never be any sort of mistake as to what you require for the money you agree to give, or in what they, the labourers, have to do. Uncertainty induces mistake, mistake begets ill-will; and labour cumbered by dissatisfaction is not worth half its value when thus approached
"with the wrong leg foremost," and really becomes "labour in vain."

In some places, or near large towns, farmers lose sight of their true interests,—the real well-being of their meads for hay,—by grazing them with their milch cows too long and too late in spring, and this particularly when near any large or fashionable watering-place, where there is a great demand for fresh butter, milk, and cream. I have also observed, on some large estates, that, because in a particular season hay and straw were short or next to nothing, they, the tenants, were permitted to sell what little hay and straw they had at very high prices, instead of consuming it on their premises, on condition that they would purchase and lay out on the farm so much artificial manure. This system is death to the productive quality of the land; and, though apparently harsh in some cases to refuse to men who may be, by circumstances, hard pressed for money, still I would prefer an abatement of rent on an individual rent-day, to giving any such permission as to exporting the hay and straw off the acres where it grew.
In the first place, a tenant has the power to evade the quantity of artificial manure he had promised to expend in lieu of the fodder sold.

In the second place, I know to my cost that artificial manure is as liable as other things to vary in strength and quality, and also that a cheap, bad article may be substituted for a much better one, and superficially cloak a very grievous error.

Artificial manure applied to land reminds me of dram-drinking in man. It is but a short-lived flash of excitement to the one as to the other,—wholesome only for a time when diluted with water, or subjected to rain, and liable to be lost in too much heat and dust, or too heavy a deluge from storm and cloud. There is nothing like the old-fashioned farm-yard manure. Plant two rows of potatoes side by side. When you dig them, there is still left in the ground, and holding the mould together, the remnants of the rotten straw, still pregnant with the nourishment of rich decay, while in the runks that had received the artificial dust, not one vestige of it remains—it has been washed away, blown away, or been utterly consumed by the crop as a
"pick-me-up," leaving nothing for cultivation that is to come.

I deny that the crops we now see are in any degree heavier, on an average, than those grown by our forefathers under the wheels of their heavy dung-carts, before "science," as it is called, had taken the place of well-tried system, and ushered in novelities the success or failures of which no man at the moment knows. It is doubtful to my mind if we have not imported or locally created some of the diseases which had never been heard of, and were certainly not known, in the United Kingdom when I was a boy. I allude to the "potato disease," to the "foot-and-mouth disease," and to the "plague among cattle." Set these new inflictions side by side with the effects of what is called "science," and look at the condition of the farmer and of the people, and I question if the world is better off under our blatant teachers and would-be scientific men of the present day, than it was when agricultural practice kept at arm's-length vain theory and conceited assumptions that only tended to disturb the matter-of-fact study of single-purposed men.
I have heard—I never saw them—of wonderful crops of corn being produced by circulating liquid manures about their roots; but it has never been stated by any audacious narrator, in my hearing, that these scientific inventions have made the fortunes of any agriculturist who used them, although they might line the pockets of pipe and pottery men to very considerable extent.

It is possible, as we all know, to lay out more money on favourite maxims, methods, and pursuits than can ever be returned again to our emptied coffers, by those favourite mythical speculations. The double fructifying hen's nest at one time suggested to the farmers' wives has for a long time become addled; but as it is my desire to treat of nothing but what all who run may read and comprehend, the following is a description of the once boasted nest.

The nest for the hen to lay in was made on a curiously contrived and adjusted spring, so nicely balanced that a new-laid egg laid to the lighter nest-egg, induced the nest to slide obliquely beneath the superincumbent fowl. The nest-egg itself was an artificial one, and fixed to its intended place.
Then, upon the decline of the nest, the fresh egg glided off into a sort of pocket made to receive it, and when thus relieved the nest re-arose to its position beneath the fowl. After a short time spent in chuckling bliss at the supposed fruit of "sexual selection," as Darwin has it, the doating mother arose, shook her feathers, and turned round to look with admiring eyes on the pledge she had given that "selection" had born its fruits. When, in astonishment, she saw it not, she deemed she had made a mistake in "counting eggs before they were" laid; so, to remedy the omission, she resumed her nest, and laid another egg, and thus a double fructuation was sensibly produced. The rumour of this nest came from Essex, but I know not with what truth.

As to cows upon a farm, whenever more than one boy is employed, the cows are always wild, for even the man and the milkmaids don't spare half enough of the caresses they bestow upon each other to render the dairy herd affectionately attached to them and docile. A cow, and, indeed, all animals, are sensible of kindness when gently and tenderly bestowed; and all animals, and birds too, have much more power of thought and wise
discrimination than foolish people give them credit for. If I were to see or hear a loud, harsh word, and a rude blow, administered by a man of mine to any creature under his care, I would not retain him long in my service. The dog-whip, if so it can be called, that I carry in my pocket, was the thong of her little donkey whip, given to me by a little child who deemed it needful to her quadruped's progression: it would not kill a fly on the back of the dog, nor induce anything approaching to a cry of pain, but it is ample as a signal of reproof. To give a dog or horse a second blow is, for the time, utterly useless. The dog and horse fully comprehend for why you struck them in the first instance, but if you repeat the punishment, all remembrance of the fault is lost in the terror inspired by the after circumstance: the dog turns the tables and bites at the undiscriminating hand, and the horse meditates the possibility of kicking off his brutal rider, and running away.

To a dog, whatever may be his fault, one blow and have done with it; to a horse, one touch of the spur, and let there be an end of reproof, at all events, till dog or horse offend again. Let the
whip be the lightest one possible, and the spur the least severe, for it is not blood nor weals, severity and pain, that reprove and educate—it is the impression, not on the skin, but on the mind, that achieves the desired consummation. If anything I have written induces a hand to withhold a blow, or saves from harsh usage any creature in existence, then my occupation has not been in vain; and the beautiful, the faithful, and affectionate creatures, the dear companions, as their races have been, of my happiest leisure hours, will not have wasted their gifted powers on my pleasures, but by the knowledge I have gained of them, and their healthful use, they have made me their friend indeed!

As to artificial manures, and regarding the feathered game on a manor, I am convinced, and so are a great many agriculturists of my acquaintance, that artificial manures have a destructive effect on the game. It is difficult to point out how or whence this arises, though the fact of the injury to the feathered game has been to me very remarkable; but my opinion inclines to the belief that some artificial manures destroy certain insects necessary for the food of game; and on sites where
there are no surface springs, brooks, nor rivers, the artificial composition impregnates the stagnant rain or soak water left on the surface sufficiently to interfere with the young and tender brood, and to thwart the old birds rearing them to perfection.

There is another fact that I have observed in regard to the "golden plover." I am aware of sites to which these birds resorted as sure as the winter came on, for they frequented a farm over which I hold the preservation and killing of the game, and one of its broad fields at certain periods was never without a few golden plover—sometimes more, sometimes less; but during winter there they assuredly were. Of latter years these birds have been gradually diminishing, and from their numbers becoming less and less, they have at last entirely failed.

Again, there is another fact patent to my observation: there are some seeds that the wood-pigeons eat, that when given by the old birds to their young, turns the flesh of the half-fledged birds black, and eventually destroys them. Now, in the earlier parts of my life, this sort of thing never happened; and as nothing can happen without a cause or reason, why is it, in these years of
artificial appliances to land, that around me, in Dorsetshire, black game and wood-pigeons have ceased to breed, and the former have become almost extinct? I deeply regret to state, that some dastardly villain, occupying land in the immediate vicinity of Wimborne, has poisoned several beautiful and valuable dogs. He has been traced in his purchase of the poison of which these dogs died, and I believe that he has disseminated a report that "he bought it for the destruction of rats." In the interests of humanity I hope that he did so, and that no such dastardly and low villainous implication, as that of purposely poison-ing dogs out of revengeful spleen, can be laid at the door of a man claiming the respectable position of a Dorsetshire farmer. Whatever was the design of the cruel poisoner, he would have done well to remember that the law assigns a very heavy penalty against a villain who, under any pretext whatever, lays poison in places to which the property of the public can attain to its destruction.

The law in such instances, however, does not demand any great amount of proof other than circumstantial evidence, for on crime so cowardly, so cruel, and so villainously destructive to animal,
and, perhaps, as a contingency to human life, justice, speedy and severe, is inclined to set the seal of condemnation, and to brand such cruel miscreants with that they so most unquestionably deserve.

To return to what I believe to be the effects of foreign and artificial manures, I must recur to a disease which has attacked my pheasants—it is nothing more nor less than the foot-rot; and it has a similar effect on their feet that the foot-rot has with sheep. The toes are affected, they swell at the joints and are very sore, and by degrees the toes rot off; the bird can't walk, the entire limb from foot to hip pines away, and the poor thing dies. The foot-rot in sheep, taken in time, is very easily cured,—the sheep can be caught and the foot subjected to constant dressing; but the pheasants so affected can be taken with no sort of certainty, and, therefore, the disease continues its fatal course.

Strange to say, the longer we live the less we are able to comprehend the cause of vegetation. In the summer closely succeeding the heavy incendiary fire which consumed the furze, heather, and trees over the greater part of my manor, directly that the ground was bare and cased in cinders, up
through the black dust in all directions came the potato plant, fresh, green and strong, and in some places miles away from fields that had ever borne such roots. There was no potato, even of the size of a pea, beneath the plant—it could only have sprung from seed.

The haulm had never shown itself before in the memory of man on these aboriginal heaths, but from some cause or other the seed had been deposited there, kept from vivifying by the wilder and superincumbent mass.

It opens a very good lesson to a man's mind to find himself merely a game preserver, and then to view himself in the double position of game preserver and farmer on an arable farm, adjoining his woods. In my practice in this double capacity, I have been very well enabled to estimate the damage done by rabbits and game, and to observe how much failure of crop is laid to the game, which failure really originated, in effect, from climate, blight, and insect voracity. At one time, on a farm in my own hands, having the shooting, not only did I know very well that the rabbits were reduced within proper limits while the agricultural portion of the acres were in the
hands of a predecessor; but when the farm came into my own hands, I continued, for my own sake, to keep the rabbits down. This gave me very little trouble, for a pest settled on the rabbits, and, so to speak, they all died off. Against my will, then, in that spring I had no rabbits, and I narrowly watched the crops.

In the corn-fields, not at the sides so much as out in the middle of the field, here and there came the same bare places, the absence of corn on which had invariably been charged against my rabbits. On this particular season crops generally were indifferent, and the pest of agriculture, the "wire-worm," abundant.

I am sorry to say that it has come within my knowledge that tenant-farmers, under a game-presenter, have refrained from sowing the headlands immediately adjoining the covers, and then, on no crop appearing, charging the deficiency against the game. In other cases, and on poor lands peculiarly prone to the wire-worm, or to fail in very dry seasons, I have observed that a bushel and a half of wheat to the acre, instead of two, was all the light, white gravel and sandy soil received; and then, when paucity of seed, poverty of soil, and the ravages of...
the wire-worm combined to prevent any return, the entire deficiency was laid on the rabbits, and the tenant attempted to make property out of the bad name the, in this case, unoffending creatures had established for themselves elsewhere.

On the subject of farms, game, and rabbits, I will reiterate my advice—never to give the tenant, under any circumstances whatever, permission to kill the rabbits. It is not in his power to "destroy" them, nor can he keep them sufficiently under. The owner of the game and the shooting, with his keepers, alone can effectively accomplish the desired and really needful object; and I have no hesitation in saying, that it is the duty of the game-preservation as carefully to protect the tenant's crops, as it is his pleasurable desire to preserve his own game.
CHAPTER IV.

THE THIEF AND POACHER—PRESEVRATION OF GAME.


Perhaps there is no subject on which so much nonsense has been talked as on the above, nor any in which so much false sympathy has been set on foot, by way of screening a low villain from the consequence of drunkenness and crime.

What used to be denominated "poaching," is now regarded by the law as "theft," for, the moment game is killed by unqualified or uncertificated persons—or, indeed, by any man, without permission, on another man's land—it becomes private property. The fact of private property...
is determined by death; and to steal dead game so situated really amounts to felony.

With the act of poaching, or theft of game, the love of sport in the rural depredator has no concern whatever. It used to be the promulgated idea, in the false commiseration of crime, that the thief or poacher, like his betters, had a love for the chase, and could not abstain from gratifying it. No such sentiment ever entered the villain's head. His chase of feathered game was carried on by night, when the poor creatures were asleep, or when pursuing his calling by day he was never on the spot to witness the capture of the creature he sought, save on rare occasions, when with a lurcher he set and then drove to his nets or wires. The poacher slunk, under cover of the night, to shoot the beautiful and unsuspecting pheasant from his perch, or he crept among the paths used by pheasants, hares, and rabbits, to set wire nooses or lay nets to strangle or entangle game after whom he had no exciting chase whatever. Before essaying on his nightly depredations, he and his fellows usually meet in some public-house or beer-shop, where they bedizen the little brains they had with drink, till
they reel to the adjacent manor ripe for murder—all going out, in their maudlin phraseology, for "death or glory."

If the house they thus left was a receiving house for stolen game, and they had not money enough at their command to purchase what is called "Dutch courage," they bargain with the publican, rogue, and sinner, for an advance of beer, binding themselves to let him have the proceeds of their thefts in game at so much less than the market price, so as to insure him a considerable per-cent age for the risk he ran of losing his money in the event of their being captured, or designedly absconding from the neighbourhood and his claim.

The village poacher is always a dirty, idle, drunken, ragged, bad man. He will never do a day's honest work if he can help it; and his wife and his children, if he has them, are always dirty, illiterate, and half-starved; while the lurcher that follows him, or lies at his cottage-door, is sleek and in fair condition. If he has a successful night or day, and receives any money on the immediate transaction, not one farthing of it is expended on his wife and famished
children. He looks on the cash so earned as pocket-money, to be spent in the public-house in gambling and drinking, and a portion of what he has thus to eat is given to the lurcher, to keep the dog in running condition. I commenced this work by a promise to illustrate my book by facts, and I now offer one to my readers that came immediately within my own knowledge, in support of the miserable and heartless depravity as so correctly charged against the village poacher.

My custom having invariably been to give the little in my power to bestow to some poor person or persons, if they deserved it, in the dead of winter, or at the approach of Christmas, on one occasion I selected three families from the mud huts near me, to whom respectively to assign a dinner for the wives and children. The families consisted of a mother and five children, a mother and three children, and a mother with two, and to these three families I intended to give beef and plum-pudding, &c., according to their number and ages. To this end, the women were warned to come for what I had to give. On being warned, one of them came to me as spokes-
woman for the others, and, to my utter astonishment, asked me "not to give them food." In reply to further questions, she assured me, that "if I gave them food, they and their children would be none the better for it, for their three husbands would appropriate it all to themselves and take it to the public-house. The larger dinner—the one appropriated to the woman with five children—would be sold for beer, while the two smaller dinners together would make a sufficient repast to accompany the liquor, and afford a public-house jollification, in which neither mother nor child would be permitted to share."—"Well, then," I answered, "your husbands I always knew to be bad men, but of you (the women) I have neither heard nor known any harm; I would aid you and your children if I could, but what you tell me renders it impossible."—"Give us the money," she replied, "the cost of our dinners which you contemplated; the men will not know how much you give us, and whatever it is we will keep to ourselves."

It ended by my giving them some money but whether they (the women) spent it in food or in gin, of course never came to my knowledge.
In some places I have known what have been by no means a "deserving poor" permitted, without any restriction, to come to the mansion for rabbits. Never many together, but repeated applications by detached old women have been made, until the aggregate of the rabbits thus obtained has been considerable. On these occasions, no reference was ever made to the head gamekeeper as to the character of the persons or families, or whether or not neglected industry, sickness, or misfortune, had incapacitated them from their usual course of living. On one occasion, an old woman came to the house, and applied to the housekeeper for several consecutive rabbits, giving no name, as usual, but simply requesting food, under the plea of her and her family having "met with misfortin." That "misfortin" came to light one fine day, through the head keeper having met her leaving the house with a rabbit in her hand, of which he took on himself forthwith to divest her.

On the matter being explained, the fact came out that this old woman's husband had been convicted of stealing game some little time before, in addition to a former imprisonment
for a felony as to wood, and by these unrestricted and indiscriminate gifts of rabbits, the penalty inflicted by an, as usual, too lenient miscalled Bench of Justices, had been more than paid.

There is nothing so mischievous in a parish as indiscriminate charity—it amounts, in fact, to a premium upon vice. I have had a really hard-working labourer say to me, "What use, sir, is my good character to me, and what good have I done myself in never having had my family chargeable on the parish? Here is Jack, as lives close to me, whose family is always a receiving parish relief, and who never does, and never has done, any regular work in his life, and who finds money, somehow, to get drunk with; he gets as much given to him at the big house, and a Christmas dinner to boot, and broken victuals beside, or even more than I does; so what's the use of honesty? You gets no more by it than if you'd been a dozen times in gaol; they says, or, leastways, the parson does, as 'virtue is its own reward,' and burn my shirt if he ain't about right, for you never gets any good for it."
Now, these are facts; and this is the rustic logic that arises from apparently little things. But my experience teaches me that many of those owners of large mansions who like the name or reputation of being "good to the poor," by indiscriminate charity to all evil-disposed persons as well as the really deserving, do infinitely more harm than good. When the young ladies of the mansions select to run about with or after parsons throughout the parish in which they live, with a big, mysterious bag, and sundry baskets of buns and old clothes, or new clothes made up for the occasion, it has come to my knowledge that the scum of the population thereabouts have resorted to all sorts of imposition to arouse pity,—such as tying up a leg or arm, alleging that they had been run over by a waggon, or lost an eye from a supposed blow from the bough of a tree they were sedulously and honestly felling. No questions are ever asked as to the truth or otherwise: it is sufficient for the applicant to be in rags; and the parson of the parish, nine times out of ten, is so soft and easily imposed on, that he never makes any effort to direct attention to the only channel in
which kindness and reward can be effective. I shall not easily forget the indignation of an honest "tar," then in the Preventive Service, when, as he sat on the steps of a bathing-machine, "look-out" glass in hand, a "Drusilla Clack"-like lady, a miss, though old, and very much amiss in the direction of her parochial preachings, came suddenly upon him and thrust a little book into his hand. The man-of-war's-man saw and recognized the donor of the book, touched his hat, and began to look it over for "the pieters." In doing so, the fly-leaf of the book escaped his observation, till, having ascertained that there were no "pieters," it caught his eye. On it, in large characters, obtrusively written in the lady's hand, were these words—"Sinner, this is for thee."

His spell of duty being over, he shut up his glass with an emphatic slap, and, sliding furiously from the steps of the machine into the sand, he strode, or rather rolled angrily away, direct for the front door of the house whence this discriminating philanthropist had emerged to perform her so-called Christian duties. Covert approaches and back doors were no longer to be
thought of by this honest fellow; but going at once up to the front door, he administered such a thundering knock, that a flunkey came out almost on his nose.

"Here, guv'nor," said the offended royal and loyal tar, "take this here book back to your lady what shoves 'em about, and tell her I won't have it nor none of it; I never was rated as a 'sinner' afore by any skipper under whom I sailed, and she'd no sort of business whatsomever to put me down as sitch in that blessed log of hers."

So saying, the mortal breaker, having broken on the philanthropical beach, he receded, and left the flunkey puzzled in the spray.

Of such anecdotes as these, if I thought it would amuse my readers to narrate them, there are many; but as my chief object is, at this moment, to show the extreme mischief occasioned in a rural parish by indiscriminate charity, I leave the donors of it and the pretenders to extreme godliness, to the opinion pronounced by that eminent solicitor, Mr. Bruff, in Wilkie Collins's admirable tale of 'The Moonstone,' which runs as follows, where the learned gentleman speaks of Godfrey Abletwhyte:—"I am told he is an eminent
philanthropist, which is decidedly against him."

I wish every lawyer was as wise and honest as Mr. Bruff, for philosophers and philanthropists not only very frequently make egregious mistakes, but the latter, in the most uncharitable opinions which they obviously form of all their neighbours, forget that it must be decidedly wrong to let boasted religion be a cloak for cruelty, and detraction of character the main staple of all their proceedings. The slap which Wilkie Collins gives to the innumerable "Clacks" and "Abletwhytes" that labour to make people miserable, while in the gloomy-looking cells of their own souls they frisk about and kiss each other in all secret levity, is well deserved, and I commend its perusal to a secret Clack and Abletwhyte Society, who at one time used to post to me from Southampton every month pink salvations in the shape of little books. As long as the papers of these impudent intrusions lasted, however, they made, when torn up and tied to lines, very good "stops" for running game.

The plan for the owner of a country house and manor, I suggest, is this: it has been my custom
always to be guided by it. If poor people apply for charity, either by bringing to the door a paper, signed, of course, by the clergyman, alleging the accidental death of cow, horse, donkey, or pig, if the truth of the tale, when inquired into, is found to be correct,—the signature of the clergyman to such a document as this being no sort of guarantee as to its real value,—give in money what is deemed fit, but on no account append your name to the paper, and, if you can stop it, prevent the petitioner from doing so.

If you append your name to a paper of this kind, your name and the names of all who sign it when that "plaint" is over, may be detached and pasted on to fresh applications, and, by the number and respectability of the signatures, carry with it a weight it in no way deserves. The names in Hudibrastic phrase acting

"Like nest-eggs to make clients lay,
   And on a false opinion pay."

In speaking thus of the clergyman's signature, it is not my intention to charge an *intentional* error against all the gentlemen clothed in black; all I design to attribute to him is a very mischievous over-zeal to appear in his parish on the
side of charity, however misplaced and undeserved any approach to favourable consideration may be. The people in the parish always well know how easy it is to cheat their parson, by "outward and visible signs," into the belief "of the inward and spiritual grace," and on his credulity they endeavour to trade.

As to the good or evil effects of a large preservation of game, the real fact stands thus. It is the little amount of unprotected game that fosters crime. There is just enough on the unprotected lands to promise to a dissolutely inclined man enough illicit game to bring him beer, without the slightest chance of his being taken and punished.

On the other hand, where there is a large head of game, it must have many vigilant protectors—capture being almost a certainty if inroads are made on the lands. In addition to this, when there are watchers, the farmer's roots and turnip-tops are safe; his hedges cannot be pulled nor his gates thrown off the hinges without an almost certainty of detection; cattle cannot get cast in ditches, nor sheep in grips; nor can sheep be stolen, nor corn from the sheaf either, when there is a large preserve of game, and men out night and day to look after it.
Preservation cannot exist without due care, and agrarian crimes of all sorts, from sheep-stealing to robbing hen-roosts, must, by the vigilance of keepers, be considerably curtailed. In fact, if the owner of the large preserve issues proper orders, and his men do their duty, everything on the manor must be held in watchful supervision.

In illustration of all these things, I now come to facts brought before me in the place whence I write the present volumes. On leaving Winkton, which I rented under my dear good friend, the late Mr. Weld, of Lulworth Castle, and which the late Mr. Mills, of Bistern, subsequently bought, I took Alderney Manor. The game on it consisted of three pheasants, some partridges, a few hares, and a great many rabbits—a great many rabbits, of course, as always is the case when the farm bailiff has what is erroneously called "the keeping of them down," which, being translated, means putting them down his throat, and selling them—the possibility of these two facts, of course, rendering him desirous of keeping up a good stock. The very poor, idle, and dissolute squatters in mud huts, who had put up places in which to live, finding a wide stretch of wild heaths, not commons, abandoned to their disposal.
THE THIEF AND POACHER.

All these men kept lurching dogs, and many of them horses, a cow or two occasionally, and donkeys, and grazed these animals on the surrounding property, they not possessing any other land than the little plot on which the mud cottage stood.

Now, I take on myself to say, that every man of these mud huts, not only would not work at any honest labour, but that most of them lived by theft and on the trespass of their cattle. On Sundays, during church-time, they used to assemble on the heaths, every man with his lurcher, and run at rabbits, and at a hare if they accidentally found one, for money to be spent in beer.

So habituated had these "poor" become to the illegal use of what belonged to other people, that at last they began to think that anybody's property within their reach—from a watch, a fowl, wood, turf, game, or rabbits, by a common right of equality or communism—was theirs.

In fact, there had been no gentleman or landed proprietor capable or willing to protect his own, or what was let to him, or kindly assigned him, by other people; and when timid people, or maudlin men, took some of the lands or the house, to

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pretend to preserve game on, or to live in, they openly laughed at his ineffective gamekeeper, and not content with shooting or snaring the little wild life there was in fur or feather, they absolutely infringed the premises, and stole the barn-door fowls that roosted in his laurels at his door. In short, no one would live at what was then called Alderney Cottage, until that happy state of things existing in its vicinity was broken through by my under-renting it of a Mr. King, who had taken it of Sir Ivor Guest, and kept it in a very neglected state.

Here, then, is an answer to the Bright, Hodger, Dodger, Dilks, and Doddle cry of the harm done by the great, or what these "dodger" people call "the over-preservation of game." By day nor night was there any proper notice of the lawless state of the district, save such as was confided to the public supervision of the county police, who, of course, could not specially absent themselves from the highways to see what was going on in more remote places. The tenant-farmers in the vicinity were trespassed on by night, and their ricks fired if they tried to protect themselves.
And this because there was no immediately resident gentleman, and no sort of preservation of game.

One unhealthy state of things induced another. Every idly-inclined and dishonest man, seeing how his fellows could fare, then tried to erect a mud hut, in order to enjoy the illegal pursuits he saw were not restrained by any exercise of landed power; and, on the suggestion of the previous squatters before him, he was told "to bide some high wind setting the desired way towards the fir woods, and then in the nocturnal hours to light a fire"—the habit having been, on occasions of these really incendiary fires, to give the loppings of the dead trees, and the half-charred poles, "to the poor"—to the very men who purposely set the woods on fire. If this encouragement of the most serious crime is what is termed being "good to the poor," why then Heaven, in that respect, make me "bad" to them for life.

If it is wrong in us, the game-preservers, to keep in our woods a quantity of game, for our amusement and that of our friends, and to the very great employment of labouring men and
servants, how much more erroneous it must be, in the eating-houses or cook-shops of the metropolis, to expose to the London "poor" all sorts of roast, boiled, and pickled catables, with but the texture of a fragile piece of glass, not the fifteenth part of an inch, between their mouths and the joint they long to dine on.

The same may be said of the silversmith and jeweller, and the pastrycook, and even to the man who dares to walk the street with a visible watch or jewel on his person.

I had obtained, but at this minute I cannot lay my hand upon it, a computation of the amount of pounds of meat sold by the poulterers of the large cities and towns in wholesome food in rabbits alone to the labouring classes, and to those who come within the fashionable denomination of "the poor."* I think at Southampton fourteen thousand rabbits, or couples of rabbits, sold as food for the people, was about the annual number; so that if you put each rabbit at about three pounds' worth of animal food, it would be difficult to include them in the audacious nomenclature of a blatant farmer or speech-maker at

* This shall be appended to the close of this volume.
some of the farmers' clubs,—I think, in the Stour or Avon vales,—who in his wine-and-watery wrath denounced these creatures to be rendered extinct as "useless vermin." I can understand the minds of some tenant-farmers being "riled," supposing them to know the millions of pounds, in the United Kingdom, of rabbits bought by the poor for their families during the twelve months, in preference to butcher's meat—the poor so obtaining a better dinner for the same amount of money than they could have had if they had gone to lay it out in the butcher's shop. But understanding this, and looking on either side the slice of bread, it does astonish me to see how completely led astray a vast number of the people are, as well as some of the leading press, by the false abuse lavished on the large estates—lavished, I repeat, for no real object of humanity towards "the poor" themselves, but in order to sow disaffection between landlord and tenant, and to destroy the influence of acres on those who inhabit under the lord of a manor. In short, the whole but tried-to-be-disguised object of Codger, Dodger, Snooks, and Noodle, or whoever the firm consists of, has been, and is, to create disaffection
to the Crown, to the Peers, and to the Squirearchy, for political purposes; but, like the mountain, if so large a name can be assigned to a conclave of such little molehill men, having no mouse, all they could produce, after all their labour, was, the miserable, half-witted hand of a boy armed with a lockless pistol, and subsequently whipped for his folly, who endeavoured to frighten the Queen. Labourers, servants of all grades, have been striking for a rise of wages, taught by these Hyde Park bleaters, and taught to strike as the negroes in the West Indies were taught to strike by "missionaries," who had better far been "cold,"—that is, the blacks were taught to strike just at some period when it was ruin to an employer or possessor of sugar plantations to lose all the hands he had. Had I a thousand tongues and a million pens I would stamp those men who counsel such strikes, and the poor classes who thus league together to force the money from their employers, as the lowest villains that disgrace the name of Englishmen, or that ever robbed on the high road.

If any labouring man, artificer, or farm-labourer, feels that he is aggrieved by having less wages
than he conceives to be his due, let him go to the face of his master, like an honest, fearless man, and tell him that he will quit his employ unless his place is better.

If he feels aggrieved and keeps his grievance smouldering in his breast till he can get others to be as disaffected as himself, and then, leaguing together, he and the rest of his companions wait till the moment when employer, farmer, clothier, or mechanic must be ruined if he does not on the instant, at whatever cost, secure his hands by compliance with any extortion, then I hold such men, in such a strike, to be worse than the robber who holds a pistol to the head, threatens life, and demands a purse.

Worse, because the villains on strike cannot be severely punished for what they do; though, fairly speaking, do they "not take a man's life away," when they seize "the means by which he lives"? If sugar-canes are not cut the very instant they are ripe, if corn is not similarly disposed of, it deteriorates, and hay the same; and if not carried when fit to be so dealt with, it becomes worthless, and the loss so occasioned is a scandalous robbery; while, if the owner of
the goods, whatever they may be, complies with a demand he knows must be his ruin, and which cannot in its extortion continue, why, then he pays his money to men who stand in the position of mean and worthless robbers.

It is high time that Peers and Commoners, and all grades of employers, should meet this mischief by a league,—a league not to take from the population anything, not to extort from them anything, not to force them to accept less wages for their industry than they deserve; but to point out to them that there are two ways of obtaining things in this world, other than by "strikes" and robbery; and that they could quit their employer's service at times that would be just to him as well as to themselves, if they could better themselves by it, and then not put it in the power of any peoples, at home or in foreign countries, to refer to, and liken them to, a nest of predatory villains.

No man has spoken more clearly or correctly on this head than the Duke of Buckingham; and no set of designing, selfish men have ever deluded their poor dupes more than the clique of stump- orators who have been permitted to make the
public parks a nuisance to all well-disposed and properly-guided people, or to pollute the fountains in Trafalgar Square with their pestilential presence.

It is farcical to combine two facts that to every thinking mind must be diametrically opposed to each other, and impossible of completion. The two facts I allude to are increased wages for less duration of work. Surely, if these deluding shepherds had intended to gain for their silly flocks the better pay they called for, they ought not to have coupled with that increase of wages a very great diminution of time in which to earn them. They should simply have demanded better pay, if they thought that they could get it for the twelve hours' toil—not twelve hours' toil, for from the hours have to be deducted breakfast, "lunch," and dinner.

I do not agree that any labourer on a farm should have any land to cultivate for himself over and above his sufficient garden or plot. No servant or labourer of any kind should be, or expect to be, remunerated on a system of perquisites, for that system fosters dishonesty and induces discontent. The labourer of any kind
should be paid every week in hard cash; he then knows exactly what he has to trust to, and can lay it out in the way that coincides with his own wishes.

There is a vast deal of clap-trap nonsense respecting "the improvement of the dwellings of the poor." I take it on myself to assure my readers that, if the entire population of the rural classes were polled for and against what is called "the improvement of their dwellings," there would be an overwhelming number of votes for the old cottages, and an immense chorus would arise of "Oh, give us our lowly thatched cottage again."

However, "to improve the dwellings of the poor" sounds well, and is an ostentatious extravagant or showy ceremony, much delighted in by the rich of the present day. No one can say anything against the abstract fact, but as to its rendering the labouring classes more contented, warmer, and better off as to the cost of living, the improvement of their dwellings has done no such thing. No really usefully-inclined man seems to me ever to ask an honest labourer, per se, why he is discontented, and what it is that he wants, or thinks would benefit his condition.
In nine cases out of ten, if this question was put to a union victim, he would make a very natural but stupid reply, and say, "more money and less work," the very two things that cannot go together. As to the improvement of their dwellings, they would ask for some straw to thatch their dwelling, and not for a gaudy stack of chimneys, very necessarily inducing an increased outlay of fuel. The really worthy and hard-working labourer, if quietly left to explain himself, would simply ask to be paid in hard cash for his work, and not to have the amount of that hard cash staved off with very sour cider or other supposed benefits, which really are to the labourer and his family no benefits at all.

Whatever mischiefs may have been achieved by these strikes and unions, they must consume themselves, from their very want of reasonable or well-arranged foundation. You may, I regret to say, delude the English masses for a time, and induce its component heads "to imagine a vain thing"; but as the gloss of the false garment thrown over them wears off, the heads will cease to cling to vain, unjust, and sedulously inculcated deceits, and come back once more to
the honest reality of their position—the fair remuneration of their labour, at shorter pay for lessened work, and to the full pay, say twelve shillings a-week, paid every Saturday, for twelve hours, deducting half-an-hour for breakfast, a quarter of an hour for luncheon, and an hour for dinner, which gives not twelve hours for labour, but ten hours and a quarter for actual industry.

With such terms as these, an agricultural labourer would have every reason to be, and ought to be, contented and happy.
CHAPTER V.

ON THE THEFT OF LIVE GAME.

Night Poaching—How to Defeat the Poacher's Object—Stacks or Feeding-Places to be well Watched—Months in which Poachers are most Active—Game-Dealers and Poachers—How the Thieves Proceed—A London Poacher Caught; what he had in his Pocket—How they Deceive the Keepers—Over-Preservation—Good Sense and Vigilance will get over Difficulties—To take the Wind out of the Sails of the Stump Orators.

In describing the various ways of stealing game, perhaps it will be best to begin with night poaching, and the use of the poacher's gun; for as regards this noisy way of depredation, very great mistakes have arisen as to the nights that are likeliest for this robbery to be attempted: foolish songs about its being the nocturnal thief's "delight on a shiny night," whereas a bright moonlight night would be the furthest off from the thief's selection when contemplating this inroad on private property. Pheasants will not sit to be shot at on
a bright night, after the first gun has alarmed the wood, therefore the night selected is generally when there is a bright sky but no moon, and a very high wind to drown as much as possible the villain guns.

If a gang of these rascals have sallied forth half drunk, and for the time being possessed of Dutch courage, gained at the low beer-shop or public-house, they always select some man among them less drunk than the majority to act as leader, and he is generally a well-known thief.

If the attack is to be made by the gang on a considerable sized cover, holding many pheasants, these thieves draw up at the verge of the cover, and, receiving their orders to keep silence, they all go into the wood together, and proceed in a body through it for a considerable distance. When they have got far enough into the wood, then they halt under some tree or trees where they can see a roosting pheasant; on that spot they leave the first man. The rest of the thieves then retrace their steps, taking up positions under roosting birds, till the last man is posted—all these villains having orders to wait till the last man posted fires; then all of them have orders to
fire and fall back as quickly as they can, shooting on their way back if they pass under a pheasant; after that they decamp, if not caught by the keepers, with their booty as fast as they can. Thus, supposing there is no "set watch" out, the whole thing is over in half-an-hour, and by the time that the keeper in bed has got his boots on, the scoundrels have departed.

Now, in this hurried attack—for I have inspected the ground on the following day—there is very seldom a valuable booty obtained; and for this reason—many of the pheasants are, of necessity, at such short distances from the gun, to enable the thief to see them, that they are blown beyond all possibility of sale for cooking, many of them fall into briars where they are not found, and some of them have life enough left to run away. I have known these gangs to bring a dog with them to find their game, and, if I may judge of the mass of feathers, tails and all, that this dog pulled out, what between the dog and short distances, there could not have been many birds fit for sale.

These nocturnal gangs are now very rare since the establishment of the Police Force, and the night shooting is generally confined to one or two thieves,
who "listen a bird up," shoot him, and run away. These are the most difficult of such depredators to catch, as you never know when or where to have them, and they are off at the first alarm. When a keeper knows what he is about, he has it in his power to make his master's well-enclosed woods very dangerous to walk in at night. He has a right to dig holes in his master's woods as deep and as frequent as he likes; he has a right to strain very small but strong wire from tree to tree, about the height from the ground of a middling-sized man's face. A nocturnal villain has no business in that wood, and if he cuts his nose nearly off against a wire of this kind, he has no one to blame for it but himself. Very strong pliant growers may also be bent down, and held down with strong whipcord and a peg to a hole in a strong post, which said growers fly up with great emphasis if the peg that holds them is displaced by the foot or leg of a man, and if the grower should catch an intruding chin, a jaw so struck will not masticate food for some days.

Those excellent but dangerous spikes for men or dogs are said to be as illegal as the spring-gun, so it is best not to set them, and, indeed, without
such dangerous things a wood can be made, if well enclosed to keep out cattle, as ineligible a spot for a midnight walk as can well be imagined. The owner of a wood has as much right to put large tenter-hooks in his trees, if he likes it, as he has to put them on the top of his palings or walls; and if hooks are suspended on stout cords, combined with deeply dug holes and growers to spring up when touched, the wood thus treated will not be much troubled with intruders by night or day. However good it may be to have these adjuncts for the maintenance of privacy, in my own mind there is nothing like a force kept on watch on every succeeding night.

Wires set for game must be left, at least for a time, and this, of course, affords the chance of the keepers finding them and being ready for the return of the intruder. Where there is game, there are stacks or feeding-places for the pheasants, and at these stacks, during the day, by snares much mischief may be done when the ground is badly looked after by the keeper.

I have known stacks visited by a poaching thief in the day, and he will very likely lie hidden in the cover till the keeper pays a visit, perhaps to
hand-feed in the straw when the stack holds but little corn, and then the intending thief will watch the keeper go away. Round the stack he will set snares,—nooses of horsehair or of wire in the pheasants' runs, or even small steel traps,—and then, hiding again in the bushes within ear-shot, he is ready at the first fluttering wing in any of the snares to creep out and possess himself of the bird. Another plan at the stacks which thieves sometimes resort to is, to lay fish-hooks on short lines, or horse-hair baited with a pea or bean, at times with a raisin, vulgarly called by this class of men a "fig"; but the latter is by no means a successful bait, for not one pheasant in a hundred will eat it. To get a pheasant to eat a raisin is to establish in the bird an artificial appetite, and that, after all, is but a waste of time.

Hooks with short lines, the fish-hook baited with an acorn, will take a wild duck at some shallow feeding-place, but if there are other wild ducks feeding there, when one is caught by swallowing the hook, the fluttering of the duck so caught will scare the fowl away from that identical spot for many months to come.

Neither wild ducks nor pheasants, hares nor
rabbits, can be caught as easily as some people suppose. A hare or a rabbit won't go through a snare in the hedge, or take the run in the grass where even a wire is set up-wind of them, that is if the hare or rabbit approach with the wind coming from the snare to them. If they come the other way, or down-wind to the snare, then they are very likely taken in it, for their nose is the only thing besides the ear which warns them of danger; their eyes, in this respect, if the danger is stationary, are of no use to them whatever.

The worst season for poaching or thieving game is precisely that when people who know nothing about it suppose that depredations against the game are all over—I, mean the entire months of February and March. It is then that the large game-dealers in London, and all over the country, have a demand for live pheasants. Proprietors who have over-shot their manors, and renters of manors newly taking possession of them, and finding nothing there but air and exercise, all alike apply to "the trade," and then, in league, many of them, with the local thieves, they send down a man, with a roomy box or well, attached to a sort of mercantile phaeton,
to put himself at once in communication with rural rascality, and to set about stealing the pheasants. Very likely the man from London employs the rural and local thieves to steal the pheasants, promising to pay the fines for them if they are caught; but I have known strangers to set about the act. In that case, however, it is generally when the woods are small, and, from some adjacent road, the London thieves can first see how the land lies, and get acquainted with the position of affairs.

If there happens to be a gamekeeper a frequenter of public-houses, the plan adopted is to get the fool fond of beer drinking, and to ply him well with liquor, making him safe for a given time. If the woods are small and well-stocked with pheasants, and of the shape which best suits the thieves—that is, narrow, but of a certain length—in the course of an hour, or an hour and a half, a large booty may be caught and carried away. Suppose the cover to be long enough, as well as narrow, for two beats, the poachers go to the middle of it, and set it across in every run with wires, with a knot on them to prevent their drawing tight enough to strangle a bird, and with "purse nets," made of silk or
twine—the silken ones are best. These snares being so set to face one end of the cover, the thieves go to the other end, tap the stems of the trees very cautiously as they come along, and set all the pheasants running. They proceed thus cautiously up to their snares, and take out the pheasants that may be caught; when, reversing the position of their purse-nets to make them catch the other way, they then go to the other end of the cover and reverse their beat, concluding in the same way. If the covers are narrow, and the pheasants many, this depredation takes up but little time, and the thieves of the game are off with their valuable booty before the drunken or neglectful keeper knows anything of the matter. I remember one of these London men being caught at this work by an old servant of mine, but not then in my employ. He gave chase to the two Londoners, who ran for it, and very wisely selected the man who seemed to have the heaviest pocket. This man, in jumping the wattled hedge out of the cover, kicked his toe against the top binder, and fell with his stomach against the edge of the ditch in the field. The keeper very wisely
jumped, and landed with his feet in the back of the thief, and secured him. On searching him, there were live pheasants in his pockets, and one dead cock pheasant, which, no doubt, had been killed in the fall. There was, therefore, a penalty for the trespass, and for the possession of dead game out of season—when, on the magistrate convicting, the thief plunged his hand into his pocket, and flung on the table a heap of gold and silver, a game certificate, and a licence to deal in game, and insolently told the magistrate's clerk to take the fine, whatever it was.

Taking live game, and stealing the eggs when keepers are slack, are two of the easiest as well as the most mischievous and lucrative manorial aggressions.

Thieves, when setting their snares for all or any kinds of game, to be left down all night, will very often select what they think is the keeper's dinner-hour to go and look at them. Then, if there should be a head of game caught, they will come to the spot, stoop down over it, make a bundle of their smock-frock or jacket-pockets, rise up again, and appear to sneak away. Then, if the keeper is deceived by this, he rushes out from his hiding-place, and seizes the supposed delinquent,
who has no game in his possession, for he only knelt down and pretended to take the game, just to test if there was anybody watching him. The poacher will also make almost imperceptible marks around their snares, but at some distance from them, in order to see if since they set them the keeper had been in their vicinity. Keepers ought always to have marks all over their covers, by which they could ascertain if, in their absence, any strange person had been there—a line of worsted, a lightly-twisted bough or bramble, or even a dark thread, would give ample testimony of anything of a certain height having passed that way.

There is a very vulgar phrase very often in the mouths of men who ought to know better, it is "the over-preservation of game." Now, there can only be one system of preserving game and prevention of trespass, and that, to be of any good, must be strict and efficient in every respect. To get up a certain amount of game and then only half or inefficiently to preserve it, is to put a temptation in the way of drunken thieves, who will not do any honest work for beer, which is the only thing they live for, and really to make a certain amount of ill-protected game an induce-
ment to rebel against the law. If by the words "over-preservation of game" is meant an enormous amount of birds and beasts to eat up all the crops, and to do harm in the woods and fields, to arrive at that immense amount of hares, pheasants, and partridges—rabbits are not game—is, on some manors, totally impossible. On some extraordinary land that suits game, it might be done, if the game was not usefully shot for one season; but when game is so foolishly kept, beyond what the woods and lands will fairly carry, the fault brings its own remedy, for the ground will get what we call "stained," all sorts of diseases will break out in feather and in fur, and in succeeding seasons there will be very little game of any kind, attempt to preserve it, or what is called "over-preserve it," to the fullest extent, as you may. Because things may be done injudiciously, and, in very harsh and mistaken ways, by wrong-headed owners of manors, who by injustice and moroseness make enemies where none need exist, that is no sort of reason why a man with his senses about him, and a wide knowledge of human nature, should not completely support his own interests, enjoy them to the full, yet by tact, resolution to
insist on the laws and the right that the law gives him, restrain all evil-doers from infractions. Thus showing to the poorer classes that it is the unmistakable side on which their bread is buttered to serve and to please the man in power, whose hand and heart alike incline him to justice, charity, and good will.

On the well-arranged and sensibly-ordered manor, there really is little ill-will and no difficulty. In the first instance, authority, of course, must be manifested and strictly enforced, and the incorrigible ruffians brought to their senses—made to see that they must either obey the laws, abstain from theft, or suffer the punishment awarded to crime of every description.

These incorrigible dwellers in a village will, when they find they can no longer revel in bad beer, bought by the proceeds of worse crime, remove themselves from the locality, and go to sites where there is less restriction, or to the purlieus of a royal forest, which really is the receptacle for ruffians sped away from places they have made too hot to hold them. In a royal forest in England there are always inefficient keepers or woodmen, and every noble lord and gentleman, during the time that he may have been
Ranger or head of the Office of Woods and Forests, in the event of his having an old servant who, through drinking or other incapacity, he wants to be rid of, has been always inclined to stick him into the hole for which he was totally unfitted, and put him to serve the Crown, because he had it not in him to serve anybody or anything else.

Those incorrigible ruffians in a village as above alluded to, were best away from the site where they had so long revelled in ill-earned beer and bad example, and, if driven away by the full and fair administration of the law,—whether of the Game Law or any other statute, matters not,—their absence on the surrounding population has a more beneficial effect than their presence.

I have, in my time, written so much as to game, that I fear to be charged with saying the same thing over again. But silent as I might wish to be, there are so many aggressions now made, at every corner of the land where a "stump" demagogue can get a ragged audience, upon the landed aristocracy, that I must speak up for those who must ever be regarded as the brain, and in war as the gallant right-hand of old England in the dangerous hour.
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Let us, then, for once, take the wind out of the sails of the stump and club orators, and, after showing them that their cry is really to rob the people of the food—the wholesome meat from rabbits that they have the power of purchasing at the poulterer's, and because they cannot buy butcher's meat at the present prices,—let the landed gentry turn all those wide wastes that the demagogues have alluded to, as being "sinfully kept for private pleasure," netting "no food for the people" of any kind, into rabbit-warrens.

When it is known, as I will take care that it shall be, how many, many millions on millions of pounds of meat furnished by the rabbits to the working classes, from those wastes so cultivated as warrens, and assigned to the only crop that they can grow, stump orators will have to drive another trade. It will afford the means of bringing down the high prices demanded by the farmer and the butcher, prices to which the humblest labourer or artificer cannot at present by the sweat of his brow attain. If it is really desirable to cheapen meat food, how is that good to be consummated by lessening the supply by millions on millions of pounds?
CHAPTER VI.

ON THE REARING OF PHEASANTS BY HAND.


As it has now become one of the necessities of the day to provide sufficient sport for the present generation, each gunner armed with three double breech-loaders, and accompanied by no dog, some further remarks on this artificial practice will not be out of place. Perhaps there is no phase of game-preserving wherein so many lords and masters are deceived by their servants as in the asserted number of young birds reared at the coops. The number of young birds hatched out under each barn-door hen or bantam no doubt can be easily ascertained, but then what very often follows?
Some keepers very erroneously mow a swarth in the long meadow grass, and put their coops into it, and never cover up the fronts of their coops at dusk, or before dusk, every evening, as they ought to do. The consequence of this is, if rain comes on, the young birds get into the grass, and, to use a keeper's expression, get "draggled," and, becoming chilled, never reach the coops again. Or in the long grass, during the day, a stoat, a weazel, or a rat may get hold of them, the vermin not visible to the keepers, when, on feeding, if the right number of young pheasants do not appear at the expected coop, the keeper at once concludes that they have gone and got mixed up with other broods, and takes no more trouble about it.

When coops and broods are put out, select as fair and open a piece of short grass as possible, so as to be able with the eye to command every yard of the ground. By way of shade and cover for the little birds, place in the vicinity of each coop several boughs of trees, laid for sufficient support, and for the sake of keeping hollow, lapping the one over the other. Furze boughs will answer the purpose of sufficient protection
from the rays of the sun, and for cover for the young birds to run into when the keeper feeds at the coop. They will be content to remain under the boughs till they see the feed put down, and till the consequent call of the hen lures them back.

Supposing that, instead of this, the coops are put by the side of mowing grass, as before alluded to, young pheasants at their earliest period may run into it, and get lost; that accident is completely avoided by having the ground completely under supervision. I know an instance of a keeper losing every day some of his very young birds, and being totally unable to account for it. They were by the side of mowing grass, and he searched every bit of it over when near that particular coop, but could find nothing to clear up the mystery. He was a painstaking man, so he cut a considerable square patch of grass around the coop, and saw nothing more than what he might have seen anywhere every day, and that was, an open mole's run, or a small orifice in the superficial run which moles often make just beneath the surface. He left the coop, and before his return another little bird was missing; so he sat
down to watch, for he knew not what, perhaps because it was a hot day, and he was tired. He had not watched long, when, within a couple of yards of the coops, on the spot he had newly mown, he thought he distinguished in the short grass a small brown spot, that was not there a moment before, so he sat for a minute or two speculating what it was—whether it might not be a dead leaf that had blown there, or some other accidental thing. The mystery was soon cleared up, for the spot rose to a few inches higher, and the substance assumed two sharp little black eyes, which turned, with the inquisitive head to which they belonged, from side to side, intently surveying the vicinity for danger or for prey. The gun rose slowly to the keeper's shoulder, and with even the cautious motion he adopted, so as the better to escape notice, "pop goes the weasel" out of sight again—as the vulgar song has it—away went the vermin, leaving the keeper possessed of the knowledge he sought, the way his young birds had gone, but that was all. However, with that restless curiosity which dwells in some animals as well as in the minds of some women, up came the little sharp face of the weasel
again, to ascertain whether the slight motion previously detected originated with an enemy or not, and the keeper, knowing the restless nature of his foe, having kept the gun to his shoulder, shot the head off before its owner could again take it out of sight. No more birds were thereafter lost.

When keepers return an estimate to their employers as to "how many pheasants they have at the coops," they give in the number they have put out, not the number that are still then there, or that may be there at subsequent periods,—that number often much lessened by neglect, by disease, by accidents, or by the ravages of winged or four-footed vermin. A keeper can only know the truth of how many birds he has, by shutting up the face of the coop every evening, and counting the young at each coop as he lets them out every morning. Then, as the birds get larger, if some of them stray to other coops, he will be able to ascertain, by the numbers let out at each coop, his exact position. To some men this is too much trouble; and because it is more trouble than they like, they tell their employer that it is best not to shut the young birds in at night.
The fact of shutting them up at night necessitates their being let out soon after daybreak in the morning, and that additional trouble to some men is distasteful. When the birds are very young, and the ground at the coops is full of herbage and clear of other impediments, before the very young birds are let out in the morning, it is good with a broom to brush away the dewdrops; but in rougher ground, or in mowing grass, this cannot be accomplished. The young pheasants should be kept to their coop always, for two or three days, by a "crate" in front of it until they are not afraid to take their food from the man in attendance. The food should be varied, every crop and stomach is fond of change, and should consist of hard-boiled egg, finely minced boiled rice, onions chopped as fine as possible, oatmeal rubbed with the egg or barley-meal (the oatmeal is the best), and grits and buckwheat. Fresh watercress, finely minced, and a bunch of the same, pegged to the ground, for them to peck at if they like. A few ants'-eggs, once or twice a day; if of the great wood ant, they should be scalded, to kill the hard bitten ant, and to mellow or reduce the strength of the insect eggs. Maggots may also be given,
but only when turned red and in a chrysalis state, on no account when fresh and alive from the carrion in which they were bred. The diseases which usually attack the young birds are "the gapes," "the cramp," and a species of "cholera," accompanied by blindness—a very strange blindness, for it consists not in the pupil of the eye, but in the closing of the lids. In this case of superficial blindness, the eyes of the young birds must be opened several times a day for them to feed, but usually before they have had time to get a sufficiency of food the lids close up again. A weak solution of camphor for the eye, and a camphor pill of about the size of a small pea, are remedies recommended, but I know no certain cure for any of these complaints: rue-tea, nettle-tea, alum-water, water impregnated with rusty iron, all of these may be given them to drink; but though some of the patients recover under some of these remedies, all seems to me to depend on efforts of nature better than on outward application or internal medicine. Of course, if a man recommends an hitherto untried remedy, if the young bird in the course of natural effort recovers, the recovery is claimed as proof of a certain cure;
but my readers may take my word for it that life or death hangs on the constitutional power of resistance. Partridges are much more easily reared than pheasants, and may be fed on much the same food, only the smaller ants'-eggs may be given them in greater profusion than to the pheasants. Black game are the most difficult to rear, and with them the same food will suit, with the addition of some young shoots from the heather; but there is something which they require more than either pheasant or partridge, the nature of which I have not been able to ascertain. Always let the game-coops be put, if possible, on fresh ground,—never attempt to breed up in consecutive years on the same spot; if you are obliged to do so, during the intervening winter give the ground a slight dressing of lime or chalk, but on no account whatever have anything to do with gas lime, for it is death to insect life, and baneful to the tender vegetation. The great difficulty lies in giving to the young pheasants a light but strengthening food, such as the mother finds for them in the immense variety of insects scattered over the surface of the lands within her haunt. Every inch of ground, every blade of grass or corn, every leaf, and every
dead stick, is tenanted by insect life, more or less, which serves for the food of the "nide." Among different kinds of beetles and grubs, the wire-worm forms a considerable quantity in the daily food. In the crop of one hen pheasant, feeding in a clover lay, and shot from off it, I found nearly half a pint of the wire-worm, which is, in my opinion, the worst enemy the farmer has. To meet this necessity for a mild, but yet a rich or sustaining food, maggots, in the chrysalis state, as before remarked, are good, hard egg, minced rabbit's flesh, but, on no account, the stomach or milky part of an old doe; and last, though by no means the least, really old, coarse Scotch oatmeal, such as I should give to my foxhounds, together with some fresh-boiled beef or mutton fat, to my mind are the best substitute for the insect food sought by the pheasant in field and wood. Good greaves are decidedly the best for spare use in a kennel when fresh flesh cannot be obtained, and are much less heating for dogs of all kinds than those unwholesome cakes of tallow which are usually given. A very little boiled greaves may be used for pheasants. In short, I can lay down no directions as to the
rearing of pheasants which are not to be deviated from through circumstantial change; but much must be left to the watchful vigilance of the keeper in attendance, and, in fact, there are very few men capable of understanding the requirements of the young lives entrusted to their charge. Some people think that if they clothe a man in a shooting-jacket, and put a gun into his hand, calling him a keeper, he must be able to breed up the most difficult birds to rear that ever came under the human hand.

For a long time it puzzled me to know how young pheasants of the season, when in the autumn or commencement of winter they had become full-grown, could live when all the corn had been swept from the fields by reap-hook, scythe, the gleaner, and the swine, and there were neither acorns nor beech-masts, nor the little root which in some places is called the pig-nut, of which pheasants are very fond. Of course, the one and only way to clear up the point was by examining the contents of the crop, and in each case I found the crop to be full of the habitation of an insect that lives in a little blister-like excrescence which may be found, in
the fall of the year, on the under side of almost any oak-leaf lying withering on the ground. Some oak-leaves, on closer examination, I found to have some of these excrescences, while others, but only a few, were free from them. The little blisters were cleanly picked off the leaf by the pheasant; but in no instance, at that season of the year, could I discover the occupant of the little cell.

I must not leave this subject without mentioning the rule that should ever be kept. The rearer of young game should always keep at hand powdered chalk, and the French preparation of charcoal, for when there is any scouring among the young birds, the use of both of these may be very important.

It is very amusing the rearing of young game, and the frustration of vermin, in their attempts to destroy them, both with gun and trap—as amusing, but certainly not so ridiculous, as it is to hear the nonsense talked by bearded men about not destroying certain things, for that we should have much more game, and be all the better, in all respects, for keeping up the just balance of nature. Would the world be benefited if we patronize vice?
When people let their tongues run so loosely on subjects they can practically know nothing about, and when "philosophers," or "professors"—professing a knowledge of things they are obviously unacquainted with—declare we are to preserve all things alike, so as to maintain the equilibrium of nature,—predatory, venomous, or otherwise,—they must give to rats, mice, ticks, fleas, and meaner vermin still, the same protection that they assign to hawks, cats, polecats, stoats and weasels, kites, crows, jays and magpies. I marvel much if these professors of they know not what, would abstain from activity unto death did they feel a trespass in their hair, or a lively visit to their skins, paid in a hop, step, and a jump, when they supposed themselves comfortably in bed. A man once claimed to be able to give the Promethean spark of life to a flea he had created out of coral dust, and, I suppose, some other more vivifying ingredient; and the same man even descended in his claim to be a creator, for he asserted he could trouble the human head of a professor by worse things than fleas, in whose composition, base as the insects were, was the dust of diamonds. Such
stuff as the necessity of "keeping up the balance of nature" is really scarce worth alluding to, save as it serves to afford a passing derision for those who moot such absurdities.

We pass protective laws for sea-gulls, which cannot be made food of for mankind, while we deny protection to the most useful and delicate things we have for the well-arranged table, and also, in a great measure, for the humble tables of the poor. Protection to the pheasant, partridge, grouse, and hare and rabbit, is growled at. They, the first four, may be sought as delicacies for the rich man's table, but the rabbit feeds thousands of the poor, who say that "they can get more meat for themselves and children out of a couple of rabbits, at the price they give for them, than they could get for the same sum laid out in butcher's meat, beef, pork, or mutton. It is this, perhaps, that makes farmers call the rabbits "vermin," for when it is taken into consideration how much money I may say a million and more of people lay out annually on the rabbits, which otherwise must be laid out on the farmers' stock, why, there may be more reasons than one for the agricultural abuse sputtered on a portion
of a people's food, that it would be harsh ruin to take from them. In Southampton alone,—I like to quote some town not far from "the Vale of the Avon,"—the annual sale of rabbits, in one winter, to the poor, without including the skins, is seventeen thousands of pounds.

None but a farmer then, I think, would call the rabbit a "useless vermin"; but men abuse things according to their kind, and, therefore, the farmer objects to rabbits because he thinks his crops make them good to eat, and to be sought after by the poor. If he wishes to run a tilt with reason against the rabbit, let him reduce the price of his bullock and his sheep, and put them more within the culinary office of the cottage.

It is amusing to hear men talk of things they know not what,—at least, it would be amusing, if their gabble had not a very mischievous tendency. A cannibal, or man of colour with that appetite, provided he is not white, is exalted in rhyme by somebody, who says, "wild in woods the noble savage ran," or he is by other enthusiasts in glaring compassion, said to be a gentleman—I suppose, in all but his chops. In short, led by bleating democrats against an imaginary slavery, or by dissenting
stump or field preachers, it has not been deemed impious to clothe that first step to manhood without the tail,—according to Darwin,—the hideous bushman or the Ashantee with the alleged "image of God." While this is done, multitudes of the white poor at home, because they are white and at home, are neglected. So, in a less degree, do we find that a similar state of things exists as to the birds and beasts of our own country; laws for the protection of the fish-destroying gulls are made, the gull not being food for the masses, but masticating or swallowing with immense and quick voracity a vast deal of fish, which otherwise might have gone to supply the different markets.

At the same time that this protection is voted by the wise men in Parliament, "protection" to the food of the well-to-do man's table, the pheasant, partridge, grouse and hare, and to the wholesome fare supplied by the thirty thousand tons of rabbit-meat to the exigent poor, is growled at and sought to be obviated. The rabbits under-sell the farmer, the farmer, therefore, hates them, and so does the butcher, who sees the poor pass by his board, and seek the poulterer's shop.

If I had time to mark the amazing ignorance of
some authors, and the babbling nonsense indulged in by sundry professors, I might fill half a volume with their blatant mistakes. Darwin, let alone his daring attack on the historic Deity and origin of man, fails in his mere ornithological lore, and declares that that well-known bird, "the snipe," "never breeds in England." Professor Owen did not know a whale's tooth from the canine fang of a badger, while other professors have declared that some of the skulls of the Bovine race, in my possession through the kind permission of his Grace the possessor of Haddon Hall, were the skulls of the Bos longifrons of the ancient Britons. And when I replied "that they were not," the answer made was, "that of course Mr. Berkeley, as usual, knew better than anybody else."

And in this instance so I did, for the beasts belonging to the skulls had been killed each by a bullet, and gunpowder was not a commodity used by the ancients referred to. For my own particular amusement, I had kept the bullet-marks out of sight. Again, we have in the work which Yarrell left behind him, a picture of what he called a "rare bird, supposed to breed in Norway or Sweden," to which he gave the name of the "bimaculated duck."
There was a male specimen of this hybrid, for it is nothing else, in the British Museum; and in order to prove what the *bird really was*, I bred a mate for it in my garden, and sent it also to the Museum, just to upset the dictum of one who, in his day, was deemed to know much, but many of whose dicta were based on mere hearsay, and whose work now stands little more than a milestone (like many others of ancient date), left on the old coach-road of science before the commencement of the better-informed and faster train, simply to show where the public in former times were wont to travel.

Before closing this chapter, in passing, let me remark, that of all the amusing birds of the duck tribe, the most beautiful, as well as the most amusing, is the American wood or Carolina duck. The plumage of the male is gorgeous in the extreme, while there is a beautiful simplicity in the female plumage, in hue and neatness, reminding one of a very well-dressed Quakeress, without that worldly tip-top tile of affectation, the ugly Quaker-bonnet. The wood-duck will breed in a tame state, and, if pinioned, reside contentedly on any ornamental water, or on the waters of a decoy for other
fowl; and certainly for the table, as I have ascertained in the Far West, no water-fowl surpasses it in flavour. The time when they are most amusing is when they pair: this often takes place as soon as the young male and female are full-grown; and once paired, in *direct contradiction* of Darwin—I mean as to the *Darwinian theory*, not as to his own propensities or inclinations whatever they may be they never desert their first love, but, in spite of other attractions, year by year the pair continues to hold good.

The wood-drake is the only duck that I am aware of who picks up food and gives it to his mate from his bill; and it is most interesting to behold, to those amused with ornithology,—and it ought to be to all men *who have paired*,—how sedulously he attends on his mate: how he protects her from and keeps her from contact with the vulgar or designing crowd; swimming before her and heading her off from "plumps," or other fowl; kissing her cheeks, and murmuring to her of her better course in keeping to herself and his devoted love.

The common wild mallard owns no such love as this; he pairs with one, or "bides," as the country
people say, with one, two, or three, as the case may be, and all that time he is a slave to any momentary whim or passion for the pairs of others that may seize him. Not so the wood-drake, he owns no passion but for the one thing he loves, and if that is taken from him, he will not, for the season certainly, and very likely never, pair again.
CHAPTER VII.

THE WASTE LANDS AND WASTE WATERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Enormous Acreage of Waste Waters—Lake at Fonthill Towers—Carp, Perch, Pike, Eels—Crosses tried at Taymouth—Large Acreage of Waste Lands—What can they Produce?—Rabbits find a Living on them—Potato Disease, Cattle Disease—Disease among Game—Fish—Steam Cultivated Farms.

There has appeared in the Times newspaper a long discussion, originated, I believe, by Mr. Frank Buckland, in regard to the enormous acreage of water which lies neglected by the proprietors, and returns not a fowl nor a fish for the general amusement or consumption of society.

Mr. Frank Buckland is right in his lamentation over this fact, but scarcely fair to the originator of the idea he has adopted, in not stating from whom he borrowed it. The subject was mooted long ago in one of my works by me, and to some readers Mr. Buckland's suggestion can be nothing new. In the letters on this subject that have
passed as alluded to, there is only one which deserves much notice, and it is that written by Mr. Vere Fane Benett, of Pyt House, wherein he states, that the club-headed carp he caught in his ponds were utterly unfit for human food; "nor could he even get their bodies removed as a gift by the labouring poor."

It would certainly not be advisable for any labourer with a good appetite and not much time in his mouth for careful mastication, to be seated with a pond carp, or any carp, for dinner.

Conceive a carp of this description under cottage hands for cooking, boiled with a bit of bacon and some cabbage, perhaps, sent up in greasy, thin gravy. The bacon would give it a savoury smell, and if he, the hungry parent of a family, persisted in eating the mess, two mouthfuls swallowed without caution would do the Calcraft's office, and choke him as sure as he was born. Any rash man with an appetite, sitting down to the bony fare of a carp, ought to have a surgeon on one side and a parson on the other to minister to his certain agony and probable departure elsewhere. Like the cautious Scotch-

* Mr. Benett has since taken some splendid carp from other pools.
man, who, when asked if a man for whom there was an inquiry was "still there," gave for the reply,—"No, that he was gone."

"Gone! where to?" was the rejoinder of the querist.

"I canna tak on mysel' just to say whar he's gone to, but he's dead," was the cautious conclusion to the dialogue.

The only way in which we can account for all old ponds, from time immemorial, to have been stocked with that horrible fish, the carp, is, that in days long gone, when there were more Roman Catholics and less sea fish, it was deemed necessary to have something like a fish to put before the poorer ecclesiastics or brethren, and perhaps to eat a carp might have been deemed, and very naturally so, a penance for sin. I doubt very much if an abbot, or any soul who had anything else to eat, ever touched that fish for sustenance. This strange love of the carp has been handed down to many unthinking Protestants of the present day; for, with astonishment, I have had the question of "What fish were in the ponds I saw?" answered with the unblushing assurance that "they had put carp into the ponds, but had never seen them again."
"Nor will you," I exclaimed, "till you let off the water; you may occasionally catch a starved, bull-headed, scaley ghost, that is not worth 'the worm at one end of the line,' that the creature, rudely called a fool, at the butt-end of the rod cannot eat; but as the carp stick their heads into the mud to let the lead line of the net draw over them, nothing can ever be made out regarding the contents of the pond till you drain off the water, and ruin every other fish there may be in it."

The best French cook in the history of kitchens, though he may cover a carp in a dish with sauce of the most exquisite description, cannot make the flesh on the fish firm, nor can the bones in it be reduced or removed sufficiently to avoid the proximity of a suffocating death.

In the correspondence I have previously noticed, and wherein my friend, Mr. Vere Fane Benett, alludes to great quantities of this horrible fish,* I must observe that there is one use to which these fish can be put, that thus regarding it, may be made useful to the community, or to the poor

* He has since discovered much better carp, and sold them well in London to Jews who, being "unbelievers," disbelieved in bones, and passed them over as in duty bound.
distracted child, whose tottering "Constitution" has so many blatant nurses offering different remedies.

If Mr. Benett, or any other of our landed gentry, have large quantities of these, in all instances, far overrated fish, let him order his teams, with the leave of the surveyors, to collect the heaps of road sand from the sides of the highways, and let him make a heap as large as he likes, or sufficiently large to overpower the smell of, and to absorb the quantity of carp. Let this heap be turned over at given periods, and the carp thus amalgamated in its proportions, and as far as that heap goes, he will have the finest manure possible. If his lands are light, let some old thatches that have chanced to be pulled off ricks or cottages, be mixed in this heap also, simply to hold the manure together, and then, I am sure, when Mr. Benett, or any other large proprietor, sees in the following spring the effect upon his crops, he will wish for more carp for that purpose, for more carp anywhere, in fact, than in a dish before him.

The most extraordinary sight in regard to carp I ever saw, was in a still, hot day in the summer of 1872, in the lake situated in the midst
of the lovely woods of Fonthill Towers, one of the seats of the Dowager Lady Westminster.

That is a lake, so to speak, of considerable dimensions, and, in places, of very considerable depth; indeed, in spots I am told that it is almost unfathomable. Besides its volume of still water, it has its sunny shallows, with a clear, clean, stony bottom, and everything suitable to many kinds of useful and delicious fish, were they but there.

I do not hesitate to say I have seen thousands on thousands of small carp, with thin bodies and large heads, basking on the top of the water in hot, still days; and I have seen them pretend to be trout from very hunger, and rise at and take any fly or moth that accidentally dipped on the surface near them.

This wooded lake, so beautifully situated in the bosom of mighty trees, is fed by very small springs; those that reach the eye are very scanty, but as the lake always keeps to the brim, I think there must be a larger and natural underground supply—a supply which no "soak" from adjoining uplands could administer. Here is a \textit{waste} of water, so far as any valuable produce is concerned, for that great, over-grown, and
now misused baby, the "constitution"—a waste of water, so far as the English appetite for food is thought of, but not wasted, in regard to the splendid landscape, and the well kept-up woodland garden, or the enjoyment of the kind and hospitable lady, who so generously and widely really watches over the interest of the working-classes, for she does enjoy the beauties of her gifted domain.

Here is decidedly one of the lakes that does not yield fish or fowl to the larder, but which might yield both. I take this as an instance of the theme under discussion, and I put the question to myself of how this fine sheet of water could be turned to more useful and enjoyable purposes? The usual remedy, on all occasions put in force for carp, cannot be resorted to, to drain the depths of this lake—must not be thought of: how, then, are you to get out the pest of carp, and to make room for other fish? You cannot sufficiently do this with nets, and, therefore, there is no visible way, keeping an eye to the maintenance of the water and beauty of the woods, by which success can be obtained unless you resort to two remedies which seem to me to be possible—the one remedy to follow closely on the other. I would stupefy and take out the
carp, and this could be done without in any way injuring the purity or healthiness of the water,—at least, such is my present opinion, and I have full belief in its success. The remedy to be resorted to there is no need to dilate on, as it is one that should be publicly referred to as little as possible, though I am well aware that a portion of this remedy for carp is known, and that it has been and is often resorted to by the thieves of fish, and that the fish—the common white fish, chub, roach, and dace—thus taken, have been and are sold for the table by thieves to any customers who will buy them.

If, as I believe, the thousands of the larger carp could thus be safely and profitably reduced, into such a lake situated like the one referred to, I would then put as many pike as by possibility could be procured to keep down the carp fry that would be perpetually struggling into existence.

The question may here be asked, if those pike are thus encouraged and grow to an immense size, as I am sure that in that lake they would, what, then, is to become of the feathered inhabitants of the water proposed to be kept on it, for the huge pike would destroy their young?

My reply to this is, that on a lake of deep
water, without adjoining shallow swamp, warmed in its masses by the sun, wild fowl could not breed up their own young, on such an expanse of cold, deep water, "cramp" must kill them, but their eggs, whenever the old birds laid them far and near, could be carefully watched, and taken and put under barn-door hens; the young reared at a distance on the grass, like pheasants, and taken down with their coops and old hens to the margin of the lake when half-fledged and too old for any sized pike to swallow.

There would be no objection, by way of experiment, to turn into this lake some large trout, if they could be got, with the pike. The generality of the store pike would be small, and, until the pike grew, the large trout, growing also, would take care of themselves. But in that lake I do not think that trout would breed, for want of the necessary beds of sandy gravel and insufficiency of running streams. Perch might be put in also to any amount, and as many large ones as could be procured. I am certain perch would do there, and they would assist to keep down the carp fry. Perch are the most prolific breeders within my knowledge, and there
is this following fact, and it in all my piscatory experience has forced itself upon me.

In large waters, lakes, or rivers, I have ever caught the finest trout, and perch, and pike, when the stock of fish has been of every sort and kind; the fact being that they subdue the too prolific progeny of each other, and give the room and food required for each to thrive and come to the best perfection.

In the lake to which I have thus particularly referred as a water eaten up by carp, there are eels; but at present, with the exception of eels and carp, I do not know that there are fish of any other kind; and, of all lakes in the world, the one at Fonthill Towers offers the finest field for the experiments I have suggested.

In my visits and travels it is astonishing the enormous tracts of water in the aggregate that I have seen and known to be in the neglected and useless state referred to, affording not a mouthful of food to the big, ill-used, over-dosed baby, the "Constitution"; nor a delicacy, nor a fowl of any kind to the proprietor's table, nor to his amusement with the rod or gun.

This dearth in amusement and utility extends, more or less, in certain sites, over the United King-
dom; but in Scotland there is a speciality and a waste of that excellent fish the eel, for thousands on thousands of tons of eels might be caught with proper "stages" on the rivers, near their outlets from the lakes, and, indeed, from their whole river extent, which, whatever may be the Scottish distaste for that excellent fish, would amply repay the construction of the stages, and, in some places, return a handsome income to the proprietor.

Proprietors seem to me to forget (they have always forgotten) that railroads now put fish that are taken in Scotland at once alive and fresh in the London market, as well as in all the markets of all the towns in England; and that for the fish which in Scotland is shuddered at and despised there is an immense demand, hitherto to an enormous extent not half supplied, only to be made use of and increased by a little attention and trouble.

Years ago, when on a visit to Taymouth, in the late Marquis of Breadalbane's time, some time before his deeply lamented death, I had suggested to him the taking of the countless and beautiful eels in his various lakes and rivers, and transporting them at once by rail to the market which I knew full well could be had, and he
thoroughly entered into the idea. We had other plans in regard to the crossing of bison cow with the Scottish bull, which I am sure would have answered admirably; the breed before I got to Taymouth having been made the reverse way, and through that mistake, the bisonic hump nearly cost the life of the mother—a fact that a bailiff with two ideas ought to have foreseen.

The offspring, however, of this erroneously arrived at cross, came to the butcher quicker and fatter than any other beast of the pure breed. We had also a project for ascertaining whether the cross between the male capercailzie and the greyhen were mules or merely hybrids. I suspected that they were the latter, and would prove fecund, for capercailzie and black-game are essentially "grouse," and I saw no reason why that cross should not be a perfect success. We mooted also a large cross of the red deer in park and forest—a fact that is wanted all over Scotland, for, generally speaking, the red deer have terribly deteriorated in size; but all these curious, useful, and interesting experiments were cut across by the death of a nobleman, gentleman, friend, and man, whose likeness I have never looked on again,
and do not expect to, were I to reach the age of a hundred years.

Well, then, in the United Kingdom there is certainly, and to all intents and purposes, "a waste of water" that might be made advantageous and pleasurable to its possessors; and while they themselves got pleasure and income out of it, a vast store of wholesome and delicious food might go to fill out the pinafore of the restless baby, the "Constitution," some of whose pretended nurses in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square are perpetually sticking pins and needles into its pillows, to make the uneasy bantling call out and cry to them for their removal.

But if we agree to the position, and none of us can help doing so, there does extend over the United Kingdom a large watery extent that returns neither food nor pleasure of any kind, save as a bath, and that the stump-orators of Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square, and other sects, always avoid, what am I to say of the vast portion of waste land which exists, like the water, with very little amusement or food upon it, so loudly referred to by demagogues, as sites purposely withheld by peers and large proprietors from
the growth of food for the people? It was by the blatant stump men claimed as a visible sin to be laid on an overbearing and cruel aristocracy, who, while the "Constitution" was starving, kept that wide extent of barren land for their own immediate and selfish pleasure. This is a grave charge, though made by vague minds, and one worth a few moments' serious consideration.

Granted, then, in the first instance, that there is a very considerable acreage at present put to no available resources whatever, either as a site for the production of the craving appetite of the "Constitution," or for the pleasurable amusement of the proprietors.

If a proprietor, or one of the much-abused aristocracy, cannot derive any income out of these at present unprofitable acres, surely, in the absence of all derivable income, he has a perfect right to get as much pleasure-profit out of this "waste," so-called, as he can. But, alas! so desolate and poor are the acres and the soil, and subsoil, that—

"Far as the eye could reach no tree was seen,  
Earth clad in russet, scorn'd the lively green;  
No bird—except as bird of passage—flew;  
No bee was heard to hum, no dove to coo;  
No streams, as amber smooth, as amber clear,  
Were seen to glide or heard to murmur here."
In many of these sites, air and exercise after a snipe or two—not the "solitary snipe," for he would be more worth the trouble—are the only solaces to the cruel (so-called) and aristocratic proprietors, who avail themselves of what the "stump" and Cockney orators call "the bloody Game Laws," though those laws, in this instance, afford scarce any blood at all. Fancy a large landowner retaining a desert under his control for one shot at, perhaps, a jack snipe!

Now I would ask these stump men and "best" abusers (I borrow this word, in this instance, from my late friend, the "O'Connell," as the stump orators borrow from him the sanguinary name they apply to the Whigs, they could not have invented a strong word themselves) to point out to that universal, and soon to be, if left to them, bandy-legged bantling, the "Constitution," what is to be, or can be, done with the at present unprofitable land they allude to?—what ought to be done with it, what can be grown on it, and what manner of produce from it is to fill the poor bantling's stomach?

I ought not to ask these restless men this question before I have described to them the nature
of surface and subsoil as to which they speak, because I venture to say they have never seen it nor tested it, and that they know very little of rural affairs. To be sure they can know nothing of things they have never seen, so I am most happy to give them that "bolt hole" for escape.

In many of these "waste districts" thus claimed as sinfully kept barren for the personal pleasure of the aristocracy, and to starve the "Constitution," the land lies thus.

There is a scanty growth of poor heather upon it, drawing its nourishment from a slight covering of its own decayed roots, those roots lying on a white, glassy sand and white flinty gravel on the surface soil.

I think I hear some of these self-constitutional nurses (Heaven save the mark!) exclaim, "Oh, aye, but what about the subsoil?" Of course they have parroted that word from some market-gardener's discourse over a pipe of tobacco, through the fumes of which he quietly derides his questioners.

The subsoil on many of these sites, as examined by me, has been white, glassy sand and flinty gravel, and, perhaps, beneath that an iron pan holding unprolific water.
"Well, then," exclaim these market-gardener-taught professors, "break through the pan, and then you will come to productive soil." Not so, for beneath the pan, of whatever kind that pan may be, there often is a worse sand and gravelly flintage than there was above in the superstructure, for underneath the pan the sand is quite white, and shines in the sun like pulverized glass, and perhaps below that a rock of stalwart stone or flints.

If these stump orators are really anxious to grow food for the tottering "Constitution," whose detrimental limbs they themselves assuredly represent, why do they not take to agriculture? I will pledge myself to the assurance that they can have large farms of these so-called "waste lands" at a very moderate rent, giving good security for their tenure of course, on which to try to grow anything they like. They will find it a healthful recreation, with as much air and exercise as they can desire, and, besides, it will relieve them from the unpleasant charge of being "vox et praterea nihil," or likened in an unsavoury simile to a young crow, the meaning of which reference I leave to their more profound judgment and self-application.

If we cannot let these impossible-to-be-cultivated
lands to a tenant-farmer, or grow anything on them ourselves but a jack-snipe, what truth or justice is there in charging the landowners with a cruel privation upon the starving poor? The poor, indeed! Why the poor are really put in want by "unions" and "strikes," both of which are advocated by these evil and selfish-purposed orators, who stump it now in every direction, and do incalculable mischief.

If in England we cannot let certain districts, why are we not to preserve a jack-snipe, or wild duck or hare, if these are the only products that the land gives us?

If in Scotland we cannot let our rocky mountains for agricultural purposes, they will not carry sheep, why not permit us to keep deer, and so employ a vast proportion of the labouring poor in the shape of gillies? In Wales the same thing would apply in some places; so, if we cannot get income and a supply of food for ourselves and the public, who can really have a just quarrel with us for getting some pleasurable recreation, derived, too, from among the burdens ever attending on landed property?

Having thus looked into the real state of the so-called "neglected waste lands," let us now look
to what available source of profit for the owner, and food for the labouring classes, could be got out of them.

The only article of food that could be deduced from them is the wholesome meat of rabbits, at present so largely consumed by the labouring classes in cities, towns, and country, and without which food, at the present price at which the farmer and the butcher sell their mutton, veal, and beef, they and their families must go without any meat at all.

Now this is an incontrovertible fact, and one well worth looking into for many reasons, as a certain class of agricultural orators, if their speeches deserve that name, essay to fix the name of "useless vermin" on the rabbits—on the animal, in fact, which supports millions of poor people, and undersells the farmer!

There is, to my mind, a vast deal in this latter fact as to prices of meat, and it is one that legislators would do well not to forget when the pretended or mistaken advocates of cheaper food for the people try to take from them that by which so many of them live, and which many farmers dislike, because they know that but for
the rabbits the poorer classes would be driven by starvation to the butcher instead of to the poulterer or dealer in rabbits, or they must eke out an existence on potatoes and bread.

Now, holding to the theme of the waste lands which the revilers of all that is respectable put forward, I grant that, at the present moment, there is an enormous acreage of hitherto unproductive land—unproductive of food, of pleasure, or of profit that *might* be turned into sites for warrens, and by the sites *millions of pounds* of delicate and wholesome meat might thus be added and made cheaply available to the poor. The skins of rabbits pay well, the meat from the rabbits can always be sold at a remunerative though at a cheap price; and then the paunches of the rabbit can be made to do,—as to my certain knowledge they are at this moment made to do in parts of Ireland,—they will keep a poor man's pig till he is "topped up" with a little meal for fattening. There are districts in Ireland where the labouring classes are glad to kill the rabbits for a proprietor, in instances where they have increased too much, and the proprietor cannot spare the time of other servants to do it; the reward of these labourers
for doing this being no more than the gift to them of the paunches of the rabbits killed. The rabbit, according to his size, is as useful as the sheep, and, size considered, can be bought at a much cheaper rate than the farmer or butcher demands for mutton.

Well, then, let the proprietors of these so-called "waste or useless lands" grow on them food for the people.* The turning waste lands into rabbit warrens is not expensive, for a mere bank, properly constructed, will keep the rabbits within the required bounds. Rabbits will live and get fat where nothing else could similarly exist; and here then I suggest a means of adding to the waist or "waist-belt" of that knocked-about baby, the "Constitution."

The late political Gamps, the worst nurses that ever pretended to watch over and guard a "Constitution,"—the Constitution, that blessed babe of three fathers, the offspring of a "Co.,"—have destroyed many of the well-aired churches which

* If any one doubts the immense quantity of food afforded to the labouring classes in the shape of rabbits, in town and country, let him satisfy himself by calling at the poulterers' shops in his vicinity, and thus ascertain the number of rabbits that each shop annually sells.
used to shelter the babe in prayer and good behaviour, and surely now they should aid us, by all just means in their power, and of course without hurting themselves upon their own waste lands, if they have any, in producing more food for the community.

Many a noble duke and peer of my acquaintance would be only too happy to get tenants—responsible tenants, of course,—for their waste lands; but tenants are not to be found who will undertake a too visible failure, and it would be insanity for even stump-orators to urge that the proprietors themselves should attempt to cultivate their wastes, when the said proprietors had ascertained that no useful product except rabbits could be induced to grow.

There is another fact that men in their walk through life should have noticed before they attempt to say what lands could or could not be made to do. There is scarce an extensive heath in England but that a searching eye can discover on parts of it the remains of ridge and furrow. Therefore, some predecessors had attempted cultivation on that spot, and found that it would yield nothing! Depend upon it, in other times of experimental
husbandry, if those heaths, thus once ploughed up, could have been turned to useful and remunerative purposes, they would not now have been permitted to go back to heather and remain abandoned.

Alas! in my opinion, the present generation have taxed the temper of the earth and of nature far too much. So much have they over-taxed the soil and "quacked" it, that Nature now seems to be kicking against this grasping tyranny, and hurling at the attempts of assuming man all sorts of diseases unknown to this country until the introduction of artificial manure. The potato disease came on the year after the artificial manure came in. This, as before mentioned, has been succeeded by the foot-and-mouth disease in cattle, and, according to Lord Radnor's statement, it has attacked his hounds.

Since the introduction of this dram-like stuff,—for, as far as the interests of land are really concerned, it is but a "flash in the pan,"—the feathered game all over the country, particularly the partridge, have been gradually decreasing. I believe my friend Mr. Sturt, of Crichel, has noticed this on his beautiful partridge ground for
many successive seasons, and the pheasants in many places too have been wasting away.

Now—in the autumn of 1872—there was some disease which none of us ever knew before, utterly devastating the ground of hares; and the same, but not to so great an extent, with the much-abused rabbit.

Disease, or the same kind of malady, had ascended,—by contagious properties, I suppose, in the air,—to the ptarmigan on the highest mountains of Scotland, and had devastated the black-game and grouse on the hills and lower level. Turkeys on the farms in some places had sickened with it; and with chickens the epidemic terminated in the most fatal case, of the gapes.

Those partridges that I ventured to kill merely for the table in my own manor, though to the hand in good condition, when picked were black in the skin, and when roasted for the table, under the hands of a good and careful cook, were as black as they looked to be when merely divested of their feathers. So black did they look, though in some instances plump, that I forbade their being served at table any more
and on my manor refrained from partridge-shooting for the season.

If I were to continue to write on these signs of failing times, I would still reiterate to all landed proprietors not to permit the straw to be sold off their farms, as has been done under a pledge from the tenant to purchase and use so much artificial manure, in place of the straw sold away. Though there may be, and to my certain knowledge there are, many most honourable men among the yeomen farmers, still there may be some who might, for the certain good sold away, the proceeds of which were in the vendor's pocket, lay out some money in a stipulated quantity of inferior stuff; for the best worth of artificial manure can be lessened or adulterated to almost nothing.

I see the mischief of this mistaken course in farmyard produce and artificial stuff. I see it in the amount of grain, and more particularly in the straw. If, with the aid of dishonest farming,—dishonest and unfair to the land and to the landlord, and really to the farmer himself, combined with the frightful diseases with which we are assailed,—a famine, or something
like one, does not visit the land, I am much mistaken.

Distracted, disunited, disestablished as men and religions have been and are,—trucked to as crime is, and bold as sectarianism has become, what with bad government, bad farming, worse speaking, and foreign, plague-like poisonous introductions, which Nature—hitherto dear, prolific, and patient Nature—now seems violently to repudiate,—I hold the United Kingdom to be far from happy, and, indeed, in a dangerous state, out of which it is very difficult for the wisest statesman who has since come to the reins of office to see his way.

To return once more to the food that might be grown in the waste waters. I see, in one of the letters published, that the dace is classed as a fish of the same indifferent quality as the roach. Now, the dace is freer from bones than the roach, and a much better flavoured fish. The gudgeon ranks as the freshwater smelt, and the snig is the most delicious of eels—an eel, in fact, in its best season. Chub are much about the same in bones and flavour as the carp, but the chub is not what is called "muddy." The bream is a very good fish when in season, and the bony back
can be avoided by eating only the sides, which are very good indeed. Perch, trout, and greyling there can be no dispute about; and pike the same, when you know how to dress them.

We then come to an excellent fish, of which there are millions in some rivers—the lamperne. They abound in the Avon, near Christchurch, and they are found in the sister river, the Stour; but in that locality these fish, which are prized by us in Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, on the banks of the Severn, as the greatest delicacy when stewed, all but its salmon and shad, are, when caught in Hampshire, thrown away. In Hampshire they are vulgarly called the nine-eyed eel, and people will not eat them. In London, when I rented a fishery on the Avon, at Winkton, I could get no sale for them, so I caught large quantities, and what I did not use at table I turned into manure for the garden and the vines. The lamprey—larger and much more rare than the lamperne—is a most wholesome and delicious fish, but if the great baby, the "Constitution," has no stomach for them, what are his nurses to do?

I see that we are invited, through the public press, to visit "the steam-cultivated farms of
Messrs. Howard, near the town of Bedford." To meet the strikes now going on among the agricultural population, I would implore all people to do the work that is so wrongfully thrown on their hands, if possible, by machinery. Some great effort will be made to achieve this, if these foolish strikes continue, and thoroughly rejoiced should I be to see the strikers met thus by an enemy of their own creation.
CHAPTER VIII.


In the matter under the above head, it will be my endeavour simply to deal, in as plain a narrative as possible, unencumbered by theories, and void of all assumption, save where subsequent realities tread so closely on things that have undoubtedly gone before, that an inevitable conclusion awaits upon the simple facts disclosed.

In a former work of mine, to which I have previously alluded, 'Tales of Life and Death,' I had endeavoured to show how much more strange and
wonderful truth was than any fiction that could be composed for the purpose of creating "sensation." In those tales, instances were given of the mysterious link which occasionally manifests itself as between man, animal, and bird, rendering their lives, to some extent, when least they seem to have anything to do with each other, as curiously and circumstantially conjoined. That narrative of facts thus far has shown how, at times, some omnipotent will ordains, that when all the ingenuity of the most cunning and experienced men, detectives and others, have failed to bring the hideous crime of murder home to the guilty hand, some dog or bird, some beast, or an "eagle," as referred to in the tale of 'The Colleen Rhue,' appears on the scene on heavenward wings, points out the murderer, and even soars, a speck in the immeasurable vault above, as if to witness the execution.

There cannot be the smallest doubt but that the human race, though in occasionally rare instances, have felt upon their souls an unaccountable depression, prophesying approaching misfortune or death. No more doubt is there also than that the same occult feeling of pending misery has as frequently overshadowed the mind of the sagacious
and faithful dog. I have seen it three times in dogs in my own possession: of those, the case of my retriever Diver was the most recent as well as the most remarkable. Early in the morning of his accidental death by my hand and gun, he got loose from the house where he was chained on the lawn, close to the front door; was seen to pass round by the back door (the front door had always been free to him when at large, but he did not in this instance come near it), thence he left home, and subsequently was reported as lying in the grass by the side of the high road, near some men mending the road, whom at any other time he would have avoided or bitten. Thence he was re-called by the gamekeeper, and, returning with him, seemed for a moment as willing to serve and as affectionate to me as ever, and, as usual, on the sight of the shooting party, ready to do his duty. He did his work that day as well as usual, save that at periods of the morning he seemed dull, which I attributed, at the time, to some slight lameness or passing indisposition. In the afternoon he sprang too quickly from my heels as I fired the second barrel over a bank; the charge caught him on the extreme back of the skull, and killed him on the spot.
Be it remembered, that that dear and faithful dog had never wandered from his home before that morning, and that if ever he escaped his collar and got loose, his invariable custom was to come to look for me at the front door. In this instance he left his long-cherished home, and hid himself in an unwonted place, and near distasteful company, evidently in some inexplicable fear of impending death.

It is not now my intention to enumerate all the instances I have seen in beasts, and birds occasionally—but more rarely in birds—indicating a connecting link between what is rather arrogantly termed the inferior mind, and the asserted superiority of human reason. It will, I hope, suffice to show that I have a better foundation for what some people may call my "theories," than that most amusingly clever, but in many ways erratic reasoner, Mr. Darwin has, when he tells his tale of tailless growth, and claims a jelly-fish as the pre-Adamite parent of the apple-tempted pair.

One of my great objects in this work, if not the greatest, is to win for horses, hounds, dogs, and even every other innoxious beast and bird, a better care from man, and to teach man that by restraint of
his own temper, more gentleness and greater humanity, which costs him nothing, he himself may be a great gainer by not only rendering the creatures that belong to him, or are placed in his care, infinitely more valuable in the market, but, by gentleness and good usage, he may win from them far more and better service than can be brought out by harsh, unappreciating, and foolish conduct. For his own sake, man should be kind and gentle to all things under him—things that can only implore by their speaking eyes and humbleness of action. When opposed in fight personally man to man, or assailing marauding beasts, such as a lion, tiger, boar, or wild bull at bay, then man, in his unyielding animosity, may be as resolutely combative as he likes, for ever remembering that with conquest pity should ever come hand to hand.

For myself, save when in following up my game of sport in whatsoever form it may consist, with that, perhaps, thoughtless zeal to which the hunter and the shooter are so prone, if with the gun I wound a harmless creature, my first idea is to spare its life, and to take it home, to cure and tame it. With the combat or the chase should end all harsher feeling; and under the blessing of a sensation akin
to pity such as this, I have frequently added to the numbers of pets who feed from and out of my hands—creatures who, in their earlier lives, regarded the human race as paramount beasts of cruelty and objects for terror.

While on this topic, a strange fact has been illustrated in my decoy for wild fowl in the month of November. After the first shooting day (mine at present is a decoy for shooting, not for netting), in which five guns obtained in single overhead shots one hundred and seventeen head of duck, besides teal and widgeon, and three snipes,—of course some others were wounded and lost,—we shot the various pools on the moors, never disturbing, nor attempting to disturb, the fowl massed thickly enough in a pool which is never disturbed, and in which it is my delight to feed the birds myself.

Apparently, the flocks who were driven over the guns at "the gazes" were very wild, and at last so wary that they kept flying round and round their haunts, high enough to be out of reach of any gun or charge. I then went to my favourite pool, called on the birds there, as I had done all through the French war, for "three cheers for the Prussians," which they immediately gave, and
in passing from that valley to another not yet disturbed, fed the fowl as usual, observing that all my immediate pets, as far as I could discern, were safe.

On the following day, when feeding the safety pool, my eyes were open, in case of a wounded bird, when among the "ruck" of fowl, say about two hundred in number, I observed three who, though anxious to come to my foot, did not look happy, and at the same time were much disinclined to be pushed about in a scramble for the corn by their fellows. Two of these were wild ducks with broken wings only; the third was a mallard with a wing badly broken close to the body, and also stricken in the breast by one or more shots. He came at once to my hand, and there being no chance of saving his life, I picked him up, feeling like a culprit for doing so, as he had crept to my foot in confidence for food and comfort in his distress. The other two ducks seemed only to have broken wings, so they fed, and on the next day were joined by a third wild duck, disabled also in the wing. These three birds survived and recovered of their wounds.

I state this fact to show that even when joined
to wilder companions, and subject to errant flights, the remembrance of one kind hand, food, and shelter, will be present to the recollection of a bird when the hands and guns of others have scared and wounded, even to a broken limb. There is a little seat by this pond, on which three wild ducks will jump up and sit beside me, while dozens of their fellows come between my feet and feed, and, inserting their necks into the bags of corn, greedily swallow the contents.

It seems to me that in all field sports, to render them doubly interesting and variedly beautiful, there should be, to the mind's eye, a combination of events, all adduced by, as it were, the great chess-board of Nature thus laid bare for observation. Yet many there are who think, when out on the moors, of nothing but the grouse and their gun. When after partridges, they only see the stubble-fields, turnips, or potatoes, grasp their guns, and hear, alas! to me, the wretched and mistaken noise of an army of beating feet, tramping, to startle to the wing the bewildered birds. The gunner on the moors must shoot to dogs, but the "ranging" of and the use of those dogs he leaves
to the keeper. He looks at them only when they point; and let their behaviour be good or bad, to use the old, and, in its first instance, misapplied saying, he has not a word—a kind word, "to throw to a dog."

He, this mere gunner absorbed in his gun and grouse, sees not the loveliness of the scene he wanders over. He takes no heed of the surrounding beauty of nature, the blooming blush of her honey-bearing heather reflected back as caught from the mountain brow by the still waters of the placid lake stretched in the vale below; nor does he care for the painstaking, mysteriously-gifted, and carefully-educated dog, who labours the day throughout, not to find anything that he (in this instance the dog, not the man) can eat, but with an unselfish unweariness which never tires the setter or pointer, labours only to please the gun-man and to give him delicacies for his table. Of course I speak of the gunner, I can't call him a sportsman, of the present day. There are some men still in existence, and perhaps a few young men coming on, who love the poetry of sport; but very few are they when compared to the headache gaining gunners of mere
slaughturers who now infest the moor, the stubble, and the cover.

Who, when partridge-shooting, *now* thinks of the setter or pointer, those graceful and grateful companions of the leisure hour? What gunner now cares to pause to snatch a momentary glance at the yellow stubble, the ripened shocks of corn, or the bright green of the fresh and healthily-scented turnips? The pigeon-educated gunner cares only for the smoke, noise and death, and puts his trust in the tramping men in line to put up the partridges under his feet; or if it is in a country where the red-legged partridge abounds, the gunner seats himself under a hedge, pipe in mouth, to have the birds driven to him.

There is no poetry in this—to me there is little enjoyment; but, in my opinion, "the drive" is infinitely preferable to the tramping up birds in line.

To me, on moor, on farm, or in the wood, it is most delightful to have time to pause, and, so to speak, to worship the beauties that surround me. What can be more delicious than on a fine October day, when alone, and wandering for
a pheasant or two, a wood pigeon, a hare, or rabbit, to call in the obedient and loving spaniel,—I detest the metaphor of "the fawning dog,"—and to bid him and the retriever to sit by my side, and to be quiet in their search for death. Then, during this temporary rest, to see the varied hues on the boughs of the forest trees, to inhale the sweet scent of the earliest withering leaves, and to feel that art lies still, and all else lives to praise creation, and to bless the strange, unexplained, and still promisingly mysterious power, that in some hours of a happy life makes mere existence quite a mortal heaven.

What man of any observation is there that has not observed and wondered at the universal mind exhibited from the largest animal, the elephant, down to the smallest ant; if reason—if instinct, still it is mind; and we trace the pervading gift as possessed by everything in life, station, clime, and habits, obedient to a providential will, that prompts the obtaining of food, and teaches the needful attention and care to guard against the dangers of the life into which each living being is called.

Strange things meet the eyes of the naturalist
and sportsman; there cannot be a good and successful sportsman unless he is fully acquainted with the habits of the creature he pursues. Some rules it is impossible for the most studious naturalist to comprehend, and the little and most delicious bird, the wheatear, affords us one of them. To follow the example of Darwin (not a good one) to account for the nervous state of terror in a wheatear at a passing cloud, which, when sailing in the atmosphere above him, induces the bird to seek shelter in the nearest hole, would lead a theorist to suppose that in former years, when two-legged beasts of prey were fewer, and eagles and rapacious foes were many, these pretty, graceful, little birds had been inveterately pursued by winged tyrants even to the death, and then, from a habit of living in terror of some flying monster, the nervousness had been handed down by "sexual selection" to the birds of the Sussex Downs. The shepherds on the Downs are so aware of this nature in the bird, that they raise a turf on the short greensward, which, without artificial means, affords no shelter, to entice the wheatear to seek it, when in terror, from a passing cloud, or from a more real enemy,
a hawk, and thus they snare them with a horse-hair noose for the gourmands of Brighton, or any other neighbouring town.

What can be more curious than the knowledge which wild fowl, teal, and ducks show of a mere speck approaching from the distant horizon? Before the eye of man has power to ascertain the nature of the approaching bird, the wild fowl are well aware of the foe and his predatory habits. They at once distinguish, when not a hue of feather can be seen, between the falcon and the kite or buzzard-hawk, and act accordingly to their never-failing perception. If it is a falcon that is approaching, they sit still on the water, or creep beneath the banks or overhanging willows, because they know the noble falcon will seldom "take" but on wing. If it is a buzzard or kite, they take to their own wings, because they know, from the slow flight of the foe, as well as from his inclination to "pick up," that the use of their swifter wings gives them the best chance for safety. Even the flocks of starlings which roost in my laurels around the house, to the great detriment of shrubs and the annoyance of pheasants, afford me a lesson, for by their bearing and flight I know
if that very destructive vermin to game, the sparrowhawk, is on my premises or not. The hawk, aware of the many starlings that come into roost, with a quick and noiseless flight slides beneath all boughs, and suddenly ascends to the laurels or ever-green oak, and sits as still as the bough he is on till some restless and chattering starling gets within his reach. The starlings, however, very soon get aroused to their danger, and they keep a watch after they come in, to see what becomes of the hawk, and by the precaution they adopt they bring me as an able ally, with my gun, to their assistance. If it is time for the starlings to be chattering to each other in their selected bushes for roost, and silence reigns, and they are not there, then they have, by their vigil, been made aware of the presence of the hawk, and, mounting high in air, they keep soaring around in flocks, watching for the hawk to take his departure.

It is, of course, impossible to say in which direction the hawk will go, when he has to seek his own roost, so that in aid of the starlings, or rather to be rid of a bad vermin, myself and my men can only post ourselves at a venture, many
times unsuccessfully, but at times we succeed in slaying the depredator.

There was a white owl that used to come by night into the bushes after the starlings, and for a time met with wonderful sport, for his bag of birds was occasionally so large that he has brought in and left in a cow-shed, where he never roosted, as many as seven starlings. I liked the owl better than the starlings; but his nocturnal visitations were attended with so much fluttering and noise among the birds, that the retriever, in his house on the lawn, was perpetually barking at what he supposed was mischief, and arousing me.

One anecdote as to the beautiful affection of a lurcher to her whelps, and then to other matters. Had I been aware of this fact in time, there is, or was, a chance of my saddling myself with a colony of lurchers for life, for I must have loved the dam and all her litter.

One morning, at day-break, one of the keepers found the lurcher caught by the fore-leg in a severe steel trap. While in that position she had given birth to a litter of puppies, if I recollect rightly, five in number, two dead and three alive. With the poor little paw left at liberty she had
scratched for herself and her puppies a sort of bed of earth and grass, and, as far as the trap would let her do so, in the cold winter's night and morning, forgetful of her own pain, she had curled herself round her puppies to keep them warm. The fact was reported to me—I, luckily, saw nothing of it; mother and puppies were removed, and I believe that an excitement to haste in this matter arose among my men, from a knowledge possessed by them that, lurcher or no lurcher, had the natural affection of the creature existing under such difficulties been known to me, not a hair of herself or her puppies would have been injured. On the younger portion of my readers, then, I would most sedulously endeavour to impress that it is possible, in some degree, to refine the roughest amusement; gold can be made to shine even in addition to its lustre, and the lily delicately treated, though not absolutely "painted," will raise her pure head and look more lovely, ere, alas! like other things, she fades away. Passion of every sort, even the intensity of love, should be governed by a spell that held all else but affection in a bondage irreproachable, and bound every thought of man to the interests
of the loved one in stronger ties, far, far beyond those inculcated by mere nature. Pity, compassion, generosity, and forgiveness of attempted ill, should adorn the successful hero, let him kill or conquer what he may. Those feelings should rule in the battle-fields of armies, in arms—yes, in arms of every sort; for, if possible, man should never be over-exalted by any success, nor lose his wits as drunkards do from passing intoxication, which, while it lasted, brutified even the beast, and banished the remembrance of every just and generous refinement.

For myself, I am arrived at that time of life when summer brings me more enjoyment than winter. The return of spring, with its tuneful and joyous minstrelsy, its budding boughs, its primrose, violet, and scented air, though rudely checked by cold as our springs now are, brings to me many memories of happy hours; and deprived of the glorious steed, as I have been for so long, perhaps that has helped to turn me to seek a quieter field for sylvan recreation. If the loss of my horses has brought or assisted to bring this about, the gun and rifle have never left my hand yet; still, at the present time, I love more to rear
by hand the rising covey, and to see the wild
duck and the pheasant bring out their young,
than to pull the fatal trigger. To watch a happy
bison calf now in the far West frisking round its
cow, would please me more than the chase and
combat with the bison bull; and yet, as to strength
and activity, I cannot detect much failing, though
the close of a sportsman's life cannot be far off.
Of this I am perfectly sure, that year by year,
almost hour by hour, the great book of nature
yields fresh mysteries to the seeking mind, that
seem to have been unaccountably passed over;
perhaps in turning the pages the leaves may have
adhered together, and thus the information has
been lost. If succeeding men, then, really wish to
find the truth, if they would divest ancient lore
of the tricks of the only men who had the power
to hand it down, as what they pleased, or served
the priestly purpose, let them seek the rock-bound
testimony braced in the bosom of the earth, sealed
under the imperishable pen of departed worlds:
a remaining record of the life that once rejoiced
in the same sun that warms us now. In these
terribly tenacious truths the assertions of priests
have no part; there is nothing there that even
points to Adam or to one great deluge, nor that reveals a vestige of fossilized man. The longer we live, the wider the boasted good of education, and the much-lauded increase of civilization and learning, the more schism and dissent and discontent increase, till where there was one seceder from what was once called "the established faith," dissent now numbers many thousands. The schoolmaster has certainly been abroad, but he is all abroad now, for his teaching has taught hypocrisy, and, with a certain class, utter contempt for the oath sworn on what used to be called the Holy Bible. As a county magistrate, I am most reluctantly forced to confess that the working-classes, generally,—that is, the lowest class of labouring men and women,—set no more store by an oath, when they wish to prove an alibi for a friend in trouble, than they do by the sighing of an idle wind.
CHAPTER IX.

DECOYS FOR WILD FOWL.

Two Kinds of Decoy—Description of the Ancient Decoy, for Taking—Decoys at Berkeley Castle—Birds do not distinguish Friend from Foe by Scent—Their Keen Discrimination of Sound—Modern Decoy for the Use of the Gun—Decoys at Alderney Manor—Ducks Taught to Obey the Word of Command—Method of Forming and Sheltering the Decoy Ponds—Rearing from Wild Ducks' Eggs—How to Proceed with the Old and the Young Birds—Curious Incident—Decoy Ducks—Attachment to Place—Feeding—Friendship with Birds—My Friend the Black Cock—Wire-Fenced Pool for Teal—Extermination of House Rats—Creatures most Destructive to Wild Fowl—Poison should Never be Used.

The decoy, though in former times an appendage to most large domains, has been for many years almost entirely neglected, save in some few counties, where it has still been retained or farmed for the supply of the public market. Wander where you will over most of the English counties, you frequently stumble on the remaining marks of an ancient decoy, the same as you do on the
little mound denoting the spot of the village cock-pit.

There are two sorts of decoys; the ancient, and by far the most profitable in a pecuniary point of view, and for which a protective law by the Legislature was provided and is still unrepealed, is that for the "taking" of wild fowl; the more modern decoy pool, or, properly speaking, pools, is simply a breadth of water kept quiet and provided with pinioned decoy birds, for the purpose of collecting fowl sufficient for the bag to be made by the gun.

The decoy for taking fowl is the first to which I will invite the reader's attention.

In the olden time these decoys generally consisted of an artificial piece of water, from one to two acres in extent, square in shape, with four pipes leading from the four corners, to suit, as the old boys used to say, the four different points of the wind, as it was a supposed matter of necessity for the decoy man to keep down wind of the ducks, lest they should "smell him out," and be scared by their noses from the pool!

Some of the smaller decoys were made with one, two, or three pipes, according to the con-
venience of cost attending them; but the full-sized old decoy had generally the four pipes, for the reason I have stated.

The entrance to each pipe was commanded by the broad water, so that the collected fowl should be able to see the decoy dog, as he passed through the several holes along the small bank, or sitting that was made for that purpose within the fence of the decoy. Each time that the dog came through one of the holes and went out again at another, and so on, he got nearer to the entrance of the net, and at last within or beneath the front entrance to the pipe, when, if the ducks followed him out of curiosity, or from an inclination inherent in all birds to "mob a vermin," the decoy man "showed" behind them, through oblique gaps made for the purpose in the screen of the decoy, and by a suddenly created panic drove the scared birds completely up the "pipe," till, by the decrease of the hoops that supported the net, they all fluttered in a helpless mass, one upon the other, in a termination not much more extensive at the end than a very large cabbage-net. Extracted one by one at the end, their necks were broken without the displacement of
a feather. Thus duck and fowl, and every sort of the common and lesser wild fowl, as well as the rarest kinds, were taken in any quantity. I believe it is on record that one decoy in one season, in Lincolnshire, captured as many as fourteen thousand head.

No wonder, then, that in those blessed and blissful days of more ducks than men, enactments were made for their protection, and guns on adjacent land to a decoy were forbidden to be fired.

It will be understood by the reader that the entrance to the pipes commenced with very high hoops to support the net, and that the water at the entrance was the breadth of a small brook, diminishing gradually both as to height of net and breadth of water, until terminating in the large cabbage-net—I use that expression to suit the knowledge of my reader—into which the scared fowl were ultimately driven.

All round, or all on one side, the broad water of the decoy, there should be what is termed a "sitting." A sitting is a bank abutting on the screen or fence of the decoy, and extending six or eight feet from it to the edge of the water. It should be raised above the level of the pool, say
about six inches, so that the fine level turf with which the sitting should be covered, could be kept perfectly dry as well as smooth, and be easily ascended to by the luxuriously inclined water-fowl, who appreciate a dry warm place for their feet when not upon the water, and they will not haunt a decoy permanently unless this luxury is provided.

The slanting "shows," when the decoy man suddenly lets himself be seen by those ducks who follow the dog to the entrance of the pipe, are so contrived by the slant in the screen, that the body of the fowl left on the pool that have not followed the dog do not see the decoy man while he scares his intended catch, and the further the frightened birds go towards the end of the pipe, the more they are out of sight and hearing, the curve of the pipe taking them well distant at the back of the screen, and out of all earshot of the broad water. Little "gazes" are made in the screen of the decoy for the man to look through, to see what fowl he has on the water; these places are termed by some decoy men "squinnie holes," derived, perhaps, from "squinting" through; and it is one of these
gazes which enables the first man to see if the fowl follow the dog to the pipe within taking distance, and then, if they do, he makes a sign to the man who works the dog; to "show" behind the fowl at the right moment. Sometimes the ducks are sleepy and too idle to be decoyed; sometimes, from some reason or other, they are shy and too wary; sometimes they are slack, and come a little way and pause. In the latter case, the man at the squinnie hole makes a sign to the man working the dog, and the dog is made to repeat his first entrance before going on for another, until the birds come on or decline to do so altogether.

If no fresh fowl, or "foreign flights," happen to be on the pool at the time at which "a take" is designed; those that are there may consist of some of those ducks who have not gone in with the rest far enough up the pipe to be captured, but who have had time to turn back in the face of the man attempting to scare them. These ducks may remember the dog as the cause of their being frightened, and decline to follow him.

I remember one day returning from hunting at Berkeley Castle by the "old decoy" (the then
existing Lord Fitzhardinge had two decoys in full work), and we dismounted to see some ducks taken. The usual well-trained little cur-dog was shown through the accustomed holes, but not a duck would follow him, there being no strange birds there, or, if there were a few, they were so few that they were kept back by the wary flock, and failed to come on. Having a fox’s brush in my pocket, I tied it to the cur-dog’s tail, and put him through again. This appendage was a novelty to the birds—a novelty there, but a sight they were, no doubt, well acquainted with elsewhere, for the Vale of Berkeley was full of foxes, and all the ducks without further hesitation came after the fox’s brush up to the pipe, and we made a very good capture. To do the thing well by these "taking decoys," the fowl should be regularly fed with barley; the corn put in every night while the ducks were out. In times of hard frost, the ice on the pool should always be broken some little time before daylight, time enough to complete the work well before a symptom of the dawn, so as to receive the ducks on their return, and then, when the fowl are in any quantity, they will keep the water
sufficiently open to their selection and use all day.

There is an expression very commonly used, it consists in the word "decoy-duck." I believe such birds so-called were used by the ancients in decoys, because I have found birds so called kept by some old decoy men in the present day; but in the decoy for taking ducks there should be no decoy bird, nor half-tame birds whatever. It is best to be without them. In the olden time, men were not so wise in some things as they are now, though in many they might be infinitely more jolly than they are at present; and they used to attribute to ducks less sense or cunning than they really possessed, and more natural gifts than Nature ever gave them. Thus they attributed to waterfowl the keenest possible sense of smell, and thought they could wind or scent humanity when behind the screen of the decoy, if the wind blew from the man towards the fowl. It was this erroneous supposition that induced the ancients to have four pipes to their decoys, as before explained, so as to suit each wind.

This power of smelling was a myth, like many of the dicta of the ancient writers on natural
history, as ducks do not use the olfactory nerve, if they have it, for any purpose of guidance whatever. Neither does the pheasant, nor any bird with the habits of which I am acquainted. But in times of danger, they have, particularly the waterfowl, and ducks especially, the keenest sense of hearing. If in a decoy the most minute sound up-wind of them comes on the favouring air, the ducks will at once take wing; and it is this fact that makes uneducated men, with hearing less acute, and prone to disturb profound silence even with a yawn or a hasty breath, or even an exudation of tobacco, attribute the disturbances of the ducks to the wrong cause.

I remember going one day, when at Combe Abbey, with the late Lord Craven,—whose death to this hour I have never ceased most deeply to deplore,—to take some fowl in his decoy. We were accompanied by the young ladies, who wished to see how the pool was managed; and when we reached the screen, the old decoy man approached us with pieces of dry turf or peat, one end of which he lit before putting it into our hands,—this he did by the young ladies as well as by Lord Craven and myself, and then took the same
precaution in regard to his own piece of burning peat; so, knowing that this peat affair was of no sort of use, I winked at Lord Craven, and we both put our fires out, laughing, at the same time, to ourselves when we did so. When these burning pieces of peat were given to us, I remember whispering to my host, that if, as he (the decoy man) said, "the smoking turf was to prevent the ducks from smelling our breath," we were all expected to hold the burning peat close to our lips; if the young ladies were to have one considerable sized piece, I supposed the old decoy man would put his own head into a peat stack, as there must be degrees of offence in which the breath should assail the birds; so the whole affair was nonsense from one end to the other. It was a funny idea, I thought, to see these pretty faces inhaling smoke, and no more smoke than that old man, the sigh from one lip and the rude breath from the other deemed, even in their terrific effects, to need no more disguise the one than the other. The end of this peat-smoking farce was, that we caught some ducks with all our artificial fumes frustrated by common consent.

In lying by moonlight under a very little bank,
the wind setting direct from me to the water, I have had wild ducks come swimming and feed so near me, that I could have touched them with the barrel of my gun.

To illustrate the fact that birds of any kind distinguish neither friend nor foe by scent, I take the pheasant,—as all sportsmen of any knowledge must have remarked, that if they are in ambush, and completely hidden from sight, and not making any noise while a cover is being driven towards them, pheasants, up-wind or down-wind, will come running to pass within two yards of them, and not be in the least aware of man's immediate presence.

Not so the hare and rabbit; if they come hopping by up-wind of the gun, even if the man stands against a tree, fully confessed, if the man stirs not hand nor foot, the hare and rabbit having no appreciation of dangerous proximity but by motion and their noses, will pass as if the entire coast was free. But, on the other hand, let man be ever so masked by ambush, ever so completely hidden, if the hare or rabbit comes down-wind of him, the instant they catch the tell-tale current of air, they stop, look bewildered,
hastily turn back, or bolt off in some contrary direction.

*Nothing more* is needed than *this fact* to prove the fallacy of supposing that birds have the faculty of sniffing the approximation of a foe.

Immense care must be observed, in a decoy for taking fowl, to keep the paths by the "screen" a couple of inches or more deep in the atoms of tan from a tan-yard, or with sawdust, or very fine sand; for ducks can hear with the keenest discrimination of sound, and if down-wind of the decoy man, *of course* they hear *much better* than if they are *up-wind*; and this it is that has led to the delusion in vulgar minds that the birds smell the men out, while really they have distinguished some almost impalpable sound, that has not been noticed by the man from whom it proceeded.

If in a decoy you take a duck once called a decoy bird, the tamer the decoy-duck is, the sooner he comprehends man's trick, and "turns up an eye" at it for the future when needed to lead to the pipe again. These decoy-ducks, thus awake to the place of capture, will, by keeping away themselves, prevent more ignorant birds from
following the dog, and utterly mar success. The easiest and the largest takes are invariably the strange and wildest birds; and I would sooner have to do with a foreign flight just arrived, than with ducks indigenous to the surrounding country.

It is my intention, the first opportunity I have, of arranging a "taking decoy," to do away with the use of the dog, and, in place of the dog, to substitute stuffed animals of different kinds and colours, such as the fox, the polecat or ferret, the stoat, and various coloured cats, so that there should be no sameness in the decoying object. A stout wire running clean round through the first two holes, and the same to the next two, and so on, will enable the stuffed decoy to pass round the two holes, and appear at the first hole again if the ducks have hesitated to come on. Or if the first represented "guy" does not draw, then it can be changed to another till the desired effect is produced.

A few rollers for the wire to run on would suffice, and the guy could be attached by small clasps, which would allow of its being taken on and off. Thus, with this wire so made to
every two holes, whatever guy was first put on could be used at all the holes throughout. This, I believe, would be a complete novelty in decoys, and, properly contrived, the effect of it would be immense. The cost, trouble of training, and uncertainty of behaviour in the dog, would be done away with, and the object sought completed to much better purpose.

And now to the decoy for the use of the gun. In many estates there are wide tracts of moor and bog of no use whatever. In their present state they return no income, and are fallow as to profit or pleasure, their only occupant, perhaps, a snipe. They may be impossible to the purposes of cultivation; and if there is a considerable bog, in nine cases out of ten it is not merely occasioned by surface water, termed a "soak," but there is sure to be a spring, and, perhaps, in a space, many springs, that hitherto had been hidden by superincumbent moss, or the constant growth and decay of vegetation. Many of the sites of such bogs as these that I allude to lie between narrow hills, and often being out of the way of receiving any artificial drainage from higher lands, they are not subject to floods other than such as
may be easily regulated by a very simple method.

The manor which I hold while writing this, had two of these narrow bogs, that suited the purpose I had in view. There were other bogs, but their position was wider of the most retired places than those selected for my decoy, and hence, in my own mind, the matter was resolved.

The bog in question, now called "the home decoy," had been drained to the last dregs of moisture, as if the former occupant, who had under-leased it to me, had been querulously afflicted with hydrophobia.

If this utterly superfluous drainage had been done with a view to cultivate the bog, then I can understand it, because the stone wall of impossible cultivation would have been uncovered, and the white shingly sand made manifest, so as to put an end to the attempt; and the state in which I found matters would have been sufficiently explained. But if it never had been the intention to attempt the cultivation of such white sand and shingle mixed with very poor and scanty peat, why take all the trouble of these drains, the bog itself being so very low that no other drainage to the
useful lands above was needed? All superfluous water from the higher level went to the bog, and ran off in a little stream to the sea by natural position. The moment I set my eyes on this bled-to-death useless waste,—several little natural springs asserting their impossible-to-be-exhausted presence by trickling into the main deep drain,—I imagined my present shooting decoy. The place was let to me for its shooting, with the house in a very bad state of repair, and unfurnished, save one old carpet, no bells in the house, and a roof letting in any amount of wet in rainy and windy weather.

The shooting consisted of two pheasants; I bestowed on each a Christian name, for I soon got to know them by sight, the one from the other; and, finding themselves no longer shot at, they very soon became tame to me, and took up their residence in the laurels round the house.

I do not think that on the land let to me for shooting purposes there was more than a brace of hares; but there was a fair show of partridges on the distant farms, and in the Pinaster Woods, close home, any amount of rabbits, as you invariably find, if they are tacitly or otherwise let
to be the perquisite of a mere farm-labouring bailiff, who told a master, incapable of judging of the matter himself, just what suited his purpose. There were also a few black-game, hitherto always shot down on the 20th of August, under the Cockney term of "heath-poults," at a time when the male birds were not distinguishable from the hens.* As to snipes, there were some at times; and but one duck was all I saw on the moors within the first twelve months.

In one of the lower home-fields there was a small circular pond, perhaps a little over ten yards across it either way; and this was fed by a beautiful little rill that rose in the upper part of the same long field. This I at once surrounded with rabbit wire-netting, leaving a margin for sittings, and planting some cover in the way of shelter; and into this were put some pinioned fowl, some of them of the rarest and most beautiful kind. The American wood-duck, the little Pernambuco goose, less in size than a duck, the pintail, and, above all, the Bahama drake. This lovely little bird was given to me by Lady Winchelsea.

* The blackgame in the New Forest and in Dorsetshire are three weeks behind the northern birds in coming to perfection.
The Pernambuco gander, for it was not a goose, attached himself to me, and after a time became perfectly tame; and the gander held me in high repute as the only creature that could talk to him, by imitating his call, among the ducks with whom he was associated. This bird lived with me about nine or ten years, and then died. While speaking of the attachment of a gander, my foes cannot call him "a goose for his pains"; but I wish some of the featherless bipeds of my acquaintance would obtain ganders and geese of that kind, for fowl capable of greater domestication I never saw.

The round pond, after being thus dealt with, was enlarged, and now it is the key to the whole decoy. Never shot in, and never disturbed, and, since the Franco-Prussian war, for my amusement, and to the muttered consternation of the ignorant boors, and in an ornithological attempt to glorify the greatest nation now known, I have taught the throng of birds in that pond, whenever I call on them from a distance to do so, to give "three cheers for the Prussians." They never fail to reply, and the shrill whistle of the Pernambuco gander used to lead them all, like a toast-master calling on a company "to charge their glasses."
When three or four hundred ducks all shout a prolonged quack together, if the wind sets that way down the hollows of the moors, it can be heard two miles off. One day a Bournemouth inhabitant was riding through the village of Kinson, and pulling up his horse by a cottage garden hedge, he asked the labourer digging his potatoes, "What extraordinary noise that was coming down the wind? It sounds, my friend, as if all the ducks on earth were gone mad! but it must be something else."

"'Tain't," replied the matter-of-fact rustic; "'tis his honour's, Mr. Burkly's, ducks a cheering for the Proosians."

The rustic never raised his head in making this reply, and his equestrian querist rode on, muttering to himself that "the man was mad!"

To dam successfully across narrow valleys is not difficult, if you can get a sufficiently stable foundation; giving a slanting and an ample back, so as to hold up a sufficient front to sustain the collected weight of water. Some people say that the supporting back should have the same amount of slant behind and before; but that course I did not pursue, because I expected a consider-
able amount of duck-traffic on and over the banks to pools below, and I desired to give no hold to the nails of the ducks' feet so as to wear away the bank, but to force them to hop or wing up to its summit. Though I knew that no great landward floods were to be apprehended, in one of the dams, however, I had not provided a sufficient "escape" in the right place, when the springs were caused to be in partial flood. The consequence of this was, that in a part of the dam where the chief weight of water rested, near where I had made the escape, the escape was overpowered, and, giving way itself, the rush of water beneath cut the dam completely in two, carrying away great blocks of earth more than a hundred yards towards another pool. The dam of that pool, however, held good, and no further damage was experienced.

This was a lesson to my engineering skill, and I there and then made all the escapes on the hard, unbroken gravel at the end of the dam at the foot of the hill; and these have answered their purpose, and all holds good, and has held good for several years under this precaution. I have constructed them so that in summer, and
moderate wet weather in winter, I can keep the pools up to their brim, with about from three to four bricks. If there is the chance of a flood mastering the usual confines, the removal of two or three bricks opens a valve to entire safety. The wet weather over, the bricks are replaced, and all becomes full as usual.

Willows of any kind will not grow on these peaty-flavoured banks, even when the banks are artificially made, and, of course, their roots always moist—not even the common copse willow, which was recommended some time ago in the Field as a new sort, under the denomination of the "bitter willow." I saw specimens of this Field-born "new willow" growing in the garden of a most intelligent tenant of Mr. Vere Fane Benett's, of Pyt House, where the tenant assured me that his cattle would not touch it. In texture, twig, and growth, in my own mind, I recognized it as the common copse willow, and being well aware of the occasional impositions practised by some designing correspondents through the public press, against which sufficient authority is not interposed, I asked my friend to give me a few cuttings to take home.
DECOYS FOR WILD FOWL.

for investigation and experiment. This new-fangled willow, as I expected, proved to be nothing more than the common copse willow, which game will very seldom interfere with. On this slight contingency there was attempted to be built up a wide, and, perhaps, to one a lucrative, but to the public a most mischievous, conclusion. I thought that in my long experience I had come to the end of hearing ignorant assertions in regard to wild fowl and game; but such is not the case. I was told by one gentleman that he had lately been instructed by another gentleman that if he wished to have some snipe shooting he need but flood a coarse and almost useless piece of "grass land," called a water meadow. All he had to do was to plough it up and sow it with barley. Snipes were so fond of the grain, "it would attract them in any number."

My dear reader, fancy a snipe bored with grains of barley which he could not eat if he tried, and essaying to swallow them instead of boring the moist sands after worms and the larvae of the insect tribes, that sort of soft diet being readily sworn to by the nature of his bill. Soft heads in the human race can often be detected,
not by their long noses, but still by *their bills*. In this anatomical reference I intend no insult to the snipe, for his bill was handed to him from his birth. *We* make our bills some time after we have run away from our mother's leading-strings!

If it can be so managed in regard to a larger space necessary for the shooting decoy as compared with the one for taking fowl, that also should be sheltered by willows and trees as well as banks. There should be, however, a succession of pools of broad waters for the shooting where there are no lakes nor rivers, so that the fowl may fly from pool to pool, and each pool thus afford a succession of sport, the fowl flying either way, thus permitting the beat to be reversed.

In some situations gazes may be made for each gun. Gazes are small huts of wattled hurdles, or of boughs and furze, and the fowl may be driven over these gazes when the guns cannot approach them on the water. Ducks are more easily directed by the driver than teal. When Lords Malmesbury and Ashley shot my decoy with me during the winter of 1870, though there were from three to four hundred teal on
the water, we only killed one. The ducks having come over the guns first, the teal refused the line, and kept flying back into the driver's face before they took their departure for the sea, and thus we only got one. The bag picked up on the spot was fifty-one wild ducks at single over-head shots, and one teal; in all, fifty-five ducks were killed, the additional four retrieved when the day was over. Lord Malmesbury had thirteen ducks down around him before he left his first gaze.

We then beat a little, straggling, scanty cover, and got nineteen pheasants, a woodcock, and a couple of rabbits, which, collectively, made a very nice day. We lunched within thirty yards of the little home or round pond where nothing is ever shot at, and while at lunch I called for "three cheers for the Prussians," which was instantly complied with by all the ducks within hearing, though among them there were two wounded mallards and a duck who had escaped thus hurt from the other pools. I mention this to exhibit the correctness of my narrative, and to show the truth of what I say.

While at lunch, and while the keepers at a
little distance were having something to eat, I heard one say, after the three cheers were given, "Well, I'm blessed if I should be in a humour to cheer, after having had such a bucketting as those ducks have had to-day." Since the shooting day above mentioned, the next bag consisted of one hundred and seventeen head of fowl, duck, and teal.

In every part of a shooting decoy there should be made varied "sittings" for the ducks. The larger and more important ones should face the east and south-east, to catch the first rays of the morning sun; for the ducks just then come home from their night flights and feedings, and want to dress and dry their feathers, just as much as we should do on retiring to our firesides. They like nice dry, short, velvety turf to do this on, it being comfortable to their feet, and of a texture that will not dirt nor stick to their breasts when in a recumbent posture—a sheltering bank of three feet in height behind them, as before alluded to, and the sittings in width of from three to six feet, so that there may be room for all and no rubbing of tails against the back of the sitting, for that is a contingency ever
shunned by every bird in existence, sitting on the ground or on a tree.

I had to make all my pools; but from knowing the humours and necessities of wild fowl, great care was taken to meet all peculiarities attached to their very little understood nature. When I say "very little understood," I speak of the surface sportsman or mere gunner. I always loved to study the nature of wild things, and now am happier in their happiness than in their death; and I love preservation and the more genial sun of the breeding season better than the "bag" and frost and snow.

A young sportsman one rainy day, or day not comfortable for shooting in (wet covers spoil pheasants in their death as well as sport), kept teasing his host to go out, so there was a consultation as to whether the cover should be beaten or not.

If I mistake not (I was not present), a noble lord, much this young man's senior, at length stepped in with this pertinent question,—imper- tinent by some it may be deemed, but with the causticity of it I most heartily agree,—"Is it not possible," said the elder of the two, "for you
to pass one day of your useless life without killing something?"

Many, many months, weeks, and days of my I hope not useless life, are passed in happy and trusted friendship with the birds and beasts around me, watching their curious and varied habits, studying their natures, and endeavouring to obtain their confidence instead of rousing their fears. There is scarce a bush on my manor which does not hold a friendly robin. The bird comes to meet me at my approach, sits close to my foot, with its little brightly shining black eye, and craves by look and a suppressed warble for the crumbs in my shooting-jacket pocket. If by chance my crumbs for the birds have been exhausted, which is seldom the case, it makes me quite unhappy to read the disappointment even a robin can exhibit in the poor little eyes, when I walk close-fisted, but still, I trust, open-hearted, from the solitary bush which never fails to shelter thus even the smallest creature under heaven.

But to return to the shooting decoy.

After my line of pools had been established, the few passing wild fowl, who at flight time, or soon after dusk, used to be attracted by
the sight and call of my pinioned birds in the home pond, and occasionally drop in to pay them a passing visit, began to use the new-made pools, where they were for some time never disturbed. At first that most objectionable popping at the distant rifle-range, when the wind set towards the birds, annoyed them; but they very soon got used to it, and now care nothing for the distant noise. Teal, duck, and widgeon began to drop in the moment the breeding season was over, and very soon "a lead," as decoy men call it, was established. All this time, too, I took such wild ducks' nests as I could find, however near to my pools, and reared them sometimes under their mothers, when they could be caught and put into coops, or under hens.

When I first commenced rearing fowl for the decoy, of course it was necessary to take as many wild ducks' eggs as possible, and breed them up under hens, and this led to a fact which, in succeeding seasons, puzzled me for some time.

It was this. About the second or third season, being short of hens for pheasants and ducks, I
caught all the old wild ducks that would be caught, as described, at the moment they hatched out, for the purpose of cooping them with their young. But these wild ducks so caught, and taken in much the same wild districts, were as unlike each other in their tempers when caught as black is to white. Some of them flew at and beat themselves against the bars of the coops, frightening and trampling to death their own young, while others remained perfectly contented and docile in their coop, "hived" or nursed the brood, and did very well.

Everything is, can be, or ought to be, accounted for. So to unravel this mystery for the future, I ordered all young ducks from the sea district and wildest ground, when hatched under hens, to be marked. By this we should know in catching old ducks from their nests, or in the bag after shooting, how they came to hand, whether known to us before or not. The mystery of the different tempers when cooped was at once explained. Those wild ducks that had been reared in a coop, when brought back to it, took to it at once again, while those wild ducks that had never been in a coop flew at the bars and re-
sisted all detention, even to forgetfulness of their young.

If a duck can be found, and her time and method of sitting on her nest watched, and she is visited just about the time when she is hatching, her nest will generally be far from any water, and in the heath or furze. When first alarmed by the approach of man, she will flutter along the ground in an attempt to lead the supposed pursuer from her young. Before she is disturbed, two or three purse-nets should be set in low places, or in such positions as she would be likely to cross in her designing retreat, and into one of these, if properly set, she is almost sure to go.

Having taken her thus alive, at a time when maternal affection is at the full, pull out the flight feathers from one wing to prevent her flying away, if by any chance she should escape her coop, and then put her into a coop narrowly barred to prevent her squeezing through, and put a board or "crate" in a square in front of the coop, fitting close at both sides. A crate a couple of yards long, by the breadth of the coop wide, and a foot high, is quite sufficient to prevent the
escape of the young brood. A dish of water at the bars of the coop, and food within reach of it for the old as well as the young birds, is then all that is required. The old wild duck, as previously explained, who has never been in a coop, will not do, but the old bird, who was herself reared from it, she never loses her interest in her brood, nor her remembrance of her artificial rearing; and her young ones, not feeding from the bill, as the young of the landrail and moorhen do, will, the very day of their confinement, learn to feed themselves; very small seeds of any kind, buck-wheat, &c., grits, and little pieces of worm and finely-chopped white of boiled egg, should be put in their dish of water. They soon will recognize their feeding place, and when the food is mingled with very small bits of thickly-kneaded meal, then the young birds will begin to thrive. Barley or maize should also be placed in the water for the old duck, who will be sure to drink, for ducks are "thirsty souls," and will discover that there is a dinner too for her.

In less than a week the crate may be removed, for by that time, if cautiously approached, and
never frightened, the little ducks are tame, and will run to meet the hand that has always fed them.

As soon as the young ducks are strong, then shift them, old one, coop and all, to some little, warmly-sheltered shallow pool—on no account to deep water; and then, when they begin to get well into their first plumage, let the old duck out. Her wing by that time will have begun to re-moult the pulled-out flight feathers, and she will soon fly as well as ever; but she will not desert her brood, when there are plenty of pools to hold them. Deep water always kills the greater number of the wild-bred young broods upon it. They are seized with and die of cramp, or where there are pike, they are eaten.

In the first instance, take all wild ducks' nests, however near the newly-made decoy ponds, for the following reason. The old duck never had looked for water where the new pools were, but, when she was a wild bird, she took her brood to the harbour some two miles off, or to some swamps in the tidal way near it, where everything was instantly destroyed by what the Globe newspaper so properly termed the invading "scamps" of the vicinity.
How I came to the knowledge of this want of trust in, or ignorance of, my pools, was thus. In one of my bogs, not where my best decoys are now, I had, in the first instance, made a small pool, surrounded by an aboriginal swamp, and there in two instances I had dropped mallards to my gun. In each case, as there were one or two other mallards flying round, I crouched, with my retriever at my heels, in the hope of another shot. When the birds on wing had disappeared, the retriever was sent for the mallard that had fallen. The dog had seen the bird fall, and went immediately to the spot, but was, for an instant, misdirected in his search in the water by a rabbit. The dog, however, soon set himself right, and returned to where the mallard had fallen; and then, to my surprise, instead of continuing in the shallow water and rushes, adjoining the deeper pool, he set off on dry land over the heather up the hill, stern down and head in air, and was hidden from further observation by the rising brow.

"That must be a hare or rabbit," I thought to myself; but as a tried retriever, knowing well what he had to do, had a better faculty to judge by than I had, as is my invariable custom, I let the
dog alone. When once sent upon a difficult duty, in which a man cannot direct his dog, man should be silent and still, and interfere no more.

In a very short time my dog came over the hill with the winged mallard alive in his mouth. The bird, as he could not fly, was walking off straight in the direction of the river Stour, nearly two miles off, and leaving a couple of acres of water behind him, into the edge of which he had fallen.

This made an impression on me, but shortly after, at the same place, the thing occurred again. A winged mallard who had fallen, in a second instance, instead of seeking the pool to dive in which was close to him, also set off on foot, in hope to reach the accustomed and well-remembered river. This suggested to me that all wild ducks, nesting, as they always do, far away from waters of their haunt, would not come with their young to the new sites opened out to them, but go to those they had been accustomed to, at whatever distance. My conjecture was right; so, following it up, an opportunity occurred by hand-rearing to make the rising generation of fowl learn that the safest place of all was the "tarn," or the ponds
within my manor, or in some preserved portion of the rivers.

In passing, let me remark that the method of the duck in taking her brood, just out of the egg, over a stretch of country of two miles or more, is most sagacious and curious. She is a perfect mistress of her geographical position, and has a thorough knowledge of the country, generally moving from the nest at night. She well knows in what direction ditch, path, and cart-wheel tend, and is sure to select the shortest road. Into the cart-wheel track she gets, with her pretty little dappled brood clustered in a lively heap at her tail, and on she waddles at a surprising pace, cleaving the air before her as she would do the water, making a vortex to suck the little fleet in the rear the more closely to her, and trusting the side of the cart-rut to keep them well together.

Few men, perhaps, have seen this; but I have seen it in a wild duck escaped from her coop, as also in a duck with her young hatched wild; and it is astonishing the pace that they go, as well as the straight line that they adopt as the most convenient to take them to the desired water.

One of the first things to do in preparing to
establish a shooting decoy is, to obtain three or four wild mallards pinioned, and then to put them in a fenced-in pond with some tame brown ducks—tame, but of the wild colour, putting in two tame ducks to each mallard. They will breed thus in the first season that they are together; but the earlier in winter they are so confined the better. Hatch their eggs under hens, or let the ducks hatch them, and breed them up in coops. At flight time, in the evening, these half-bred ducks will fly as well as wild ones; but they have this virtue—their tame blood invariably attaches them, however scant the water, to the spot or home where they were reared, and though flying as strongly, and mingling with the wild flights, nothing can seduce them to stray from their first home, or from that attachment so localized and strong.

There is a small white Dutch duck, named, because it makes an everlasting noise, the "call-duck." This bird for the table is worth very little—it is foisted on would-be sportsmen, who are, in fact, mere owners of estates, as a "decoy bird," sure to "call the wild ones down." This is an utter imposition, for to attract wild birds by call, as well as by appearance, this little duck is of no

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use whatever. The best decoy-ducks to begin with are the half-bred ones before alluded to; they, or ducks reared by hand, are mentioned in a clever work ('Notes on Fields and Cattle,' by the Rev. W. H. Beever), which every farmer ought to have. If I recollect right, Mr. Beever alluded to his ducks as being from eggs of the wild sort, but reared in the farmyard by hand. Birds so reared and bred will at times be localized, but they are apt to be led away by wild ones; and to make sure of what is wanted, let the ducks at first be half-bred.

They will go on and on breeding among themselves, and crossing with the wild birds; but the attachment to place, however remote the strain may become, never leaves the duck, whose origin was as I describe. On each succeeding year I breed up hundreds of ducks by hand, and though the wild "lead" to my decoy is established, I shall continue to do so with all first nests. My reason for this is that the first nests in February, March, and April, come out in such cold weather, that in my mineral impregnated springs, or, indeed, anywhere else, on deep water, the young ducks, unassisted by man, can-
not live. I therefore take the first nests, and deal with them artificially. If the hatches are small in number, one duck, or one hen, according to the size of the latter, will take two or three broods, if of the same age or within a day or two of the age of her own, and the other ducks so deprived of their young, their flight feathers in one wing extracted, are put into a small pool enclosed with wire. If this were not done, they would go to the coop, if within their reach, and call away the young ones from the bird appointed to bring them up. To prevent this, they are put into what I term "the prison." In no very long time they forget their young, and re-moult the extracted, not cut, flight feathers. The mallards have had free access to them, they are impregnated, and when of themselves they fly out of prison, they are prepared for a second nest.

I have been all my life, or the greater part of the last years of it, trying to teach this to my friends who have estates and manors, and width of acres, moss, or moors, at the present time lying fallow from all that is either useful, remunerative, or amusing. Somehow or other, "they don't seem to see it," and somehow or other they don't always
understand it, or they leave it to, or they listen to, their keepers, who, being ignorant and averse to any additional trouble, set them against it, or raise ridiculous and unfounded difficulties, which scare their employers from any such undertaking.

There is scarcely a so-called keeper that understands the requirements of birds at their appointed feeding-places; and though they, the keepers, find it requisite to have for their own benefit at least two meals a day—breakfast and dinner—they deem that the birds under their very questionable care can live and remain contented with one.

If you do not feed pheasants twice a day, morning and afternoon, the first food you give them may just as well be sacrificed to pigs.

If they find, when they are hungry, that at breakfast they had eaten all the food, and that there was not any put for them for dinner, of course they must go further for their last food, and wander to look for it,—too far, perhaps, to think of coming back for breakfast. With ducks in the home decoy, where they are never disturbed, they, too, should always be fed twice a day, morning and evening. I have them fed three times a day in one pool. In the other
pools which are shot in, and where the wild flights, on account of the greater breadth of water, mostly haunt, they need only be fed at night, after flight-time has well begun, and the ducks are all away. On their return in the morning, they find a welcome repast; and by this management the keeper taking down the food in no way disturbs the fowl. The home-reared ducks seldom go far away at night, at least, never so far as salt water; but the wild flights always do, as they feed on the muds of the harbour. So the former require food twice a day or more in their own unseared decoy, and when the keeper goes to feed them it matters not if he puts up any strangers, as they only go to the larger pools and mingle with their fellows.

In feeding pheasants as well as ducks the moment of feeding should be rigorously kept, and then all birds so fed will be found collected at the right time, and it is fatal to the object in view ever to disappoint them.

And now as to the disturbance caused by the report of a gun: all birds, pheasants in their covers, and home-bred ducks in their decoy pool, can be made steady to fire when they are on
the spot where they are never molested. Thus at my round pond or home decoy in summer, even when many ducks are there, I can with my gun pick off a house-rat in the evening, and send my retriever over the wire to fetch it without putting one bird to wing.* In fact, as I am the only gunner who shoots frequently at rabbits out at feed, my home-bred ducks know that where that gun is I am, and that where I am there is always a pocketful of Indian corn. At times, even in the woods, I shall scarce have re-charged my gun, when there is the whistle of a wing in the air, and a duck lights down by my foot. In the fields far from the decoys,—I never saw him in the woods,—during summer, a splendid old pin-tailed drake, caught in and sent me from a decoy in the North, and never pinioned, the moment he hears the gun he comes with a little Bahama duck, with whom for the last three years he had selected to pair, and they settle down together at my foot, and will follow me about the field. All this comes from method and knowledge of how

* The same decoy is wired in, not covered in, because at times there are curious and costly birds there from foreign parts, who must be pinioned and scientifically cared for.
to *ingratiate* yourself with timid creatures. It is impossible to teach the method to anybody, because everybody who had tried to learn it hitherto has been certain to leave out *something* which *seems trivial* in itself to him, but which, in fact, may *occasionally be the key* to ultimate success.

It is no use to make decoy pools without well selected sittings. It is no use to send me foreign game birds, however carefully the box is made in which they come across the sea, or however well they may be fed and watered,—if a supply of fine gravel or sand is omitted. Food costs money, but the fine sand and gravel, which costs nothing, and ought to be an inch deep in the bottom of the box, and without which a bird for any time can't live, is regarded by superficial observers as of no consequence whatever. It costs nothing. It has not to be paid for, but nevertheless *it is the keystone of the whole venture*.

Never go among your wild fowl when in peaceful guise, unless you wear the same dress you have always worn, and in which they first saw you, or a new dress exactly like it; for if you do, they will not recognize their friend, but be seized with a panic and fly away in dismay.
Never approach any wild thing in startling haste, but let them see and hear your quietly spoken word and advancing step, that they may have time to recognize their friend, and not be seized with panic.

I remember to have seen, in the Field, a correspondent asking "if any one could tell him why the cast of hawks he had bred up and been trying to train, after an absence of a few days were afraid of him." In his letter he described his return and "sudden rush to see his darling birds."

I could have told him that, on his return, instead of "rushing in" to see his favourites in his holiday attire, he should have waited to divest himself of his travelling or "courting garments," as labouring people sometimes call their best clothes, and have put on the shooting jacket and attire, such as it usually was, and, going in quietly, the hawks would then have welcomed his return, instead of being scared by an unwonted appearance; but these things are not known to every one, and it is not every one that can be taught.

To conclude my remarks on this head, what will the reader say to a wild blackcock and myself
having *scraped into such a state of acquaintance, familiarity, and friendship, that, knowing where I lived, he would come in *spring to my door*, not only on my little lawn, but *absolutely to the door*, and *"curl" at the breakfast-room window,— his wings down, his cheeks and ears red, his horns up, his tail spread like a fan over his back till it touched his head, and, *stamping* round and round, throwing out the soft sort of tremulous *"coo" in tone resembling that of a wood-pigeon?* He was very civil to all the hen pheasants, but he permitted no cock pheasant to be on the lawn while he was there. He fed on barley thrown from my hand, but he liked oats best; and I often invited my neighbouring brother sportsmen to see this strange friendship between me and an old wild blackcock of the moors.

Alas! that dear mysterious king of the wastes at last died, very near my house, stricken by a disease in this vicinity that so constantly carries off both old and young of his kind. I have three blackcocks still who know me; they are always bolder than the grey hens. One of them, an old, rusty-plumaged bird, that I have known for years, will let me pass within forty yards of him when
feeding at the pheasant-stacks, but as yet I can incline him to no greater familiarity.*

In arranging decoys for the collection of wild fowl for the gun, let me add, that it is necessary to have a smaller pool here and there in the midst of the larger ones, wired in with rabbit wire-netting, in which to keep teal by way of decoy birds for their fellows. In such cases, there should be a bank around the sides of the pool about four feet high, so as to give shelter from any wind that blows, as well as to catch the beams of the morning particularly, as well as the afternoon sun, and to afford the sun's warmth to the birds on the sittings at the foot of the bank and on the edge of the water.

The wire around these little ponds should not be upright, but one-half of it should stand on the bank, and the other project horizontally over and above the sitting. This method of wiring-in a small decoy pool keeps the pinioned birds safe within their desired location, while, at the same time, it affords a facility for any pinioned birds that may have escaped or strayed to walk over the

* The black game in my vicinity, by the spring of 1874, became extinct, and I have none left.
wire, and, by so doing, capture themselves; and, in the same way, it permits any birds that are pinioned by the gun, and for the time lost, to come where they can be taken and killed, or fed until they recover.

A pond, if thus wired-in with wire of a small mesh and with due care, also acts as a trap for vermin, as, though they can leap in very easily, they cannot jump out, nor get out, unless they burrow through the bank, which they never have the patience to do in any one place long enough to compass a sufficient hole by which to escape to the wilder lands.

In these small decoy ponds for teal, there should always be made a feeding-place for those delicate little fowl. Supposing there to be from two to three couple of pinioned teal, a feeding-house should be made for them of very fine wire, the lower part of this wire amounting to a sort of small iron rod, to bear the stress that in two places would be continually laid upon it by the passing in and out of the teal, and the attempts to force their way in of the larger wild ducks outside.

This wire feeding-house should have four sides, one side being made by the upright bank, the
other side by the wire netting, and the two ends of much closer and stiffer wire. The feeding-place for the teal should be on the sitting, and in a wet place, for all water-fowl like to feed over their feet in water. A yard-and-a-half, or twice that length if desired, for the feeding-house, would suffice, and the two ends might be in breadth about a couple of feet, or a yard, according to the space to spare, with an opening just sufficient for teal to pass through, but which would keep out a duck.

In course of time, the wild teal also will find out the food and the way to get at it, and it serves its especial purpose admirably.

When these feeding-houses for teal are made, the barley and boiled rice should be put into them only after dark, so as not to disturb the fowl, and but once in the twenty-four hours. The keeper must be watchful as to the presence of either the house or water rat, as both these cunning animals will be aware of the hour of feeding, and, day or night, close in on the food at once. Their presence can always be noticed by the impressions of their feet in the mud, and if permitted to live and to resort to these pools,
they will not only starve the teal to death by quickly consuming their food, but the house-rat, *not the water-rat*, will often vary his repast by killing the teal themselves.

I would, for the sake of demonstration, permit any man, even in summer, when the house-rat most frequents his watering-places, to search the sides of my ponds, and to find, *if he could*, the track of a house-rat. I have them exterminated by trap and lightly-loaded gun, for there are some practised old crafty house-rats who cannot be taken in any kind of trap whatever. At the dusky hour of a calm, hot summer's evening, however, if the whereabouts of these old rats has been by their track discovered, they cannot resist coming out for a walk in that deep stillness ere the night sets in, and then it is that the lightly-loaded gun insures their death with very little noise. If these cunning old house-rats find out the coops where young ducks are being reared by hand, there is a method that often succeeds in their capture by trap, and it is this. Put in the water near the coop a small square, made by rabbit-netting, of the *largest mesh*; the house-rat can get through this and so can the young
ducks; the trap for the time unset, and the food for the latter may be dropped within this wired space, and both ducks and rats, at different times, be attracted by it. Anybody who understands the safe rearing of ducks will have a board to fit the coop, to shut in the brood with the old bird as soon as it is dusk. Then, when the young ducks are safely shut in, lift up the little square enclosure of wire, and set beneath the water, within the circumference of the wire, the steel rat-trap or gin, and put the wire over it in the usual place, dropping a little more food, that will sink on and around the trap. The water prevents the scent of the human hand from animal detection, and use induces the rat to seek boldly on the same spot the same food he has so often revelled in. The trap needs no peg nor other fastening, for it is too large to be pulled through the wire, and the rat will be found drowned on the following morning when the young ducks are let out. Care must be taken to make this little square pound for the trap wide enough for its dimensions to keep the snare out of the reach of old ducks, who might be stretching in with the whole lengths of their bills and necks
in an endeavour to get at the food they knew to be there; the size of the pound, therefore, necessary to exclude the old ducks who are at large from danger can, to a certainty, be very easily ascertained; of course, the wire pound must be kept from being put out of place by external pressure by a peg or two inserted on either side. Water-rats can be taken in the same way, but the best trap for them is an old single-entrance wire eel-trap, its end immersed in water, while the entrance is kept by a slanting position within reach of the victim it is intended to destroy.

The only damage the water-rat does is by eating the corn put down for the fowl. The same rat is detrimental to willows, or to any succulent plants or herbs in the vicinity of the water; but, other than this, to animal or bird life, this often unjustly persecuted creature is perfectly innocuous.

During summer the old viciously predatory house-rat seeks the water, as the biped rats from the Commons House of Parliament, and the inhabitable towns and cities of the world, flock to places situated on the sea. There the biped people game, intrigue and bathe, swim, fish, flirt and frolic, precisely as the viciously inclined quadruped
rats do when they resort to the pond or river. The steady-going, constant residents of the one place, householders and water-rats, get turned out of the quiet routine of their existence, and either let at remunerative rents their houses for a time, or desert their domiciles, to escape the contamination of gamblers, impostors, or characters undesirable as acquaintances for the rising generation:

The water-rats, in much the same position, yield up their holes in the banks to the vicious foe, who, if they did not do so, would kill and eat them. In these holes the house-rats, for "the season," breed and live, adopting precisely the habits, in all but appetite, of their predecessors; and thus, because the superficial observer sees a rat on the mill or duck pond swim after and catch young ducks, he immediately charges the mischievous fact against a poor creature who never destroyed anything alive in its life.

When decoys have to be made up by dams to keep back the water, and to throw it into pools or lakes, the water-rats, and the moles also, will do a great deal of damage by perforating the banks beneath the surface of the higher water.
Water is ever on the watch, when penned back, for any illicit escape that may offer, and once let it find a hole, however small, there it will run or trickle through, till, by degrees, if not immediately stopped, it wears for itself a passage of exhaustive dimensions.

For the above reason, I would recommend pools to be dug out three or four feet below the level of ground and water, and the earth so removed to be placed on two sides of the water as a shield against prevailing winds, and as comfortable backs to catch the morning and afternoon sun, and reflect the warmth so caught upon the nicely turfed sittings. Or an island may be thrown up from the material dug out. When this plan is adopted, it puts an end to the constantly to be repaired dams, and does not cost so much as the latter. All work so occasioned should be let out to the labourer as "piece-work," binding the labourer or labourers down to complete the job in a given time. If the latter is not done, when once they begin the task, they will be in no sort of hurry to finish it; but looking on it as a job in hand to fall back on when they have nothing else to do, the work may be protracted for any amount of time,
and the ground around disturbed, to the ruin of the rest of the decoy.

The worst vermin that will, if they are permitted to do so, haunt and be destructive to the decoy and to the fowl who breed in the vicinity, are the carrion crow, the moor falcon, or hen harrier, the magpie and the house-rat, the stoat and the weasel. The latter, the weasel, in a decoy is the least destructive of the lot.

A fox is also most destructive to wild fowl; but I do not look on the fox as a "vermin," but simply as a creature that repays the mounted sportsman tenfold for any mischief he has occasioned to the man who walks.

I have observed in my decoy that though I have destroyed every carrion crow in the vicinity, and not seen one for five months, no sooner are their eggs laid about the moors and the decoy, than several carrion crows put in an appearance.

Some of these old thieves may probably be those who, in the last breeding season, had left a leg or foot in some of my traps, and who returned to their old hunting-grounds well aware of the purposely-put temptations as well as the danger that awaited them. I have seen these
DECOYS FOR WILD FOWL.

rusty old rascals (some of them when old assume a very rusty appearance), in winging their search- ing flights about six or seven feet above the heath, come upon one of my traps,—the bait a dead rabbit or eggs, as the case might be,—I have seen them then pause in their flight, hover or dwell over the spot where the trap was, and then cry out as if in loud derision, winging their way on and resuming their flight of search in other places. Where there are old crows of this description haunting the vicinity of a decoy, they can often be taken thus. Ducks, when they first begin to lay, will drop their eggs occasionally about, not in nests, and often in shallow water. These chance eggs in the eyes of a crow don't look like purposely-placed baits; therefore a bait of this sort can be with success adopted in very shallow water—water enough to cover the egg, and yet let it be visible to a bird's quick eye. Around this egg, and beneath the water,—for the water that covers the one will be deep enough to conceal the more flat proportions of the other,—the traps should be set. Crows and moor-falcons will both walk in water up to their hocks if after eggs, and they are sure to step into one trap or the other.
I have in this way taken these birds when proof against any other attraction. These traps are dangerous to ducks as well, and small, shallow pools of water, as much removed from the haunts of fowl as possible, should be selected.

There are more sure ways of destroying the carrion crow and magpies than those by trapping; but as it involves the use of strychnine, I ever set my face against it. It can be used by a careful hand with apparent safety, by poisoning a slightly broken egg and placing it on a pollard tree or stump of a tree, or on an island where nothing else but wings are likely to reach it; but under no circumstances do I advocate its use.

There is also, I deeply regret to say, a method of poisoning foxes, which will confine the lamentable death by strychnine to the fox; for when the poison is put into the carcase of a house-rat, nothing but a fox will eat it. Not the water-rat, but the house-rat; and, curiously enough, a fox will prefer a dead house-rat to a rabbit; and this latter fact or preference I have ascertained in feeding litters of foxes when I kept foxhounds.

Poison should never be used in any case.
Surely there are ways enough of destroying vermin without resorting to the use of drugs, that if by chance they find their way to man, woman, or child, may be fatal to all alike. The law against the sale of deadly poison is too easily avoided,—in fact, there is no effective law in respect to it; and of this, two instances have very lately been brought to my notice. The one was that several valuable dogs in Dorsetshire had been poisoned by strychnine said to have been bought by a tenant-farmer for rats. The other was in the deaths by poison administered by thieves, commonly called poachers, to the valuable pigs of the owner of a large estate, because some low beerhouses, where thieves did congregate, and labouring men got drunk with the money they ought to have spent in maintaining their wives and children, were abolished by the lady of the mansion and manor. We greatly need a revision of the law against the almost unrestricted sale of poison, and were I ever in either House again, it should be my endeavour to effect it.
CHAPTER X.

EELS AND LAMPERNES.—THE MYSTERY OF FISHES.

Generative History of the Eel—Appearance as they Ascend and Descend the Rivers—Pond-Bred Eels—Traps for Eels—Baits—Lampernes—How to Catch them—Shoals of Lampernes—Caught by the Rats—Used as Manure—A Table Delicacy—Bait for Pike—Lampernes full of Spawn when Ascending from the Sea—They Breed at an Early Age—The Lamprey—Use to which the Lamprey puts his Wide Mouth—The Old Angler at Cranford.

Having read some time ago, in Belgravia (see page 158, vol. vi.), a very well-written and interesting account of the "whitebait," from the pen of Mr. J. G. Bertram, perhaps it will not be deemed amiss to offer to the reader some practical observations on that mysterious inhabitant of the waters, the eel.

To begin with the generative history of this, at present, little understood creature, it certainly is not thoroughly ascertained whence, where, or how the generative process is achieved. Whether
the eel is produced by ova, or by any other known process, certain we are that no roe has ever been detected.

Writers on the history of the eel content themselves, but no one else, with the assertion that eels seek the tidal waters and margin of the sea for the purpose of procreation, but we are completely puzzled to ascertain how the eels which inhabit small ponds in the midland counties, without the remotest access to ditch, brook, or river which would conduct them to the supposed scene of their operations, get there.

In my practical experience and investigation of the habits of the eel, I have emptied, or "laved," small ponds of inland description, and found the usual complement of eels embedded in the mud.

That in certain rivers and streams debouching into the ocean the eels annually seek the tidal water of the harbour, there can be no doubt; and this they do with the first autumnal inland flood. My practical experience of the river Avon, which empties itself into Christchurch Harbour, has shown me the extent of the autumnal emigration of these fish, from my having swept from my eel stage, during a flood, sixteen hundred-weight of eels in
the space of three or four hours, all on their downward passage to the sea, the mills above me and the mill below me reaping a similar harvest of this particular fish. Then, at a certain time of year, during the summer, the return along the edges of the river of countless millions of the little elvers, supposed to be the offspring of the eels, sufficiently accounts for the descent and purpose of their progenitors. These little eels are as delicious, or nearly so, as whitebait, when dressed in the same fashion.

This enormous amount of descending eels being thoroughly ascertained, it is natural to look for a return of the same fish when the duties of procreation are over; but unless they return in some other guise or condition than that in which they "run," or in which they went down, those millions of fish are lost to further observation. This brings us to the next question—of the eel and snig. The eels seek the sea, as I have previously said, with the first flood of autumn. We will assign that flood, then, to the month of September, and they continue to descend during October, and even into November, of course diminishing in quantity flood by flood.
In the first approach of warm weather in the early spring, there then ascends, or seems to ascend, the river Avon and the Stour, a vast number of eels called snigs. The traps, pots, or wires placed in the river for the capture of these snigs, which are then in the most delicious condition, are set with their mouths, or entrances, down the stream, as these fish invariably ascend, and continue to do so throughout the summer, up to the first flood in autumn, when the great descent of eels, changed in condition, and not good to eat, before alluded to, commences.

The condition of the ascending and descending eels is very remarkable. Those that are descending are much more slimy to the touch, and hard, and so rich when dressed for table, that it is almost impossible to eat them; the ascending snigs, or eels, on the contrary, are most excellent, and so mild and sweet in flavour that they make the best white soup. The hue of the descending and ascending fish is also different, as the belly of the descending fish is of the most white and silvery character, while that of the ascending snig is tinted with shades of the brightest gold. Locally speaking, the snigs which are caught are
of a much smaller description than the generality of descending eels; but this, according to my experience, apparently arises from the fact that nothing but the smaller kind of eel-pots are set to catch the fish, which precludes the possibility of catching the larger fish. That they are to be caught, I have proved by capturing, among others, one snig that weighed four pounds and a quarter.

During the summer I have caught large snigs and large eels on night-lines; and then the eel, though it had not donned the golden hue, had entirely lost the richness and ill flavour of the descending fish; but whether or not he would have attained the colour of the snig by a prolonged summer residence in the river, I cannot precisely say.

After the descent of the eels in autumn, I have followed them up with a spear, to ascertain, if I could, as immediately as possible on their descent, which class of fish remained in the river mud, whether snig or eel. Those I found were chiefly eels in their descending condition, mixed here and there with the snig. The question then occurred to me whether or not the snigs so found
were not fish not yet arrived at the "running," or general condition of the others. I am dealing with facts as they occurred under my own observation, leaving the question open as to whether it is condition alone which makes the difference between the eel and the snig.

It is true that, in many instances, the head of the snig has a more pointed nose and a smaller jaw than the accredited eel; but if we are to pronounce as a distinct species on a physiognomy so trifling, we of the Vale of Berkeley, and our noble neighbours on the Cotswold Hills, our respective noses being widely different, aquiline and snub, may be quoted as distinct species of the genus man! Anatomists and naturalists often assume to distinguish new species by dissection and colour; thus, an additional bone or varying vertebrae in beast or fish, or in the plumage of a bird, is seized upon by anxious discoverers of mares'-nests to denote a new species, as in the dun and fawn coloured whole snipe, whose different hue, in my opinion, arises from accident. That the change of plumage does not of necessity define species, is proved by the ruff and ree, of whom scarce two species are clothed alike. The fact,
then, as regards the eel, and its enormous autumnal migration to the sea, unless they re-ascend the rivers in the condition of a snig, cannot be accounted for; they are lost entirely to our knowledge. In 1871 I knew of a fresh-water eel being taken in a sprat-net four miles out at sea.

It is the custom, in some places, to call any little eel a snig, and hence arises the term "snigging for eels"; but, in my opinion, the snig, or the eel in snig condition, is found in rivers only, and does not exist in inland brooks, stagnant waters, or in isolated ponds fed by springs.

There are innumerable small ponds within my knowledge, and in those ponds there are eels that never leave them; therefore it is too sweeping an assertion to say that all eels proceed to the sea for breeding purposes. To my certain knowledge, there are pond-bred eels, as well as eels bred in the tidal waters of the ocean harbours, and by way of meeting the partly true assertion that eels will travel through the dewy grass, I affirm that no one ever detected the elver in a similar question-able position; yet in an isolated pond I have found the young of eels, and an elver in the water in St. James's Park.
There are four different traps which may be set for eels,—the wicker snig-pot, the wicker "hullie," the thief, or hoop net, and the wire eel-trap. All of these are effective if properly set and baited. All fishermen, however, would do well to remember this fact, that no fresh-water fish, not even the abused eels, supposed to fill the "pockets" of "drowned sweeps" in Hyde Park, will enter a trap netted with twine, if the string is allowed, by continuance in the water, to get sour, nor will they touch a stale bait. This objection of the eel to the sour twine does not apply so much to the iron wire; it exists in the greatest degree as regards string. Traps made of twine, therefore, should be taken out of the water every morning, and washed, and then left to dry upon the bank before they are again submerged; but the wire need only be rinsed out, and at once returned to the water.

And now, as to the appetite and nature of the erroneously blamed eel. We have heard of demented widows, whose piscatory tastes have been somewhat epicurean, on the damp remains of the dear departed being recovered from its humid resting-place, with pockets, as reported, replete
with eels, to order the body to be re-set in the mud for further capture; and, as I mentioned before, we have heard of the body of a sweep, in the Serpentine, who drowned himself for love of beer, not woman, having been fished up, alive with slimy parasites! All such reports, whether of the "widow's mite" or of the sooty suicide, are utterly ridiculous and untrue; there is not a cleaner feeder beneath the waters, salt or fresh, than the conger, the snig, or fresh-water eel.

I remember, as a child, seeing my father take up what he called his "eel-wheels," made of wicker, in the tidal brook around the walls of Berkeley Castle, and, so to speak, he never caught anything. In after-life, my experience as a man explained this failure; the bait put into those wheels was the entrails of a chicken. A more fetid, nasty-smelling bait, when it became stale and soddened, cannot be conceived. The only bait that will entice a conger eel or snig is *fresh* fish, or in regard to the fresh-water eels or snigs, similarly, fresh worms. The charge against the method of feeding of the eel as being unclean is simply false and absurd.

Having discoursed respecting the manners and
customs of the eel, I now proceed to deal with a fish almost as mysterious in its habits, but not so generally known—I mean the lamperne. This fish, as far as my experience goes, is found in any quantities only in the mouths of rivers where the freshets seek the sea. In the Avon, near Christchurch, in spring, they ascend in continual shoals of countless multitudes. So thick and phalanxed is their line of aqueous march up the river, that you may stand on the bank with a common minnow-net suspended from a pole when it is dark, and lift them from the river as fast as you can put the net in and pull it out again. In a similar way you may set eel-nets, wire traps, if made close enough to retain the lesser lamperne, without bait, the mouths of the traps being set down stream, as if for snigs, and close to the bank in the line of the ascending shoals.

In the upper weir on the Avon, when I lived at Winkton, these curious fish came most within my command. They came to ascend the weir so massed together, that from the weight of the pressure from without, the fish next to the bank were driven, forced into, and wedged up in the rats' holes that were beneath the surface of the
water. So well was this annual fact known to the vermin in the neighbourhood, that the house-rats from every homestead, barn, and cottage gathered together by night at this weir for the purpose of a piscatory harvest.

In the morning, beneath every available spot on which there was any cover, such as a few boards, an old hurdle, or a hollow stone, more than a bushel of these fish might be found secreted, all of them caught by the rats during one night, some being dead, some still alive, but all of them marked more or less by the teeth of the spoiler.

After I had taken possession of the Winkton fishery, and came to live at Winkton House, on my visiting the place one day, I found my punt, which was moored to the gravel-walk in the garden, with a great many lampernes still alive in an inch or two of water that the punt contained. This made me demand of the man in charge who it was that had dared to fish in my absence with my boat. He replied, that no one had done so; to which I answered, "Then how comes it to be full of live fish?" To this he rejoined, "that the fish had been left there by the house-rats." In order to utilize the spoils
thus obtained, I manured the roots of the vines at the grapery, and many of the wall fruit trees; to the vines first and last I laid the lampernes nearly half a foot deep as fish manure.

Although in the Severn we deem the lamperne one of its greatest delicacies, as well as the shad, which we think second only to the beautiful salmon of the same river, in the vicinity of Christchurch, and on the banks of the Avon, the lampernes, locally known by the name of "nine-eyed eels," when accidentally caught, meet with no sale, and are thrown away. Of course, with my Severn proclivities, lampernes were properly stewed and served to table.

As the lamperne season begins before the pike are out of season, I used them as bait for my trolling rod, and found them, while they lasted, the most killing bait of all.

While mentioning bait for pike fishing, next to the lamperne comes the eel or snig; and in addition to its tempting nature, one eel bait for pike will often last an entire day. The shape of these fish (the lamperne and eel) enables you to place them on the hooks so as to spin to perfection; and if the eels should be longer than you desire, you
can cut off a portion of the tail till you reduce your bait to the desired length. Supposing the pike fisherman goes on a visit to strange waters, or to friends who have not the means of procuring good bait, he should take with him three or four small eels, salted, in a box, which will keep perfectly sweet, and enable him to fish in any water which may be put at his command.

But to return to the lamperne. All these fish, in the instance alluded to, were ascending, from the direction of the sea, to breed, in the same enormous multitude that the eels descended in for the same purpose; only, in the instance of the lamperne, we have direct evidence of their especial purpose, for, unlike the eels, the fish are full of ova, or spawn. Thinking that, perhaps, in London I should be able to find a sale for lampernes, I caught, and kept alive, an immense quantity of them, putting them into a pound with a stream running through it, which I kept for eels at the lower weir. I could, however, obtain no demand for these fish in London, and they were useless to me, except for my own table, or for burial at the roots of trees.

One other peculiarity which I observed with regard to these lampernes was, that though con-
fined in a clean stone pound, with from two to three feet depth of water, and a stream from their native river running through it, they could not, or would not, relieve themselves of their spawn, and, after a few weeks, they were sure to die.

It would appear, from observations made by me in the small brooks of the New Forest, and other little streams which I have visited, that the lampernes ascend all the lesser water-ways which lie at their command, and that they breed at a very early age; for I have seen them making places for the reception of their ova, and moving and carrying small pebbles for that purpose; and the parent fish, while so engaged, have been but from three to four inches long. I have also, in the neighbourhood of Avon Tyrell, when, in company with Mr. Frederick Fane, in search of trout for store, discovered a small sand-bank, mixed with gravel and mud, perfectly full of little lampernes, from an inch to two inches long, though neither gamekeeper nor labourer in the vicinity ever saw, to their knowledge, a lamperne breeding in that little brook.

As to the larger fish of this species, the lamprey,—of a surfeit of which, it is said, one of our royal
Henry was dead, but whether the surfeit arose from
the cook or the fish has always been a matter of
some doubt in my mind,—with this larger kind of
river-frequenting fish I am less acquainted. At all
events, by ocular observation, and, for the time,
most clear and close inspection, I have arrived at
a certain and distinct knowledge of the use to
which the lampreys turn their enormously wide
and sack-like mouths.

One day in summer, I was fishing for perch
in the river Stour, in Hampshire, when my servant,
who was idling along the bank above me, and
looking in the deep, clear water for a shoal of
perch, called out that he could see "two large eels
feeding in the bottom of the river." Upon this
rather strange report, it being the middle of a hot
day, and the sun shining very brightly, I hastened
to the spot to ascertain what it was that the man
really saw. The river, at that particular turn of
its course, swept with a very brisk current over
a clear bottom of clay, without any weeds. On
arriving at my servant's side, I could very clearly
descry two large lampreys, very busily employed,
though their occupation had nothing whatever to
do with food. So intent were they on the duty
they were performing, that they took not the slightest notice of us. Clear and transparent as the water was, in depth, perhaps, about five feet, not a motion nor an act of the fish escaped my deeply-interested study. Their occupation was as follows:—They were boring a hole in the clay, as I supposed, to deposit their ova, but that is simply conjecture on my part. First one fish and then the other seized hold of the clay with its round, extended, and sack-like mouth, and then twisted round and round for a considerable time, as fast as a carpenter could use a gimlet "bit-and-brace."

When the then considerably extended mouth and throat had bored from the bottom of the river a large, round pellet of clay, the fish turned about, and, descending the river for some three or four feet, he deposited his burden, and was immediately succeeded at the hole he had left above by the second fish, who in its turn descended to deposit the clay, while the former fish again returned and continued the operation. Having watched this "division of labour" for a considerable time, I resolved to attempt the capture of the fish. Taking off the single perch hook, I added to my line a brace of snap-hooks for pike, putting
a small rifle bullet about four feet above the hooks, so as to sink the line in the swift current, and to act as a mark to enable me, before it could be carried away, to see the exact position at the bottom that the hooks would take.

My object was to get the fish on my side of the snap-hooks, so that, by a sharp snatch of the wrist, I should strike the hooks against them. I cast my line in two or three times before I could correctly ascertain how far the force of the current would sway down the line. During this operation the lampreys took not the least notice of me, nor did the first two attempts I made to strike them, both of which failed, disturb them in their occupation. On the third attempt, while the fish was screwing out the clay, I struck it in the side, and landed a splendid lamprey,—lifting it at once, and as carefully as I could, from the bottom of the river, lest I should disturb its companion, who was, at the moment, depositing the clay it had taken at the usual spot where both fish had placed their former loads.

The lamprey thus bereft of its companion seemed not in any way to notice the fact, nor even to miss its fellow-labourer, but returned to bore out
the clay, when, at the first attempt, I also struck that fish, and landed it upon the bank by its comrade. Deeming that Lord Malmesbury, on whose fishery this capture took place, would be more abstemious in his diet than England's glutton king, or had a safer cook, I sent the two fine lampreys at once to him, as a trophy from his river, and one very seldom obtained. The united weight of these two fish was over three pounds.

To vary this somewhat trite discourse upon fishes, in passing, I will narrate my first act in conservation of manorial rights and rivers. There is at Cranford, in Middlesex, a widened pool in the course of the Crane, near the bridge that spans the little stream, and carries over it the great high road. Though very young, and not a strong boy of my age, I had, when about twelve years old, taken upon myself to act as a conservator of the manor, and however I might have failed in muscular power, my resolution was to prevent all aggression and infraction of my mother's jointure rights. Strolling down one sunny Sunday afternoon in summer, just as I had surmounted what was then called "Little Common Bridge," and had come into full view
of the before-mentioned pool, then called by the somewhat questionable name of "Muddy Reach," to my intense disgust I saw the tall figure of a man standing by the side of the road, and fishing in that, to me, sacred water. In my mind's eye I see him now, so keen is my remembrance of first impressions. He was an old man, and of rather a spare habit of body; his nose was long, and his face of mild aspect,—none of the ferocity about it which that feature, the nose, seems to assume when snubbed in its lofty proportions, while his eyes beamed mildly through his spectacles, and spoke of a sweet and affable spirit. Over these features, and above what appeared to be the edges of a flaxen wig, there presided rather a broad-brimmed hat, suggestive of the simplicity claimed by Quakers, but somewhat repudiated by them when ascending to the Brighter scenes of the House of Commons.

Striding up to the side of this mild and gentle-looking fisherman, I rather startled him from the contemplation of the nibble beneath his float by peremptorily demanding "what right he had to fish there." He turned his eyes slowly upon me, his questioner, pushing up his
spectacles to the verge of his flaxen wig—a thing which, in after-life, I have frequently seen men do when intending to take a more distinct measure of their antagonist, although they had previously asserted that they wore glasses to better their vision.

We confronted each other thus for a moment, like Puck and Bottom, though there was no Titania to add a lustre to the scene. On my again demanding "by what right he fished there," coupled with the command "to desist," he replied in a mild tone of voice by asking the question, "What harm am I doing by angling in this water?" To this I angrily replied, that "no one was allowed to fish there; and that I should insist upon his immediate departure." A bob or two at his float then withdrew his gaze from me, and fixed his attention on the water; when, on the activity of his fishing-gear ceasing, he again regarded me, and, in a mild, firm, but gentle voice, said, "My boy, I am doing no harm here, and I shall not go"; and then, re-adjusting his spectacles, and gazing at his float, he seemed to subside into that mild, sweet, and peaceable spirit which Izaak Walton claims to
have felt when impaling on his barbed hook a living, writhing, and squeaking frog!

This address, in what, when the "young heart was hot and restless," seemed to me to be delivered in a calm, contemptuous manner, made me at once consider the chances of personal collision. In strength he could master me, no doubt, unless by some cunning and unexpected blow I could reduce his power to a more even footing with mine, or make him, by breaking his spectacles, pay a penalty for the infraction of the water right. Scanning his person narrowly, from the protuberance of his fob beneath his waistcoat, and the dangling of a chain and several large seals, I felt convinced there was a large watch there with its glass face outermost; so to assure myself of being able to obtain damages, I contemplated taking up a stone and assailing the exact spot where I thought the watch must be; but, on second thoughts, I deemed that the butt of his rod being in dangerous proximity to my shoulders, it would be better to abandon the idea of "personal" attack, and cast about for a more advantageous site for active aggression.

Retracing my steps over Little Common Bridge,
I attained an island which, by the bough of one of the oak trees upon it, by climbing, again afforded me a descent to a lesser island, on the other side of which, from the mainland, he was fishing. I have since seen many a gentle face suddenly hurt or painfully astonished by the rude incidents of life, but I never saw the repose of an elderly figure so completely broken up as it was on this occasion, when the first heavy stone flung by me from my previously charged pocket knocked over his float and dashed the water into his face. Without any apparent loss of temper, this old man called out to me to desist. The only reply which this evoked from me was stone after stone into the water in the vicinity of his float, driving all fish away, and rendering piscatory or contemplative success impossible. "Are you going to continue this annoyance, my little man?" he mildly inquired. "Yes," I replied, "you old interloper, if you continue your trespass upon our water;" and then followed stone after stone, to prove my obdurate resolution.

On this, after regarding me attentively, and making a sort of plaintive chuckle as if of pity, the old gentleman drew his line from the water,
and proceeded to take to pieces and put up his neat little rod. At first I watched him doing this, proud of my prowess and of the battle I had won, and thinking of the pleasure it would give me to tell of the victory to my brothers. Somehow or other, however, there was an impressive grace and quietude about the old man's hands, as he arranged his neat and nicely kept fishing-tackle, which won upon my hot heart, and induced me to think that I was a tyrant, and that in this instance my acts were harsh and unkind; and when, without another word, he turned to proceed in the direction of the old Cranford Bridge Inn, perhaps for one evening to relieve himself from his laborious work in London, so calm, so quiet, and so ill-used, but forgiving, did his retreating form appear, that I was seized with a choking sensation, as if I should burst into tears.

The oak bough from which I had dropped, was too high for me to attain again, so I spattered through the water over a gravelly shoal, and was soon in full chase of the receding figure. Apparently he had forgotten all about me, and perhaps forgiven me, for he rather started as my
hasty steps approached his side, but, turning round, he stood and intently regarded me.

"Sir," I exclaimed, and I was ready to cry, "will you forgive me for what has passed, and believe that I shall now be very happy to see you fish in my mother's river?"

After a short pause, in which he still regarded me,—"Yes," he said, "I do believe you, my young friend, and I will fish again, for your amusement, I am sure, as well as mine."

The rod being again put together, I showed him the best perch holes and gudgeon shallows, all of which were well known to me, and saw him, at half-past eight that evening, proceed to his inn with a very good dish of fish for supper. I did not tell this story to my brothers, for I thought that perhaps some of them would deride my conduct on this occasion, and laugh at me.

Long years have passed over my eventful life since then, but I scarce know any one of my boyish actions which, on reflection, gives me so much pleasure as this: perhaps it promoted some of the better phases of action, and suggested to a generous heart, which ought ever to be in the breast of a soldier and gentleman, that on every
event in this world, whether in love or war, when man is successful, faith to the death, if the fair fame of woman requires it, and generosity and almost love for a fallen foe, should be the attributes of that man who dares to refer the dog to a lower order of creation than himself.
CHAPTER XI.

CHANGE OF SEASONS AND OF THE TIMES.


It must be, or it ought to be, evident to us all that the times—I mean the age, not its leader—are changing fast in various directions, and that this is not a time when any person or any subject whatever can be allowed to stand still.

The Communists, the political prattlers, the mischievous men inconsistently termed liberal, for they are liberal only with other men's possessions—these and their like have rendered the working population dissatisfied with their wages and their
employers, and set them against those under whom their forefathers for centuries had lived contentedly and remuneratively, and, in many cases, dying rich for their calling in life.

All the activity, all the feverish demand for change, has been on one side, and it seems as if the other side stood still, in an apathetic attitude, leaving any fool or dangerous demagogue to grasp the rudder of the national craft, to roar and lie his full without contradiction, and to give the ship of Great Britain, in the trade winds, as little way as possible. Among what once was called "the industrious population," there are now nothing but "strikes." In a strike every idle and ill-disposed labourer is sure to join, because mischievous unions in other quarters advance money; and the idle drunkard, of course, would sooner be kept on bread and water, with a drop of gin, when he had the power to pilfer, and a possibility to steal and sleep, than work and eat and drink good meat and beer.

The worst, the weakest, and the most mischievous thing that master-men could do, was, in the first instance, to give in to a strike, and a robber-like demand for higher wages, to men
extortionate and—who sought them by villainous and really unconstitutional means.

I use the term "villainous," for that man is a villain, as vile as the robber on the highway, who, with a power in his hands which the villain uses as the highwayman uses his pistol, forces the farmer or the artificer to pay him money through the exigencies of crop, manufacture, and season, and without which compliance the farmer and manufacturer, of whatever description, must be ruined, or, so to speak, resign his life.

The labouring classes here in England, sorry am I to say it, have been and are following, in a dishonest course, the example which, on my West India property, some years ago, was set them by the blacks.

The emancipated slaves came to the local attorney, and said,—"Your sugar-canes are ripe for cutting; if they are not cut on the instant they are ripe, you will lose the crop; and we will not cut them unless you give us a bonus (a very large one) in addition to the wages we have been and are receiving."

Fearing to lose the crop, the attorney complied, but, unhappily, complied, as many farmers and
artificers in England have done, without making any stipulations for the future. These blacks, then, who were certainly "brothers" in spirit to Messrs. Ogger, Podger, Badlaw, Dilk, and Dodger, and similar misleaders of deluded labourers, after they had cut the crop, very well knew that the crop must perish if not immediately made into sugar; so they went to the attorney again, with an increased and impossible demand for a further bribe, so large in amount, that the attorney feared to comply without first obtaining the sanction of his employer, who was robbed just as much as if he had been stopped on the highway and his purse taken from him, not by a single footpad, but by a force of footpads which rendered resistance unavailing.

Those who yield to strikes in the first instance by their own cowardice, entail upon others a terrible misfortune.

Though the work I am now writing is not a political work, I cannot help making this allusion to the times political before I go on to notice the change in the seasons, and in the habits and interests of beasts and birds.
Binding my narration, as far as I can, to ornithological notes, who ever suspected (I am sure I did not) that a graceful and protective measure for wild and beautiful birds should have emanated from the Gladstone Government, or, at all events, from its mistaken supporters? yet I find myself hand and heart with the protective Wild Birds' Bill, brought in, to my surprise, by Mr. Auberon Herbert, and afterwards dealt with by Lord Malmesbury.

The next thing in the change going on that I might expect to find, would be a Bill brought in by my former antagonist, Mr. John Bright, for the better protection of rabbits against the political plotting of some tenant farmers, and this he might honestly do on the score of an increase of food for the people; but in that instance there would not be quite so much reason for astonishment, as it is now known what a vast amount of the poorer population in the United Kingdom subsist on rabbits—the dealers in them, under-selling the butcher, and therefore raising the tenant farmer's wrath.*

* In this allusion to the "Tenant Farmer," I merely mean to attach to some few of them, but by no means to the majority, a
Well, I begin to regard myself as a mile-stone left on the side of the political highway. I commenced life as a Whig, or, as we were then called, a "Liberal," but the drivers of coaches to consecutive Governments either forgot to give me a lift, or I fell asleep among the primroses by the road side, where I seem to have taken root, until the coach of Liberality, by employing coachmen of too levelling a laxity, has been driven into a sort of slough, whence none of the passengers seem able to escape in any direction, and all seem bent on pulling each other to the bottom of the bog, in the hope of standing higher on each other's heads.

At one moment Members of the House of Commons, inclined to sedentary or predatory habits, — politically they often go together, — assail protection when it is extended to the beautiful pheasant, partridge, grouse, the deer, the hare, and rabbit; at another time they institute new laws for the protection of gulls and owls, and other obscenities. Therefore, in passing on to the change of climate and the alteration blame arising from their after-dinner speeches, though in their wine there was no truth.
of the habits of creatures existing in it, it is well to have given Darwin's political "Apes" a short notice, if but to show that the world is still in a state of transition, as proved from the fossil age down to the present political hour and the revelations of the London clay.

For very many years I have remarked that a change has been taking place in the habits of birds.

There was a time when that merrily chirping little bird, a summer visitant, the house-martin, used to awaken, of a summer morning, the soundly-sleeping child with its lively twitterings from its clay-built nest above the bed-room window. In that spot whence those sounds proceeded, no bird now welcomes the dawn of the summer day, or speaks of health and innocence to the slumbering child, for with father, mother, brother, and sister in many instances, the bird seems to have fled the ancient roof, a sad reminiscence only lingering still. Observant of birds as I have been all my life, I have no hesitation in saying that, where the house-martin numbered thousands, there exist now but very few, and those few decrease as the seasons pass.

It is not so yet with the sand-martin, swallow, and
swift,—at least, not yet perceptibly so; but I fear the diminution now extends to fieldfare, redwing, and even to the lark. That partridges, grouse, and blackgame are decreasing, I have no sort of doubt, and pheasants are kept up by artificial breeding. The common pewit, too, is falling off, and no wonder, as every idle man's hand is raised against its life and eggs but for the preservation of game on some manorial lands.

When I first came to my present residence, on the neglected heaths around it there was scarcely a pewit, and certainly on my own lands not an egg procurable for my table. Now, from the strict preservation of the few pewits there were, I have many pewits, and from their first nests a very good supply of eggs, the rule being not to interfere with the second nest, but to let them hatch and rear their young. The taking of plovers' eggs should be restricted, so that the gourmand's supply might nevertheless satiate the appetite, while, after the feast, the second nests should fare better. I would bar the taking of plovers' eggs after a certain day.

Since the gun-tax, every class of birds has felt the wisdom of it, and the harmony of the woods
and hedges has been increased. Within the last six years, from the preservation of game, and destruction of what were really vermin around me, and the consequent prevention of trespass for birds'-nesting among the idle classes, every sort of innocent, beautiful, and harmonious bird has increased; or, in fact, as on my lawn, they have appeared where they never were before. Regarding the country from the widest point of view, there will be found to have been fewer accidents from fire-arms since the gun-tax has shelved the old fowling-pieces in the cottages, with their not trustworthy cocks and triggers, than there were before; and now a very good tax might be imposed, as in France, on the possession of gunpowder. Here let me again impress on my readers that the cartridges for the breech-loaders, when boys or beaters bear the open cartridge-bag in attendance on the gun, should be under lock and key, like the bag made for me by Stephen Grant, in St. James's Street; for to my certain knowledge a system of theft on a large scale, by boys and men, has been established, simply for the powder and shot in the cartridges,—the boys stealing the cartridges for the sake of periodical explosions, or to give to the
illicit destroyers of game, the men taking them to serve their own poaching purposes, as need might be.

The seasons have changed, and with the seasons, of course, will change the ornithological world. What has become of the once genial and "merry month of May"? when London 'prentices and the London labouring population used to sally forth, as it was then expressed, "a-maying," gathering the white blossoms of the whitethorn; in lieu of which, oftentimes, did they seek them now, they would shake down on their heads the whiter snows of lagging winter.

Rooks may have been seen in what was the very earliest of the spring, bluffed out on the top boughs of rookeries, as if they had put great-coats on, gazing on their snow-filled nests, and wondering over their chilled eggs, as if in anger that one sunny day had induced them to deposit hopeful sources for maternal care. Wild ducks' nests, old birds and all, to my certain knowledge, have been buried in snow; but on one occasion, some years ago, the fall of deep snow happening in the night, when some of the ducks had begun to sit, the eggs, from being protected by the double cover.
ing of snow and duck, were not hurt, and the
duck found her way back to the nest by the
track in the snow she had made in leaving it.
Other nests of eggs also, when the duck did not
sit, were in that year not harmed because the
covering the duck herself had put on her eggs,
as well as the snow, served for a sufficient pro-
tection; and besides this, the fall of snow was not
accompanied or followed by much frost.

In other instances, the change of season has worn
a much more difficult aspect. The frost has come
with wet, but without much snow, and with
such unusual severity for the time of year, that
the cold, of course acting on every humid thing,
absolutely froze the vivifying principle in the
eggs of all kinds; but seized particularly on
those laid in damp places, whether the old duck,
in the case of ducks, was on the eggs or not
—even the duck's downy breast could not
save the eggs; but the wet she carried on her
breast from the pools or rivers, so necessary in
genial weather to the perfection of hatching, added
to the power of the frost. In the same way, I
have known the earliest nest of the pewits de-
stroyed. A frozen egg will not boil hard; so, for
many reasons, the beautiful, the living world of innocent and graceful things, demands greater care not only from the legislature, but more abstinence in man from his predatory habits,—protection at the hands of man, instead of increased destruction.

Late frosts, embittered by high cold winds, with sleet, hail, and rain, not only destroy the eggs when laid, but they absolutely stop the course of successful incubation in the old birds, and they cease for a time to produce eggs, or, at all events, to lay them in the nests.

As a proof of this, in cold springs the wild ducks in my vicinity averaged no more than from five to seven or eight eggs in a nest, and at times not more than three. Not a young wild duck hatched in March by its immediate parents could endure the cold and live; and those that were under foster-mothers, to be reared by hand at the coops, with the coops and mothers to shelter them, the back of the coops to the wind, and constantly fed with the most nourishing food, not even these young ducks could withstand the frost, wind, and wet. My keeper and his men had to carry the coops to barns, stables, and sheds, and even then some of the
young ducks, between the delay of carrying coop by coop, were killed by the inclemency of the weather.

The same cold weather also drove, within my immediate supervision, three song-thrushes from their nests, after each had laid only three eggs, or two short of their average complement. There was also another contingency, and that was, the scarcity of worms, grub, or insect food, and this most likely also arose from cold; and nothing could illustrate this scarcity more than the fact that those birds who had been fed on the window-ledge by me, but had left me with the earliest song of spring, came back to me, in that beautiful reliance which it is my great pleasure to establish between myself and every bird; and remembering where their friend through the winter lived, they tapped with their beaks against the window, and scarcely fled when I opened it to give them the wished-for food. Among them they numbered the blackbird and song-thrush, the chaffinch and yellowhammer, the blue titmouse, the hedge-sparrow, and, of course, the robins. The house-sparrow came, whether I liked it or not, and snatched pieces of food, but fled away when he heard me rate him,
as I do not regard that bird as an object for charity. The sparrows know this, and when, from my breakfast-table, I objurgate their presence on the window-sill, they fly off, but always with their mouth full, while not one of the other guests are the least daunted by the gruffness of the tone of voice. The thrushes and the blackbirds, during that cold spring, for a time left off singing; but as soon as a more genial warmth came, and they left the window, they sang more than ever, and had nests full of young; their restful or brilliant harmony received by me as thanks for my kindness, or as payment for the fruit they intended to take from my garden in the time to come.

In regard to pheasants and partridges, there is much to be inquired into. In years gone by, a bad pheasant season was rare, and a very bad partridge season a thing that did not often vex us; but now, with the change in the seasons, and the introduction of artificial manures, breech-loaders, &c., bad seasons for game are consecutive, while, at the same time, the numbers of game certificated men increase,—I will not call them all sportsmen,—and the method of the discharge of the gun, as well as the charging of it, is fifty
times more rapid than it used to be. Breech-loaders do not kill so far as muzzle-loaders, but from the increased and increasing number of gunners, the fact of two guns or more being permitted to each person, and scarce anything that arises escaping a shot at it, there is more game in quantity killed and more crippled than there was in former times, and consequently less game left for the following year.

When you couple with this another fact, which, like a great many other things, originated in ignorance and folly,—I allude to the wholesale destruction of hen pheasants as well as cocks,—the decrease of game cannot be wondered at. I have often asked the giver of the shooting day what game he will have left to breed on his lands the next season, if he and his friends shoot every hen that rises.

The reply to this invariably has been,—“Oh, they don’t breed much in a wild state, I depend on my aviaries and hand-reared birds.” And, with a blush, he might have added, “I buy my neighbours’ eggs.”

Very well, then, artificial manure, change in the seasons, and neglect of the gamekeepers in the time when birds are laying (where any hens
are left to lay) to protect the eggs from being stolen to sell to other aviaries, that may militate against the wild breed, and so may the unhealthful nature of some soils; but as men can't lay their own eggs, and the hen pheasant is the only bird that can furnish the required brood, how foolish it is to destroy the source whence the best eggs come! You can have only a certain or limited number of birds in an aviary, whereas a man with a large manor can have as many as his acres and wilds will heathfully carry; and if the soil is not favourable for pheasants, he can take better eggs from his own wilds than any he can buy, and breed them up in addition to those in the aviaries, leaving the old birds to help his stock if they can with a second nest. I have descanted on this matter before, but it cannot be too much impressed on the sporting reader. When, as a boy, I began shooting, a bad partridge season was scarcely or never known. Now bad seasons follow each other. I have seen, in August, pairs of old birds packed together, and known of coveys the number of whose young daily diminished. If in August you spring a covey, and in flying over the standing corn you see
some young birds drop much sooner than others from inability to continue a consecutive flight, that is a sure sign that disease is doing its office, and that disease and death will decimate, if not utterly destroy, the entire nide. Ere these gradual changes in the seasons commenced, we used to think that partridges, being later in nesting than the pheasants, escaped all damage from frost. But in this change of season they have no longer that advantage; while grouse, in the higher and more northern latitudes, are even still more exposed to changeful vicissitude.

It is in my remembrance, that if any man found a woodcock's nest in England, it was chronicled as a curious fact by the public press. Of late years woodcocks breed very largely in England. In the New Forest I knew of nine woodcocks on their nests at the same period, and I have, in that ill-used forest, seen their young of all ages. Snipes, that used always to breed in England, in spite of Darwin's erroneous assertion that "they never did, and do not do so now," breed here more than ever, and in great multitudes. I have, if my memory serves me rightly, some nine or ten years ago, made a bag of full-grown snipes
of twenty couples, with some old ones intermixed, in one day in August, when I rented Winkton and its fishery of the late Mr. Weld, of Lulworth Castle; and now they frequently sell snipes' eggs among the plovers' eggs to the London dealers and chance customers, and it is almost impossible to detect the one egg from the other. The colour of the shell is exactly the same; the shape is much the same; and when boiled, the white in the egg of each is similarly clear. If possible, the snipe's egg is the better of the two, only not quite so large, and at times inclined to be more pointed at the lesser end.

If birds hitherto deemed to be more habituated to colder climes than ours come to this country thus to breed, that certainly is a sign of change in the times. If wild geese, wild swans, and other rarer water-fowl, do not come to us as much as they used to do, that does not in any way tend to shake my position, because where man increases, and drainage of particular sites predominates, there are some birds who would not be attracted by a habitation foreign to their nature; and, besides this, all wild and beautiful things invariably decrease as the human race
comes on, or as crime increases with learning among
the lower orders of the present day; or schism
and dissent from orthodox doctrine increase pre-
cisely with the increase of the churches erected for
the so-called established religion.

If false doctrine, heresy, and schism cannot
be gagged or prevented,—if we are to support
self-styled Liberal Governments, who lust for dis-
ruption and office, and care not for the Consti-
tution, who court the murderer, as in Ireland,
and set the Fenian and traitor free, with punish-
ment cravenly commuted,—why, then, if such a
course of communism were permitted to continue,
there would be "a political aspect in the times"
both marked in its changes and in its ruinous
results too terrible for calm contemplation.

In all the action of the visible world, from the
lightning above to the increase of crimes below,
there is a change going on. Every thunder-storm
has become more or less fatal to living things, and
trees are oftener struck by the electric fluid than
they used to be. So rare were the accidents at
one time, that they were alluded to as facts for
wonder; now, we only wonder if a thunder-
storm has burst without a consequent loss of life.
I have lately had a fir-tree smitten by the lightning, and, curious enough, after running from the top of the tree to the bottom, and severing the bark, the lightning glanced off, but, not entering the ground at the foot of the tree, passed down the carriage-drive close to a boy, and exploded with a noise like a gun on the ground very near the house. The electricity in the same storm struck so near to a coop containing a barn-door hen and a brood of young pheasants, that, without absolutely touching either, it killed some of the young birds and prostrated others, though several of the latter recovered.

Change, except in Parliament, where all has seemed convulsive, comes on gradually,—so much so as to be almost imperceptible to the human eye and brain, because the mind of man gets used to succeeding novelties, and avoids surprise through the means of an almost imperceptible gradation.

To return to the ornithological theme, and to the interests of the birds of game as well as to that of the proprietor of the manor, the following facts ought to be taken into consideration. With this change from succeeding
good seasons to succeeding bad ones, more hen birds should be spared.

The mischief of mowing machines, too, should be thought of, the increased number of gunners, and the rapidity of fire, all should be taken into consideration, and a greater stock of feathered game increasingly protected. The most mistaken custom of permitting keepers to save themselves trouble in protecting the eggs in the wild nests, by having all the birds the gun spares in an aviary, should be done away with. The eggs of the wild birds may be collected, and the birds left for a second nest, and thus the stock might be kept up without the deplorable custom of purchasing some of your own eggs and many of your neighbours'.

It is strange, but men of the present day seem to think that there can be good eggs independent of the male birds, and that they cannot kill too many cocks. Through this strange error, a friend of mine had on his manor about five hundred bad eggs, which, of course, though put under hens, came to nothing; and, in a second instance, a similar thing happened on a manor with which I am well acquainted.
Foolish gamekeepers hate a large stock of male birds, simply because they think their crowing when they go to roost attracts the poaching thief. They also hate to have many cocks in summer, because the crowing of the male bird indicates the whereabouts of the female's nest. All cock pheasants crow in summer, master birds and younger birds, and the more there are, the more deluded as to the spot of a pheasant's nest the intending thief will be. Some people, masters and keepers, dislike white or pied pheasants, because they think that "they attract thieves." If I thought they did, I would tie a lantern to the bird's tail, if I could catch him, to add to the attraction, for then the capture of a poaching thief would be more easily effected than it is now.

I recommend a larger stock of both hen and cock pheasants to be kept on the lands than is absolutely needed for breeding purposes, because then if it is a bad season, as it so often is now, you have something in hand to shoot at. As to partridges, I have heard lords of manors say, "It is no use hand-rearing partridges, for they pack, and in the shooting season you can't get near them." So much the better then; you can shoot harder on the wild-bred
birds, knowing that for eggs you can fall back on those round the house, for wild though those hand-reared birds may be in the shooting season, they will return, as spring approaches, to the spot where they were reared, and be certain to give you a good stock at home.

It is possible to kill too many partridges on a given site, just as it is possible to kill too many of any other kind of birds; therefore, to all my brother sportsmen I recommend judicious moderation and circumstantial guidance. We are attached to the scene of the home where we were born, we love our old play-grounds, and there is in every man's breast, more or less, an attachment to the site of his birth, which years of joy or misery elsewhere cannot obliterate. The heart of a bird beats in a similar direction, and, though gifted with wings, the bird never entirely forsakes the field or wood that first met its eyes when peeping, from the brooding breast of its mother, at the first glories of the rising sun. It would be well, as the change in "the times" continues, and as change has for once had the better of position now, to seek that mysterious throne of truth, the caverned breast of ages gone, whence facts indisputable are handed down to man if he will
only seek for them, in a handwriting on a wall of imperishable rock, that does not and cannot vanish. Beneath the walls of the modern Babylon, below the foundations of palace and prison, in the truthful clay beneath London, lie secrets that tell us that the climate of our little isle and of the continent was then far colder than it is even yet become; that races of reptiles, huge animals, and birds have passed away, and made room for those with which we now are conversant.

If we go further into the congealed truths locked up in the cabinets of creation, we find irrefragable proof that climates have changed altogether; that those animals which were once the inhabitants of hot and sultry climes lie now beneath a colder hemisphere; and that the elephant, which, within the memory of man, is only to be found beneath a torrid zone, had been clothed, in times long gone by, with a rough, shaggy coat, to protect him from a polar winter.
CHAPTER XII.

THE LOVES OF THE INSECTS.


At the commencement of this chapter, let it be understood, not only by the scientific and general reader, but by all his subordinates in letters, with or without purchase of my work, that I do not profess to be an entomologist. It is in my family to be so, for my brother, the present Earl of Berkeley, when a boy, left off birds’-nesting, and sought the humbler nest of the wild bumble bee, his (my brother’s) proclivities being operatic, for he cared nothing for the habits of insects, their honey, nor how much he thwarted them, but his delight was in their angry “hum.” Often and often have I seen him seated, meditatively,
on the ground, a small straight twig from a nut bush or some other tree in his hand, twirling it round, as if, according to a fabulous power of a "rod divining" the site of water, but in reality in the enjoyment of a stifled chorus of angry bees beneath him, on the orifice of whose homestead he had securely and safely seated himself, having first stirred up their angry notice by an insertion of the enlivening twig. The bees couldn't come out, and, for a time, he dared not get up, or, as Burns says,—

"The bees would have flown out wi' angry fyke,
When men so seated closed their byke."

Had my brother risen from his melodious position before the wearied bees had come to the not honeyed conclusion that the world had turned upside down, and that they must try an exit from the other side of their home, he, in all probability, would have paid dearly for his harmonious pastime.

Darwin on 'Crustaceans' (pp. 334 and 335, vol. i.), asserts, "that the mental powers of these 'creatures' are probably higher than might have been expected." But I do not see why we should, under existing circumstances, attribute less intelli-
gence or mental action to the crab than we know to be exhibited by various insects—the bee, the ant, the hornet, wasp, and spider. Mr. Gardner's observation on the "shore crab" and the shells, shows in the crab a reasoning power based on a necessity for precautionary measures in regard to moving other shells to a distance because one had fallen into the hole that the crab was making. Leaving out the wondrous instincts and almost reasoning powers exhibited by the insects I have named, I will match their actions and those of all the crustaceans put together by what I myself witnessed on the heath near Bournemouth while watching a beetle.

I am not entomologist enough to name the beetle, but he was nearly as long as a moderately-sized wasp, but thinner, and his sides were red, his shoulders of a brownish black, and the portion of his figure below his waist was of a brownish grey. Lying down on the heath above Bournemouth, and resting on folded arms, my face to the heather, I saw this beetle carrying that which, from their relative sizes, seemed to me to be a heavy burden, with great speed and curious care; so I watched his proceedings with interest,
under an impression that he was about carrying a large, doubled-up, dead spider, which I made it out to be, to his home. There was much that was clever in the way he held the spider, for he never let it impede his way by coming in contact with the ground, and, by deviations, he prevented it striking against the stalks of heather and heath grass that closely neighboured him on either side. In his progress, he obviously paused slightly at the foot of an occasional stalk of heather, which at first I set down to his considering how to avoid contact; but it was no such thing; the reasoning insect had a purpose beyond mere instinct, which at first I did not dream of. On he went till he arrived at another heath-stalk, then he paused a little longer, and, having deposited his burden at the foot of it, he proceeded to climb deftly, what to him must have been a considerable tree. Arrived at the summit, he examined the small forks and fibrous formation of his lofty position with considerable care, and then descended to where he had left his spider, which he again took up and carried off as before. In a little while the same thing was enacted again, and, setting his burden down, he ascended another
stalk of heather, returning, after some research, to resume his burden, and to resume his earthly progress. I was more than once obliged to shift my position to keep him in view. For the third time he did the same as to leaving his dead game, ascending the heather-stalk, to him a tree, and looking at its formation; but when he came down again it was, on this occasion, not to resume his game and to carry it further on, but he picked it up and climbed with it into the top of the heather, which at last he evidently had found suitable to the object he had in his reasoning mind. Then, in a fork of the heather, which he had previously and of aforethought ascertained to be shaped in the desired way, he safely deposited, or, as we should say, hung up his dead game out of harm's way, when, leaving it there, and coming again to the ground, he commenced ranging his forest at much greater speed, and much in the way that my Irish setters quarter the ground when ranging the stubbles for partridges, or the moors for snipe.

Alas! I could have continued this entomological research into succeeding hours, for the beetle had fascinated me, and I wanted, with the longing of
a huntsman, to see him find and kill the fresh game he was evidently beating for; alas!—

"There are bucks and raes,
On Billhope braes,
There's a herd in Shortwood shaw;
But a lilywhite doe in the garden gaes,
An' she's fairly worth them a'."

A butterfly, we will call it so, then came over the brow of the moor, so modestly gay, so winsome of flight, so gracefully afoot, and so attractive to my chivalrous proclivities, that the beetle and his sporting attributes were eclipsed, and, applying to myself the words of the song,

"Poor insect, what a little day is thine,"

I set about dedicating to the butterfly that high-souled lofty homage which beauty ought ever to command.

Well, then, to descend from heaven to earth, or, at all events, from the regions of air to the more lovely things that, each a lesson in itself to boastful man, wend their way through life's intricacies.

Wherever we look we see, or we ought to see, that after all instinct is really more or less reason, and an object can dwell in the brain even of the flea and the New Forest fly, beyond the love of
blood. It is not mere instinct that leads a flea to ascertain the only spot in the frame of the dog whereon he can enjoy complete freedom from disturbance, and obtain rest, and not hopeless but hopless sleep.

There is a philosopher very aptly named for the theme on which he cleverly descants, 'Hunt on the Skin'; and any observant person may see the dog closely nibbling with his teeth to catch his tormentors, or scratching vigorously at them with his hind toe-nails, pursuing his "hunt on the skin" in all parts of his person save the rearmost portion of his loin, where it closely abuts on the root of the stern or tail. To that spot he cannot attain, and at that spot, not deviating an inch beyond this Alsatia, do the dog's fleas resort; they go there for rest,—it is only for refreshment that they wend to other districts.

This same anatomical reason is possessed by the New Forest fly; he is different from all other forest flies. His powers are so great, that he can unseat a regiment of dragoons if they cross his wilds, and an army dare not picket by night in his vicinity, or all the horses would break loose. He feasts on blood, but Nature, for some occult
reason of mischief, has armed his legs with a power to tickle, or perhaps to wound, so that his assaults are unbearable to animals not bred in his vicinity. No blow from a tail can crush him, not even a cow's head, when she flings it back upon her shoulder; and the only certain way of putting him to death is to pull him in two.

All day long he pesters and feeds on and all over the cattle; but as night approaches, the forest flies gather together in a black mass in the comfortable sweet hollow that lies between the root of the tail, the hip, and backbone of kine. The cow cannot reach them there, nor does she desire to do so, for they all seek the spot to go to bed together, and to cease from their daily toil, to sleep and get up early for further mischief.

We will now refer to that little noticed, and seldom descanted on theme, the loves of the dragonfly. In this there is much that is curious, and, as far as I can ascertain, a vast deal that is not accounted for, both in their loves, incubation, and action in depositing their eggs.

translated, revised, and edited the well-known French author, Alphonse Karr's 'Tour round my Garden,' has not taken great liberties with the matter he had in hand, I feel disposed to rebel furiously against the French action as imputed to men in regard to "making love."

But let us quote the exact words, as revised, and, perhaps, altered by the reverend gentleman, Mr. Wood; and for myself let me, at least, hope that if he (Mr. Wood) is married, he neither forced himself by "annoyance" into holy matrimony, nor "rushed" towards his bride and "carried her off by the throat."

These are his words:—"Their manner (the dragon-flies) of making love is singular for insects, although by no means uncommon with men! It is by perseverance and the annoyance they cause by an almost hostile assiduity, that the males succeed in seducing the beauty that has won their hearts, generally from the middle of September till the middle of October." Alphonse Karr, or his translator, then goes on to say,—"The female glitters coquettishly in the sun; a blue male perceives her; he rushes towards her, seizes her by the throat, and carries her off through the air, and
will not let her go till she has consented to reward his flame."

Now, let the clergy speak for themselves, and not attribute to us, the laymen, even an approach to any such violent method of making love. Among us, the laymen, it is very uncommon to win, or to seek to win, by "annoyance," or seizing girls with whom we are in love by the "throats," whatever the clergy may do. On the part of those beautiful insects, the dragon-flies, who take their mates, *not in the autumn, "September and October,"

* but more often in the hottest and calmest days of midsummer, double instances of courtship *may be seen, very contradictory to the position of the translator or author. I positively repudiate the notion of any rude "seizure," such as the reverend divine suggests. The poor dear things have no hands; they can't go forth in the summer-day arm-in-arm like I thought that clergymen did; but in all amiable felicity and gentleness, having no hands, the male fixes his tail in the back of the head of the female, as the handiest part for transportation, and then, making use of their light wings in unity, not the least objection on either side, and by loving and common consent,
they may be seen hovering over the lucid pools, or reposing on the leaf of the water-lily, or on the forget-me-nots on the bank of the stream or pool.

When the female lays her eggs,—and this fact is an extraordinary one, as eggs generally are a sequiter to bliss,—the two dragon-flies thus happily conjoined may be seen hovering over a spot above the still water, using their powers of flight in unison, the male kindly consenting to a continuance of dips at the water to enable the tail of the female to touch and drop her eggs upon the surface, when, by the laws of gravity, they sink to the bottom. There is no rudeness, no persecution, in this,—no abrupt seizure or forcible detention. In truth, such a method of love-making as that described would, according to any experience of mine, be "especially uncommon among men." So for the laity, as well as for the poor dear insects, I repudiate in gentle, but firm terms, the allegations of the reverend Mr. Wood, and his friend, Alphonse Karr.

Now, kind reader,—as it is the fashion to call every "reader," though some of them sit down to the work they are perusing with bitter wishes and a gibing pen,—come with me, not for "a walk round my garden," but for a walk with me "round the..."
water;" and let us look at the curious habits of the
dragon-flies. There they are; some of them conjoined
in pairs, as before described, dipping up and down
over a given spot for the tail of the female at
intervals to touch the water. Look at that appa-
rently heavy dragon-fly, who wings by with rather
laborious action; there is not one fly, but two, only
the female needs repose; and for this purpose, while
the loving male still holds to the back of her head,
she doubles herself beneath him, and, passing between
his legs, affixes her tail to his chest or throat, though
not in savage guise, thus comfortably assisting him
to hold her weight without additional assistance from
her passive wings, they proceed to rest in each other's
embraces on some broad leaf above the water.

Among the dragon-flies their colours differ
greatly. They are blue, red, and variegated,
but occasionally may be observed, in single in-
stances only, according to my experience, a huge
and brilliantly-beautiful specimen of this genus,
not only about the water, but at great distances
from it, who seems always to be in search of
something, or to have an inordinate appetite for
the sport of devouring small flies. He, she, or
it, whichever it is, is so large, that the wings
make an almost jingling noise; and one day one of these gigantic dragon-flies came into my drawing-room, through the open window, and hovered over our heads. We named him the soul of a discarded lover, for there was no other lover there but me.

What with farming, fishing, shooting, and hunting, thank Heaven! I have much sylvan and rural felicity,—still I have but little time to look closely into the more minute details of creation, and to study insect and reptile life as closely as I could otherwise find it amusing to do; yet with eyes always open, as I have said before, I read a lesson everywhere—and a lesson, too, that a long life does not get to the end of while life lasts. Now for the little water-newt, and the poor pool of his selected habitation.

I was in the woods one day, spade in hand, digging out a swamp to bare or expose the water that percolated beneath the moss, for the encouragement of fowl. In one spot, about two delves of the spade had opened out a little shallow pool, and at this point of my labour I sat down to my sandwich and flask of sherry. On returning to the spot thus alluded to, the water had
filled in perfectly clear, to the depth of about six inches, and the following aquatic scene in insect and reptile life presented itself. The spade had divided a largish worm, and two large water-newts had swallowed either end of one portion of it as far as they could get it down their throats, and were angrily pulling the one against the other, in the hope of a substantial meal, and the possession of a treasure. Neither could gain any advantage, for the two ends of the coveted morsel were jammed into their jaws, and, besides this, each held fast in order not to lose the prize. Assembled around them were six or seven lesser water-newts, and a flock of nasty-looking black water-beetles, all deeply interested in the struggle, and all, no doubt, though afraid to interfere, ready to seize on any crumbs that might fall from the great newt's table. This struggle amused me for a considerable time, and, though I transferred my attention and labour to other places, when I left off work the two combatants had still hold of either end of the worm, while the expectant or observant smaller fry had considerably dispersed, as if they thought the battle, unlike the worm, would never have any end.
In the 'Tour round my Garden,' the editor, or author, describes an insect on the "leaf of a peach-tree of the size of a grain of millet-seed," page 208, from which source he deduces a would-be illustration of "what the Romans required of woman, to spin her wool and keep her house"; but such references in purple, to my mind, are beside the mark, and I will not be led to follow the reverend reviser into the outward and visible signs of scholastic study,—mine is an unvarnished tale, and I only speak of what I know. On one occasion I had shot, quite on the outside of the manor, a fine cock pheasant, in splendid condition, and the bird was known to have haunted that spot for some time. I had not fed artificially in the places of his resort, and it was too late in the winter for there to be any superfluous grain left about the arable lands; there were no acorns in the vicinity, nor beech-masts, yet still the bird was fat. There did not seem to be much of anything in his crop, and what there was seemed soft to the touch—not like grass nor turnips, but clammy, and of a close substance. On inspecting the crop, it contained the small, very small, blister-looking spot that may be found
during the winter on the lower side of the fallen oak-leaf, and which little kind of blister, about the size of a threepenny piece, or not so large, generally contains a minute white maggot. This spot, with its inhabitant, the pheasant pecks from the leaf, and on this the pheasants maintain themselves in good condition.

I have not time to investigate the interesting insect to which this tiny maggot belongs. It only came within my observance within the last year or two, but no doubt the author of 'A Tour round my Garden' will deduce from it some intimate connexion with the inhabitants of mighty and departed nations, and leave us to digest the dilemma of what the one can by any possibility have to do with the other.

Darwin, though with an imagination wild and daring in its flights, is the only author I have ever read who knows anything of the loves of the dragon-fly; but, as the history of its affections, of its methods and its manners, may be studied by the water-side anywhere on any warm and windless summer-day, or by the side of my pools upon the moor, if a student—or, better, a studentess—likes to walk with me to investigate
the mysteries of nature, they can look on that picture (the 'Tour round my Garden') and on this, and then form their own conclusions.

Anybody wishing to amuse an idle quarter of an hour may make himself some entomologic fun by going to one of the large wood-ants' nests, and, with a stick, putting aside the top of it, and stirring up the crater of the living little Vesuvius. Then, the crater of the nest thus hollowed out and exposed, without touching the nest, he can lean over it, and put his arm and bare hand, without getting near enough to the sides for the ants to touch him, and then let him feel their assaults and watch their actions. Every ant will man, as it were, the sides of his infracted fort, and every ant will be on his hinder legs or haunches, and the aggressive hand of man will feel just as if it was being slightly iced, or put into an ice-pail without contact with the frozen contents. The position assumed by the outraged ants is thus accounted for,—they sit up to spit at the intruder.

After the hand is withdrawn, it will have a decided smell upon it, as of having been in contact with vinegar. It is very curious to watch these
ants when climbing the trees or crawling along boughs in search of food. A solitary ant, when wending *his way up*, if he comes to a spot where two or three branches diverge, will pause, and seem to hold communion with himself. This pause is necessary to him; for in its short duration he makes out which course had been pursued by some other ant beating the beat before him, and he takes care not to go over the same track,—just as a man would do, if there was an earlier shooter on the ground before him. I made this out by watching several ants in their ascent of trees, and always discovered that one would not follow another if he could help it. These ants reminded me of tramps and gipsies, as well as of sportsmen; "poor insects," indeed! "what a little day" it is that is assigned to all of us! Tramps, when more rife than they are now,—except on a tramp preserve of a parson near me, who, though a magistrate, assigns them land to halt and live on, in spite of law and the orders of the police to move them on,—never would follow the begging or thieving line of each other. So, there being "honour among thieves," the preceding tramp or family of tramps, when country roads
or lanes diverged at particular points, always left a mark by the road-side to show which way the preceding tramp or tramps had gone. The marks were very trifling, and scarcely noticeable, except to a practised eye. The first I found I mistook for a poacher's mark opposite a "muse" in the hedge, to denote the position of his snare; now I am more alive to the arts of the tramping world, and am down on a good many of their dodges, as the divine before alluded to keeps me in practice. The marks these tramps put on entrance-gates or gate-posts are slight enough to look at, but still ample to warn beggars of the different receptions they are likely to meet with if they touch on the forbidden ground.
CHAPTER XIII.

ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.


It is very curious, in this world of change, self-seeking, and sedition, to watch, from the retirement of private life, the throes of the disaffected in their endeavours to pull down the temple, which when, if ever, it falls, is sure to crush them in its ruin,—to crush the demagogue and self-asserted Man of the People out of all shape and feature, while at the same time there will arise from the débris of destruction the honest and capable politician. Like the growth of some sylvan shrub beneath an avalanche from the hill-side, the really useful patriot will rise again and ascend above the shapeless mass, his stepping-stone the skeleton of decay.
ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

Agitation for no good end seems, in hundreds of cases, to be the blatant food on which some men live. They can't be quiet nor let others be contented, but advocate strikes, leagues, and unions for mischief, of course craving under false pretences for subscriptions, that they may keep the caldron of cavil boiling, in order that its steam may attract the unwary, and prompt to robbery, hope for food and an impossible comfort which never comes. According to the late Mr. Cobden,—who, I sincerely believe, was a conscientious pleader for impossibilities,—when the law of free trade passed, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and France, were to be "crumpled up like a sheet of waste paper," if any of those nations dared to disturb the general peace. Swords were to be turned, by the action of free trade, into hoes and harrows—bows and arrows would have been far more likely, if we had been in ignorance of the better munitions of war; war-horses, no longer wanted for the big guns, were to be harnessed to the plough, cannon turned into culverins for sewers, and soldiers into milkmen and mowers for the rural harvest of those expected peaceful times.

If Cobden could look from his grave and see
the result of his prognostications, his "unadorned eloquence," what would he behold, now? Free trade refused in America and France, and objected to more or less all over the world, more murderous artillery invented than ever, better-drilled soldiers of standing armies, some of them, too, of all arms, and those mighty nations which, by the ascendancy of industry among tradesmen, farmers and henwives, were to have been crumpled up if they presumed to frown at each other, in a very few years engaging in fight, with results more sanguinary, more terrible, and fraught with graver consequences, than had ever been thought of in Mr. Cobden's time. The study of each nation, in spite of free trade, now is to produce the best system of soldierly drill, and to invent the most powerful cannon for the destruction of man. At sea, in the fortress, in the field, nations now vie with each other in the invention of deadly mischief to the foe.

Practice has proved that the best-drilled army, the largest and most heavy artillery, and the readiest sword to fly from the scabbard, have a million-fold more power to keep the peace, than all the corn-growing maudlin congresses gathered
together by any eloquence, adorned or unadorned, that ever was listened to in the House of Commons or elsewhere. Directly on this peace-asserting free trade, we have had certainly three of the most bloody wars that ever raged between the nations of the earth. In that mis-called centre of a boasted freedom, America, men in civil war murdered each other with a ferocity scarcely equalled; England, France, and Sweden had before assaulted Russia. Prussia then marched over Austria, and afterwards crushed the flower of the chivalry of France, the cry of "à Berlin" circumstantially adhered to by French prisoners going to Berlin on coercion, instead of conquest. To them a sad reverse to their desires.

This "crumpling up of nations" with the mills of free trade, then, was an "unadorned" mistake; a "mill" of more combative grind took the place of grain, and garnished Imperial halls with trophies of anything but universal peace.

It is an egregious fallacy to suppose that men, that nations, can be kept from fighting. Combativeness is as much the gift of Emperors, as mischief is the ruling passion of demagogues, or theft the motive of the thief. Nothing that human
ingenuity can devise, either by education, extension of cottage comforts, religious example, or church discipline, will make a population any better than it is their gift to be. I have watched what is termed the progress of learning and religious education, as it is fondly called, step by step, year by year, for half a century, and at the end of that half century for the life of me I cannot see that the population is one bit improved, that crime has become less frequent or less villainously vile, or that murder has shrunk from its sanguinary purpose. Let us look the facts in the face, and not shrink from an unpalatable truth.

Wife-murder, child-murder, assaults on women and children, have increased, and not increased in merely the same ratio as the growth of the population, but hand-in-hand, numerically speaking, crime and education have advanced side by side; of the two, crime has outstripped the schoolmaster. If my readers doubt this, let them search the statistics of the Police.

The real fact is, that the laws of the country do not now speedily and sufficiently punish evil-doers,—the murderer, the thief, and the vilest offenders. They execute the foul murderer as if they, the
officers of justice, were ashamed of their appointed duty, and the press of the day speak of the most unmitigated rascals who were about to be hung with deep interest and commiseration, and inform their readers what an appetite the biped brute had on the eve of death, how calmly he slept, and how cordially he shook hands with the sheriffs and the chaplain, after eating a very hearty breakfast.

Why let such a biped brute have luxuries that many other biped brutes would commit murder for, if they were sure of getting them? Why, if you want to decrease the parochial expenditure, do you permit thieves and vagabonds, who will not do any honest labour, to enter and throng the unions, and do as they did at the Brentford Poor Law Union, swill wine, spirits, porter, and beer to such an amount that it made it difficult for any looker-on to deem otherwise than that the union officers, nurses, and paupers all got intoxicated together?

Our prisons and our Poor Law Unions are made so much more comfortable to their inhabitants than the arches under the railway and similar dark dens can be, that the villains and villainesses commit small crimes on purpose to escape honest
labour, to get housed for the winter by committal, and to drink as they did at Brentford. I speak as a Justice of Peace of very long standing, and also as a Foreman of Grand Juries, and I know that for a man of the working classes to call on God to witness, by his oath, the truth of what he says, is no more binding to his, the swearer's, conscience than if he had sworn, as actors in a theatre do, by the large centre chandelier.

The entire working population seem to consider direct perjury as the best means of defence. To prove an alibi, by sending to the nearest low beer-house, the resort of tramps, who are just at that time passing by, and will be off the next day, is the constant habit of the accused. There they can always obtain well got-up men and women to attend at the Petty Sessions, who, one and all, having consulted beforehand together, swear to the same lie, and before a bench of magistrates at Petty Sessions, if there are Parsons there, they are sure to be believed. Of course, it is impossible to rebut their false testimony, save by the oath of the prosecuting witness, and it is curious to see how a bench of magistrates will cling to the defence made by non-resident and
unknown witnesses when placed side by side with the sworn accusation of one or two honest and responsible men.*

I have seen a magistrate, a clergyman, having to do with one of these false witnesses, after the witness, by a low attorney, had been examined in chief, and then cross-examined by the prosecutor, recur to that witness again, and take a further examination of him while he stood behind the bar, in the company of his fellows. I have seen a magistrate allow a headborough, who had been summoned and fined for committing an offence, on his application, half-a-crown for serving the summons on himself; I have heard a Chairman of Petty Sessions very properly rebuke another magistrate, who was a clergyman, for gross and illegal conduct on the Bench: and with such examples as these, and many others that could be adduced, there are people still who set their faces against the abolition of the Justices of the Peace, and the substitution for that body of a paid Judge, on the plan of the County Court.

* If testimony on oath from either side clashes, then it becomes a question which is the most reliable source whence it comes, and decision should be arrived at accordingly.
There can be no sort of doubt that if a magistrate was not deemed, by the Legislature, judge enough to act in petty cases in his own house, where, if they applied for it, any portion of the public might have been admitted, the same class of judicial functionaries had better not be called on to legislate in a conclave held in open court. Lord Albemarle attempted a most excellent remedy when he moved this consideration in the Peers; but he was in error in urging as one of the reasons that it was wrong to entrust the decision of cases to gentlemen who often owned the property against which the crime had been committed, because they, the magistrates, on account of their position, would have a strong bias against the accused.

This is not so; it is precisely the other way. Benches of magistrates are so nervously afraid of being charged with a partiality for conviction in poaching cases and other rural thefts and misdeemors, and they are, so to speak, such very impartial judges, that they commit themselves much more frequently than those who are brought before them.

The Bench, as at present constituted, puts clergy-
men, when placed on it, in a very disagreeable, as well as mischievous position; for, wishing to curry favour, perhaps, with their parishioners, and lean to the sinner, or what they call the side of mercy, as they invariably do,—perhaps on the score of charitable feelings, perhaps because the thief or sinner is a hypocrite, and goes to church, and is immensely loud in his responses and amens, in order to gull the parson, as he very often does,—all clergymen shrink from being useful to the community in a judicial position.

For myself, as a game-preserver and as a farmer, if I catch people within the bounds of a borough offending in any way against the laws, short of compounding a felony, I religiously abstain from proceeding against them, for it is utterly hopeless to obtain justice from a Bench so circumstanced. Even in the County Court, presided over by an excellent public Judge, if the accused prays a jury, consisting, in all probability, of five men the colleagues of the poacher or the thief, who are permitted to form the jury, not being personally or by character known to the side having a right to object, the Judge of the court, whatever his charge may be, is set at defiance, and a
verdict returned utterly at variance with the evidence.

Some legal interference ought to be allowed with juries thus constituted, for, in a borough, if a gentleman brings a case before the tradesmen-magistrates, among whom there is very often a great jealousy, if the gentleman resident near the town who comes before the County Court happens to deal with a man not a magistrate, and there is a tradesman of the same calling who is a magistrate, the latter will set his face against the gentleman because he has not dealt with him.

You may make what are called improvements in the dwellings of the poor, but you cannot make the poor think them improvements.

You may teach boys at school to know that theft is called a crime, but you cannot make them refrain from stealing apples or other property.

Theft and a tendency to all sorts of crimes are, in a portion of the lower classes of the population, born, and bred, and grown to maturity, in their breasts, and not all the preachings of all the parsons in the world, nor all the rods of schoolmasters, will lead or scare them from it. The highest and most honourable feelings of
county magistrates, soldiers, and gentlemen,—men who would risk death at the cannon's mouth,—will shrink from their duty to some extent, rather than let vulgar thieves or low attorneys charge them with partiality, groundless and uncalled-for as such a charge may be. A public Judge, paid to administer the law, is not thus hampered. He has a task to perform completely independent of any local bias of any sort or description, and he will fearlessly, and according to the exact letter of the law, do his duty. The time will come when the petty jurisdiction will be thus provided for, and a very great boon it will be to the community, and immense in its effects on the suppression of crime.
CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPORTSMAN IN RETIREMENT.—RURAL LIFE, AND FOOD FOR THE POOR.

Acclimatization Society—Alderney Manor—Rural Life and its Pleasures—The Lark—Tench—The Mole—The Water-Rail—Mistaken Accusation against the Bullfinch, Goldfinch, and other Small Birds—Mistakes of the same kind as to Game—Food for the Poor—Conclusion.

There have appeared in the Times newspaper occasionally letters suggesting a "National Acclimatization Society," as a means for introducing more food for the community, rich and poor, in the shape of birds, beasts, and fishes.

There can be no doubt but that if the Government would patronize an association of that sort, taking example from the success achieved in Australia, that much good might remotely result from it; but to send for, to import, and then to naturalize living things to a change of climate, must meet with many failures, and be a work
of time. What we need is an additional supply of food now and at once, with as little delay as possible.

The late Marquis of Breadalbane and myself, as President and Vice-President, set on foot an Acclimatization Society, and the first meeting to promote the question was held at the office of the *Field* newspaper. There could not have been a nobler or a better President, fond as he was of natural history, and lord of an enormous territory, containing lakes and rivers, as well as tracts of rich cultivation, forests, woods, and moors. He introduced and acclimatized on his wide domains the capercailzie, or "cock of the woods," and the bison from America, and reared there the cross between the capercailzie and the blackgame, the bison and the Ayrshire cow.

As far as my limited power went, I acclimatized, and in England bred and reared the prairie grouse, crossed the American dusky duck with the English wild duck; and, had the Acclimatization Society acted in the honest spirit of its formation, sundry noble lords and large proprietors had promised me their landed influence on which to introduce experiments.
The very indifferent leg the Society halted on was this. Of course, to manage the business of the Society and its foreign correspondence, it was necessary to appoint "a quorum" to act during winter, when the owners of manors, gentlemen sportsmen and fishermen, were at their country-seats, or, so soon as Parliament was up, pursuing their amusements elsewhere.

This quorum, or these quorums, completely mismanaged everything. The funds of the Society were most injudiciously squandered, public money was wasted on private premises and on individual amusement; the splendid donation given by the then Miss Burdett-Coutts, of five hundred pounds, and other subscriptions were squandered away; and, seeing how matters were going, and that it was impossible to rescue the state of affairs from very questionable management and bad hands, all the landed proprietors, noble lords, and others, myself among them, took our names out of the Society, and very soon after it collapsed.

From the very first, when I saw some of the men who somehow or other got their names on the list,—men who had never belonged to
any association in their lives that came to any good end, — I was fearful of the result, and expressed my doubts on the matter to many of my friends. The result proved the correctness of my anticipation, and the way in which the last public dinner of the Society was conducted opened everybody's eyes to the speedy breaking-up of the affair, as one no longer to be tolerated.

Well, then, unless the Government would take importation and acclimatization in hand, there is no sort of chance of any leading noble lords and gentlemen belonging to it. We would not again trust a quorum of men whom we knew nothing of, or, indeed, if what we might know of them was not invariably in their favour; and then, who could be found to attend to the public interest, when approved men were not on the spot to undertake the task of revision and correction of abuses?

It is, then, useless, at present, to talk of a "National Acclimatization Society," but it is by no means useless for us all "to put our shoulders to the wheel" of the cart that really needs our aid, and which would directly and at once im-
mensely increase, not only the annual amount of food for the people, but, at the same time, add to the beauty of the domain and the amusements of the lord of the manor. I allude to a subject on which I have long written and for many years advocated—I mean "the cultivation of the waste lands and waters."

"My shoulder" has long been "at the wheel" of what might be a well-filled cart, and on my coming to Alderney Manor I at once cast all theory aside, and set about establishing an example that any one asking my permission might inspect, and assure himself, as years went by, of the results or failure of my endeavour.

The miserable-looking, brookless, pondless waste bog, far below any needed drainage, for cultivation and utterly useless and devoid of life, as I found it, now offers to the sun a little rippling brook of beautiful water from the hitherto hidden springs, capacious pools for wild fowl and fish; and my improved waste, that never held anything but snakes, lizards, and adders, has been made to offer continuous sport to myself and to my friends with the gun and with rod and line. On the wastes there is every sort of wild fowl, and in the
waters there are trout, perch, eels, gudgeons, dace, roach, and minnows.

Thus, then, as far as my efforts to increase the food of the community, combined with my own amusements, have gone, they have been crowned with success. I have not been the *vox et præterea nihil* that many writers on this subject have been and still are; and, with little or no aid from the public press, the fact, as it stands, is known to a vast round of my acquaintance.

Three pheasants, and *no* wild ducks, was all I found on the estate, save a snipe and a sprinkling of partridges and hares; now I am able to give sport to my immediate friends who shoot with me, and game to those who do not shoot. I have plenty for my own consumption during the autumn and winter, and game, wild fowl, and rabbits even to give away, or to sell to the game salesman and poulterer, Mr. Briggs, of Bournemouth, who readily buys all I have to offer for public use. During spring and summer I can fish in ponds created by myself, and study the breeding habits of the fowl who still at that time haunt the waters, look at the brooding snipe in her nest at my foot, induce
the pewits not to be much afraid of me when I approach their nests or their young; and thus I have turned a miserable waste of black, bad, and unburnable peat into that which, by comparison with what it was before, has become, so to speak, "a garden of Eden"—at least it is so, in my retired way of living, to me.

It is not until May, or "the merry month of May," as it has long been called, that the English sportsman can be said to rest from the saddle, although the gun and greyhound ought to have been laid aside on or after the 1st of February. The death of a May fox should be the signal for preparing to "summer the hunter" and rest the hounds; and up to the 1st of May, though many packs of foxhounds had ceased to hunt, the salmon rod always affords occupation of the most brilliant piscatory kind.

Well, then, all sport but fishing being over, let us see the sort of life that can be led by a hard rider and a good shot when the horn, the cheer, and the breech-loader are hushed, and he no longer cares for, or has not money at command to enjoy, the London season.

The sweet violets have long perfumed the air;
the primroses, succeeding to the empurpled violet queen, have clothed the ground beneath the trees in the woods; while pale gold, dear, beautiful cowslips deck the sweet meadow-grass. Every male bird is singing to the partner of his nest. When the sun shines bright, all nature seems in love, and dark and dismally unfeeling is the heart and soul of that man who cannot turn in thankfulness to God for the mere gift of warm existence.

To hear the pheasants crowing and the birds singing around the bed-room window ere the day has scarcely broken, is amply enough to call the sportsman and naturalist from his couch with a joyful spirit to share in the gladdened world; and when, in the midst of such harmony of scent and song, the casement is thrown open, and the warm fresh air enters the lips and breathes on the breast of man, why he really needs not hound nor dog to lure him forth, for Nature herself to him is all in all.

If he has a farm in his occupation, there are the crops up fresh and green to greet him, with that sweet leader of Nature's orchestra of the fields, the skylark, ascending thankfully to heaven higher and higher, but still immediately over the
little nest upon the ground, as if to bear from above a dewdrop on his wing to pay his loving homage to his brooding mate.

This rural life, so loved and followed, pursued under judicious guidance, and the close study of every living thing, puts me in possession of many little facts, small in individuality, but large in the aggregate, which seem never to have been known to the old and now obsolete naturalists.

I can at once answer the question of what led to the vulgar error, by one of our old poets poetically used, as to the "tench being the physician of the waters," other fish seeking to "rub against his healing sides." A casual observer might be inclined to that poetical delusion by seeing two tench, male and female, in the act of spawning. If the surface weeds in the water had been cut and removed, the tench would seek the brink of the shore, and the overhanging grass that depends from the bank to the surface, at some little depth in the water, and there may be seen two backs, one slightly below the other, swimming, and gliding, and floundering along in contact, the one, from its position, being more visible than the other. These fish are both tench,
and it has been this incident that led casual observers into the mistake. Carp spawn on the surface weeds, and so do tench, but if you put them to it, the tench will seek the grass that is pendent in the waters.

Now there are very few people who know why the mole makes so many hills; but if they will take the trouble to beat about as many mole-hills as I have done,—it is excellent exercise for the arms, the biceps muscle, and the chest, when no other exercise is at hand,—they will have ocular demonstration of the following fact. The mole will go on making his "run," and move an infinity of mould from side to side, with those wondrously adapted claws of his, without being necessitated to lift it to the surface. In his burrowing progress, however, he is often stopped by a stone; of this impediment he has but one way of ridding himself, and that is to get it to the surface. In beating the mole-hills about in one field, this circumstance will very often be found to occur, but not always; and in nine cases out of ten, or thereabouts, a stone will be found in every molehill, not quite on the top of the molehill, but above the middle of it, and this in fields where
stones, at the depth at which the mole works, are very rare. For some time I was in doubt whether this stone was not wedged in by the mole when he had done heaving up, to prevent the fall of the hill, but since then I incline to the idea that the stone is there to be rid of its obstruction.

Among the more recent wild birds that have become attached to me is a water-rail. The rail comes to the whistle for the ducks to feed, and eats barley in close approximation to man, and in full confidence in the safety he affords.

Superficial observers, by confidently pronouncing their casually or ill-considered opinions, very often do much harm, and create for many a poor little innocent creature an enmity undeserved—thus, in the beautiful bullfinch, and goldfinch as well, because the birds are seen to pick off and apparently eat some buds from fruit-trees; none of these misobservers permit what may be inside the bud, and already destroying the possibility of perfection, to enter their minds. They build their opinion on one visible sign, and tarry not to ascertain if there is not another lurking behind it, which is really the sole source of the mischief they observe. Thus,
the finches seek the hidden grub, and thus the moles industriously work beneath the perishing corn, already fading in its blades from the bright green hue of spring to the scar and yellow tint, and really devour in thousands the wire-worm already devastating the crop.

Before any one ventures on an opinion concerning the habits of anything in Heaven's creation, however humble its little life, he should first gather correct information, not only for his own guidance, but for the guidance of other people. A lie in print, to speak plainly, gathers, from the type and colour it assumes, a shade of truth, like many a weak and erroneous falsehood when founded on the merest circumstance, and these mistakes are often the most difficult of all to set right.

Thus, in the very erroneous, uncharitable cry that the Communists and Red Republicans, and blatant men who have no just means of rising into public notice, have made against the Game Laws, we therein find them charging the lesser lives with mischief they do not do, and with devouring corn at seasons of the year when Nature gives them no appetite for it. If a hare or rabbit's ears appear from among the green and growing crops, the
animals are set down as eating nothing but the blades of corn, whereas I have shot them at all seasons for the purpose of investigation, and found that a short green grass was among the roots of the young wheat, and that was the food they chiefly sought, and which accounted for the disappearance of their ears, and their heads being so low down while in the act of feeding.

By this it is by no means my intention to say that hares and rabbits will not eat the blades of corn; I merely desire to show that their appetite is not confined to what would become the food of man, and that the purposed blame heaped on them by false demagogues is, to an immense extent, undeserved. Pheasants and partridges through the spring and summer are perpetually among the green corn as well as among and beneath the full-grown crop; but they can only eat the corn for a few days just when it is sown, and not afterwards till the grain is quite ripe: unless laid by storms, it is out of their reach.

The hare and rabbit only casually eat the corn when in its fresh, green, and unripened state. Of this I am perfectly sure, that all the means for increasing the food for the people, suggested by that
mistaken and mischievous clique, that are so fond of croaking and making nuisances in Hyde Park, and suggesting the most absurd things to our gracious Queen, are totally worthless and impracticable; and that feeding the labouring classes has no more to do with their real intentions than the love of a Chinaman for a dead and putrid pig has to do with the probability of his desire to keep a clean styie for a fattened hog. We find these demagogues, as I have previously said, trying to deprive the people of the annual supply of thirty thousand tons of rabbit food, without one available suggestion from them as to how so large a deficiency of meat was to be met. In fact, there exists no immediate way of meeting a deficiency so established.

To take an idea from "Guy Mannering," when Meg Merrilies tells Dirk Hatteraick, in the cave, that he "will be hung," and he replies that "the hemp is not grown that will do it,"—an assertion met by her "that it is sown, it is grown, it is hacked, and it's mown,"—so with Meg Merrilies we cannot say of the meat that is to take the place of the rabbits. We, if we ever could do it, should have to breed more largely, and to await the
births of calves, lambs, and little pigs, many of whom might never come, and to wean and tarry for years for the growth of calves ere they could be dignified with the name of beef, or be fit for the general consumption.

It reminds me of the dog who snapped at the shadow of the meat he held in his mouth reflected in the water, and by that act lost the substance his jaws contained.

Better let things be, than condemn them without reason. Better that blatant tongues should be still, than mislead the over-credulous, or, by falsehood, seek a selfish aggrandisement—not an aggrandisement in the end, but a mere time-serving and time-sought popularity, personally desired, its premises laughed at, and its mischief, in the end, despised.

Having lived long enough now to look on this side and on that, "the heart" no longer hot and restless, but "subdued and slow," it is not without some reason that I attempt to win for every living thing, from the giant to the lesser life, more kindliness at the hands of man; and both for man and animal the best and gentlest care of all—that of woman.
If I achieve one particle of this, if I have succeeded in my endeavour to win for any life protection, faith, and charity, or attained any good for those whose origin is so mysterious, and whose hereafter is so veiled, then I shall not have written in vain; and when the time comes—the sad, but not the dreaded time—when I must resign the saddle, lay down the otter-spear, the salmon-rod, the rifle, and the shot-gun, as I have already put by the quarter-staff, single-stick, and boxing-gloves, then my heart, with unrepining resignation, will meet the "common fate" from which none can escape, and bow before that high behest which neither gives nor seeks a challenge, nor owns a call from man.
CHAPTER XV.

NATURE'S SCHOOL-ROOM.

Where, in these days of tyrannical whippings, mortal rods, and coercive laws all running against the natural and growing grain, and getting at anything but the bottom of mischief, shall we find a better school than that so long ordained by a creative power which passes all comprehension, and sits enthroned, in contemptuous silence, far, far above the puny efforts of "the feeble tenants of an hour," or the struggles of "the degraded mass of animated dust," which seeks to cover its own hideousness with a veil of hypocrisy more easily seen through than a London mist?

Vast, unapproachable, and mysteriously beautiful, some strange power presides, awfully and mightily magnificent in the frozen iceberg as in the splendour of the glorious sun, yet none can tell
with any certainty what that power is or when the last curtain over it will fall, what fate it really is that awaits the insects who claim themselves an exclusive heaven, or whether or not "dust and ashes" are to be the final meed of Vice and Virtue, and thus that "Chaos" shall be king again.

Among the splendid places which so lavish their charms in the varied sites of the United Kingdom, I scarce know where to select one which would best illustrate the lesson to be seen and read in the months of April and May; but as it has so happened that in this, the spring of 1874, I have again had leisure to study and dream in the beautiful wilds of England, "the vale where the wild waters meet" and the mountains and lakes of Ireland and Scotland, with all their far-famed grandeur and grace, must be left untouched, and my pen must once more dwell on the tranquil scene set before me by the lake and woods of Crichel. It is a curious study afforded by the almost domesticated wild fowl, who, sheltered there unmolested all the winter, are induced, numbers of them, to stay on throughout the summer, and to lay bare their
habits and their nests in conscious freedom from any fear of closely observant man.

To an admirer of Nature, of scenery, and the habits of wild birds, there is no place,—I had nearly sung, "There is no place like home," but what I do sing is, "there is no place like Crichel," the beautiful residence of Mr. Sturt, wherein can be studied the habits of the rarest and wildest water-fowl from the very midst of their happy congregation. I take the scene as set before me in a still sunny day of the middle of April, and select the locality for observation the green turf of the park on the edge of the clear water of the lake. On the opposite bank is a large wood, the tall trees in which verge upon the water, and in places dip their gracefully drooping boughs as if to kiss the source of that strength that has enabled them so far to out-top even the oaks and elms in the further park. Grown up between the stems of the larger forest trees are the rhododendrons, the laurels, birch, and willows, all close to the clear water, but leaving sheltered little spots here and there for the repose or rest of the aquatic tribes who frequent this hospitable region in summer and winter for food, for rest, and love.
With Sir Walter Scott, I can, at the moment, while viewing this graceful scene, say,—

"The blackbird and the speckled thrush,
Good-morrow gave from every bush;
In answered covert the cushat dove,
In notes of peace, of rest, and love."

For, indeed, the "cushats," or "ring-doves," are answering each other from every fir-tree top, while the less musical murmurs of the blue-rock pigeons seem like a subdued accompaniment as they sigh their nesting hope to the mate on her eggs in the hollow tree, or, perhaps, in some rabbit's hole at the foot of it.

High up,—always on the highest branches that the tallest trees, of whatever description, afford,—there sit the brooding herons, on their large but slovenly-looking nests, their crested lords either standing erect, like soldiers at attention, by the nest, or soaring just above, in that smooth, graceful way that the wide span of their pinions so silently affords. To quote from Sir Walter Scott again, "the smooth lake's level brim" is dimpled all over with every species of wild fowl, save the gadwall, —and I hope to see that added before long to the list,—diving, pairing, washing, or pluming their glossy wings, as if they owned the water and the
woods instead of their hospitable host, and that I sat so near them as their guest, instead of as a visitor at the kindly mansion.

Close to me glide upon their happy way (or chase each other on wing just above the water) pairs of teal. A little further off the pochards play, the red heads of the male birds coming out warmly as against the darker shades, while the brilliant shelldrake, the goosander, the widgeon, the golden-eye, the baldcoot, the lesser grebe, and the moor-hen, all join in this scene of happy life, or add to the chorus of wild cries, while my presence, or what, in other places, would be the dreaded presence of tyrannical mortality, creates neither terror nor distrust. I seem to sit among the birds as a sort of invited guest, to love, to watch, and still to learn, the wondrous and beautiful secrets of Natural History.

The flocks of swans around me—even their pugnacity to other aquatic birds is, in this happy scene, completely laid aside; they are all over the lake, as if standing on their heads, while bending beneath the surface of the water to pick the newly-springing tender weeds. Here and there on the banks are sitting, on their coarse,
open, and uncomfortable-looking nests, many female swans, and various sorts of geese; and in their vicinity the old male swans keep perpetually "pushing" after the cygnets of the previous year, if they dare to look even in the direction of the brooding mate. Suddenly a heavy sound of collective large wings beats the quiet air, and the young swans rise and fly from one end of the lake to the other, to attain the lower or more distant stretch of the lake, and happier riddance from the spotless lords whose mates are everywhere thus jealously protected.

The flights of these young swans are often joined by the different tribes of wild geese, who scream their delights at any confusion that may arise, mingled, in some instances, with jealous ideas that some one of the passing flight might designedly drop by the nest of their happy expectations.

Every gander or goose, except man, cares for his offspring when they are hatched, still adores his wife or mate, whatever be the number of her family, and never deserts his rising young. I never knew a feathered goose in this respect to be disgracefully unkind or jealous, but I have
heard that a swan was miserably astonished and disgustedly angered by a servant boy or page, who took from the swan's nest the lawful eggs, and put in their place those of an old grey goose.

When the male swan saw the horrible distortion of his graceful hope, he stood erect with half-spread wings, and hissed for hours; but the poor gander, much less keen in his perception, doated on the brood of swans presented to him, suspected nothing, and in his farm-yard never became a "goose of sorrows," and thus escaped an "acquaintance with grief."

I must not omit to add that all around me crowed the splendid pheasant, the partridge called, and the willow-wrens, the redstarts, and the flycatchers, chimed in, and, with the brisk tomtits, common and crested wrens, sky and wood larks, chaffinch, green-finch, and yellow-hammer, all added to Nature's harmony, in spite of the mischievous daws and starlings, who clamoured for roguery inharmoniously, as some as foolish daws in human shape chatter at the opera.

I remember to have written long, long ago, that when the thews of limb and strength begin
to decline, what a happy thought it was to know that the weary head could ever find on the breast of beauteous and bountiful Nature a sweet and indulgent resting-place, on which to escape the pangs which the loss of other enjoyments seemed to inflict.

Let the inquiring glance of man turn which way it will, there is a lesson of love, a song of happiness, a something that is sweet and to be admired, in every nook and corner, meadow, bank, or bush. There, in yonder fresh, green bank, nestles the modest primrose, as if she wooed a protecting breast to shield her loveliness and to save her from the luscious bee; thickly spread on the mead beyond, her sister flower, the lowly but scented cowslip, in thousands, decks the grass, while the gold and green marshmallow,—or "mashmallow," as it is more commonly called,—adds lustre to Nature's carpet, but honeyless tries in vain to attract a passing wing.

To vary the lesson Nature yields from above, let us now give freedom to the cormorants, to issue from their wooden houses, and to disport themselves in that portion of the clear and swiftly-gliding trout stream allotted to their food and
healthful recreation. Unless Nature had spread before us the page of this aquatic lesson, who would have been able to judge of the rapid evolutions of so large a bird beneath the water with or against the rushing stream, and its power to turn and cope with the swiftest fish that swims, either the strong bright dace or the pliant eel? Yet here we see that these fish have no chance to outstrip their foe; and that if they evade him by suddenly availing themselves of a crevice in the bank, at full speed the cormorant's sea-green eye can detect their ambush, and seize them with his unerring bill.

Then, when the cormorant thus shows to us the strange and admirable appliances with which pre-observant Nature has supplied him, it is thus that we become aware of the destined purpose the bird is sent to enact, and then, to me, at least, occurs the doubt of a similar pre-observant wisdom existing elsewhere, or as we are supposed to believe that it does exist; and I cannot drive this question from my mind—If it was by some all-wise and powerful will destined that the lamb and the lion were always to lie down peacefully side by side, why was the lion formed to be carnivorous, and
why or how came he to be trusted with his terrible teeth and claws?

Nature is in itself a beautiful, and, perhaps, a terrible study. The bowels of the earth contain truths as mysterious as they are opposed to all mortal doctrines in regard to sundry beliefs. A terrible destruction and the most violent changes, where floods (not one flood) and fires have caused disruption, dissolution, and partial decay,—all this is visible,—then who or where is the man or conclave of men who shall dare to make sure of the future?
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