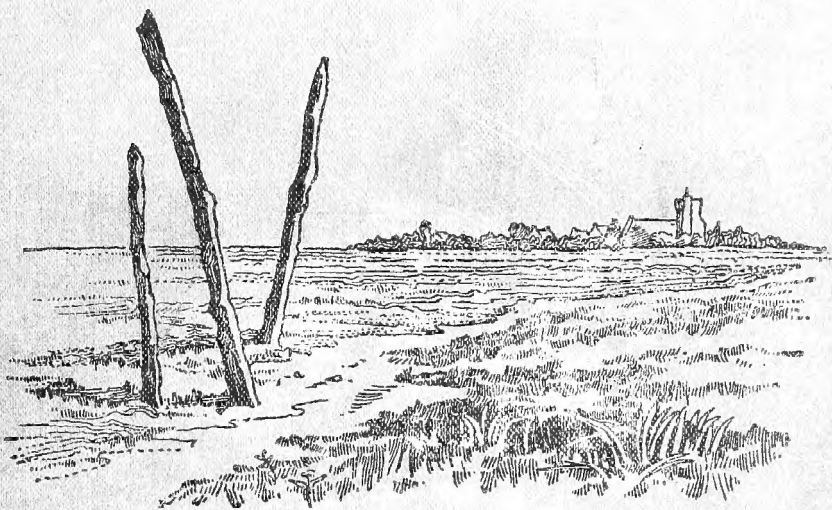
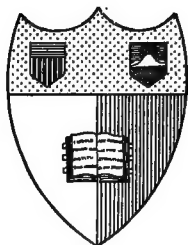


From Spring to Fall



By A Son of the Marshes



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FROM SPRING TO FALL

FROM SPRING TO FALL

OR

WHEN LIFE STIRS

BY

A SON OF THE MARSHES

AUTHOR OF

'WITH THE WOODLANDERS AND BY THE TIDE,' 'ON SURREY HILLS,'
'WITHIN AN HOUR OF LONDON TOWN,' 'ANNALS OF
A FISHING VILLAGE,' 'FOREST TITHES,' ETC.

r Jordan, Denham,

EDITED BY

J. A. OWEN

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

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FROM SPRING TO FALL.



CHAPTER I.

WHEN LIFE STIRS.

GREAT masses of clouds pass over us as we tramp merrily along the green roads that run in all directions by the border-lines of Surrey and Sussex. This is a line of country brimful of beauty for those who have eyes to see the beauty of the common objects around them, although for many the district we are walking over would probably be a dreary "No Man's Country."

Mountains of clouds are passing over us; all shades of the richest greys are there, from the darkest to the lightest and most pearly, edged with the brightest white: they go sailing through

vast spaces of blue, bathing the landscape with soft bright light, at the same time bringing the surroundings out in their most vivid colours; and, best of all, bringing them close to you—a common atmospheric effect in March and April. The properties and degrees of light are very different, as the seasons vary: some days you may keep indoors, if your object be natural observation; but in March, as a rule, we can see well. And as we jog on, wild life presents itself in various shapes, both furred and feathered.

One spot, on the outskirts of a vast heath or common, furnishes us with a fine picture, for the furze-blossoms show out like gold spangles. It is somewhat damp in places; great bunches of rushes and grey moss-covered stones are all round us, also stunted thorns and creeping brambles. A couple of titlarks are running about, balancing their bodies, as is their habit when in their restless tripping to and fro they mount on the tops of the moss-covered stones. They are prospecting in all directions for a future nesting-place, and they wish to seem very unconcerned about this appearance of an intruder in their haunt; but, for all that,

they are not easy, and so we pass on. As we turn a corner of a large furze-brake, a patch of open ground is in front of us—rough nobbly turf littered with grey stones and stunted rush clumps. Hardly have we taken a dozen steps over this, when, with a shriek of Weet, weet, weet! pewit, wit, wit, peweeet—weet wit, wit—weet! up spring a lot of nesting green plovers. We must stand quite still if we wish to put the finishing touches to our picture; but we have not long to wait, for from all directions, from dips and hollows where they had been feeding, with rapid beatings of their wings, come the cock pewits. They are directly over us, and are in their breeding plumage—the rich metallic tints of the upper parts flashing in the bright soft sunlight, as they wheel and flap, rise and fall, to rise again in order to dart down like hawks, humming and rustling as they come down, within a few yards of our heads.

All this fuss is to no purpose, for the creature that has disturbed them remains quite still, as quiet as a post. None of their company are hurt, they find; and they turn from this inspection to ground skirmishing, which they do in the most

admirable manner, pretending to run about and feed. We are soon surrounded by them in all directions; but we do not move, though we look as well as we can to right and left of us—we can only hear them when they are behind us.

Presently, one or two fine cocks, in all their beauty of bronzy sheen and white, come directly in front of us, as near as they think is quite safe for them. So close are they that we can see their feathering and their full bright eyes, while they stoop, raise their beautiful crests, and lower to erect them once more. This time they are standing up fair and square, in order to inspect us, uttering a faint quivering “wee” the while. It is much too bad of us to stand here in this post-like fashion, causing them such great anxiety; so we move. They know what it is now, and we are surrounded by a mob of wailing birds. But they need not have put themselves out so much, for not one of their eggs did we move; we only looked at them and passed on.

A gentle twittering song reaches us; and as we look round, we find where the music proceeds from. Two or three pairs of rose-linnets are con-

gratulating each other on the fact that spring is near. Dotted here and there over the turf are the golden flowers of the celandine. Surely there is beauty in common objects, if only there is a sympathetic eye to note them.

If we dip down from the top of this rough table-land—if one may call it that, because it is higher than most of that which surrounds it—we pass through a copse, and find ourself by the river's side. It is trout-water in certain parts; and here we have either to follow the path by the river and get into the main road, or to climb and scramble over the ruined bridge that spans the river—a structure which is really not of the least use now for any purposes of traffic for man or beast, as the water is not fordable. This at times puts some wayfarer, who may have found his way by the merest chance to it, in a fix.

I decide to scramble over and make for the heart of the country; and I get over all right, being pretty lucky as a rule. Then I take a look up and down the river, and at the old bridge, the ruined brickwork of which is stained grey-brown and yellow by patches of mosses and lichens. As

the water swirls under the shadowy arches—the masses that have fallen have forced the current to cut a way through—the reflected light from the surface of the bright running water quivers and creeps up the remains of the buttresses and broken arches, sinks down at intervals, then runs up and quivers, waves, and creeps on again as before. So much does this old ruined bridge interest me, that I sit down on the dead stem of a willow that has been left high and dry by the last flood, and think over what has been and what now is, and of the great changes that may come in a possibly immediate future.

Cloud-shadows fall and glide away over the old bridge and the surface of the water. It is very quiet,—only the ripple and lap of the water to be heard, with the faint rustle of the dead flags and the whispering from the sallow willows which are just budding out.

We might think that it is almost lifeless here, but it is not so: some small bird-forms show in the sallows, moving about with mouse-like actions; and then we hear the faint-hearted (the first after migration) notes of the small

willow-wren, — Cheevey — cheevey — chef chef —
chef —

Then all is still, until some creature coming up the river sounds a piping rattle; a flash of brilliant azure shoots round a bend and under the arches of the ruined bridge. For one moment the kingfisher shows on the other side, and again he is gone; and we rouse ourselves, because we too must move on.

Life is stirring in the air; only those who are about betimes on the hills and in the woods, miles away from the town or village, can fully enter into the full meaning of the brisk life of the early part of the year. The great tits feel it, and in gayest plumage they are in pairs in the old pollarded willows; you hear Pincher! pincher! pincher! as it sounds only at this time of the year, when things are moving. Gales have passed over, making the branches of the trees creak and snap off, but all is quiet again. The woods are looking peaked up,—by that I mean, that though the buds are showing, none are open yet; but they are ready to burst when the sun helps with his warm rays.

Large birds with great wings and strange cries come and go, now, as they have ever done within the memory of those who have for generations lived near the hills and the moors below them, by night or day, passing over on their way to their nesting haunts in the far North. These are wild geese: whether they be birds of good or evil omen, opinions differ. At one time they were not regarded very favourably; their cries sounded weird and uncanny to the woodlanders as they passed over.

When the evening closed in, before fastening the door for the night—bedtime in those days was at eight o'clock—the master of the house would have a final look round at the signs of the coming weather.

“The firs is all of a hum, mother; ’twill be louder afore long. An’ hark! them ’ere cries is in the air again. I’ll put up the shutter an’ fasten the door.”

Cuckoo-pints—or, as they are called in some districts, lords and ladies—the poisonous arums of the hedgerows, show now under the hollow banks. These cuckoo-pints and the storm-cock are two

features which, when life stirs, are noticed by all; the green sheath of the one and the loud bold song of the other attract ear and eye quickly. The missel-thrush is the earliest member of his family whose song welcomes the turn of the year. His relatives the song-thrush and the blackbird are early nesters, frequently having eggs laid before those other thrushes, the redwing and the fieldfare, have made up their minds to leave us; but they can hardly be said to sing yet. Now and then they do make a start; but not before the furrows reek with the warm April showers will they be in full song. The first to rejoice in the new life is that undaunted woodland singer the storm-cock; and his song is a welcome one, fitting in with the rush of gales and the tossing of tree-branches, when all life is stirring.

The green woodpecker and his mate are busy now, prospecting round; for the grubs that have burrowed deep down in their tunnels now draw up as near as they can to the bark, warmth being necessary for their perfect development. It is wonderful what a wealth of insect life old trees hold. It takes these woodpeckers some time to

fix on a site for a nest, if the hole made in a tree by the bill of the birds can be called one.

If we examine the old nesting tunnel and the new one, in the same tree, we find circular holes, just large enough for the body of the bird, gouged out under a projecting limb. When the old nest gets foul, they set to work to make a fresh one. This matter is not settled in a hurry: for weeks the pair will look round in a general way, playing antics with each other, making the wood or copse ring with their yikeing laughs. As the ordinary woodland songsters have not yet tried their voices beyond half-hearted twiddles and pipings, the green woodpeckers have it pretty much to themselves, and they make the part of the wood or the timber trees they have selected ring again. It is a difficult matter to find out the exact tree they are at work on when they are fairly at their carpentering, for the birds take turn and turn about at the tunnelling business, and when one is at work the other is on the watch, looking down on you as you creep through the under-stuff. As a rule, some lucky accident enables you to determine on the exact spot: to your very great astonishment you find

that you had been searching in quite the wrong direction. The last tunnel that I examined had young in it: the oak in which it was stood out by itself on the sward.

That full twit, twit, twit, like the lower notes of a fife, comes from the nimble nuthatch that is busily travelling over the trunks and limbs of the nearest trees. This rich full twit! must be heard to be fully appreciated, for, like the laugh of the green woodpecker, it is not to be described by the pen. On the top twigs, just swaying to and fro in the soft air, are the greenfinches, calling now as they will call at times in the heat of summer, Breeze, breeze-e-e, breeze!

As the time follows on, more decided evidence is daily given that the heart of mighty nature is throbbing with the fulness which shall soon gladden all her children; the music of the winds, soft winds, that wave and bend without breaking, can be heard on the wide open commons of the uplands.

Linnets gather and twitter to each other: the cock-birds are very handsome now, for they are in full nesting, or, we should have said, in full breeding plumage. One near us, perched on the tips

of some golden furze bloom, has a breast like a rose; he is no longer the "grey lintie," he is now the rose-breasted linnet of the commoner's children.

"No rose without a thorn," says the proverb; and as the little fellow is contentedly singing whilst he eyes the little flick of wool the sheep have left on the thorns as they passed, with which his mate will line her nest, a bird not larger than a ring-ouzel shoots up the rough track, about a foot from the ground; it rises like a flash, and the linnet is captured by a male sparrow-hawk. If the hawk had shown itself above, all the birds would have dropped in the bushes. The hawk knew this, and made his capture in the way described.

"My brother what's just come home from foreign parts, said as how he felt as if he could bust out cryin' for joy when he leant on the gate o' our medder, an' heard the blackbirds sing in the old elms at the bottom on it. The birds is most hansom', an' cur'ous, where he's bin, he says, an' some on 'em sings. But he said not one on 'em could ever make him feel like that couple o' cock blackbirds a-singin' in our old elms." So spake

a young friend of mine as we stood by the cottage gate together. For the time has come, noticed by ancient lovers of the woods and all that pertains to woodland lore, when the merle and the mavis are singing.

Flitting and piping, first on one side of the hedgerows, then on the other, are the bullfinches, making for the gardens.

On a bit of greensward by the edge of the woodland road a doe rabbit has brought her litter of young ones from her stop in a ploughed field on the other side of the hedge. As they sit crouched round about her, the old doe looks as if she was sitting among some scattered potatoes; for only the arch of the youngsters' backs show, and they are close to the hedge, ready for a bolt if required. And well they may be, for the dusk of a spring evening is drawing on, and before we cleared the last timbered copse we heard very catlike mewings from some young owls of the long-eared kind. In fact, for half an hour I had been amusing myself by getting in one of the hollow ash pollards and calling one of the "branchers" to me. He was not able to fly, but he could flutter and jump from

bough to bough. It was a most ludicrous performance to see the young owl hump his back up, flutter his weak wings, and turn his head from side to side, for he could hear the call of his parents but could not see me.

Pheasants crow, and partridges call over ridge and furrow, and the hares course about in merry fashion; but as the fox and his vixen have a family to provide for, some of their frolics may be stopped prematurely.

The daffydownillies have been gathered in the moist woodland meadows by the children, to their heart's content, and nice bunches of snowdrops had been gathered from the same place; but these are gone now. Daisies and the golden buttercups now spangle the meadows.

“One swallow does not make a summer,” says the old adage,—the first originator of that saying must, I think, have been a little cantankerous; but the swallow, whenever he is seen, surely tells that brighter days are in store for us.

So far as the cuckoo is concerned, he has of late years been a little unfortunate. Snowstorms do not suit his constitution: for all that, he pulls

through. Very curious notions exist about this bird in some localities.

“Now look here, I don’t care what you says, if you jabbered on fur a week. Cuckoos turn into hawks. An’ I ken tell ye summat else as will make yer open yer eyes a bit,—swallers in the winter goes under the mud like eels. I’d sooner believe my father’s old book, what tells ye about the swaller stone an’ the swaller herb, than I would what you says on it. Why, that ’ere book was writ afore my grandfather’s time. It come down to us in the fambley. An’ I’ve heerd my old granny say as all critters an’ herbs—an’ us as well—was all under the power o’ the planets.”

Jack was only proving in his own rough way what our forefathers in their own limited and peculiar fashion had noticed of the resting-time of nature, and the time when life stirs.

CHAPTER II.

FURRED AND FEATHERED YOUNGSTERS.

THE water-rat, or, more properly speaking, the water-vole, is at all times a very interesting little creature. In the marshlands, where the banks that are constructed for keeping the water back have to be kept in good order, he and his are certainly most unwelcome, as they undermine these, and cause great loss to the grazier-farmers; but that does not concern us here.

It is a very pretty sight to see a family of voles come out of their burrows to feed. They have holes above water and below it,—the one below being used to enter the upper chamber, from which they dive, if alarmed, from the bank they are feeding on. The father of the family pokes his head

out, looks round, and then ventures out, runs a yard or two, plumps off the bank, swims along the edge of it, then dives and enters the passage under the water, to make his appearance once more at the top hole. This is only to convince himself that no enemy or enemies are near his small domain. Then he sits up, gives his whiskers a trim up, and out glide his small family, their mother bringing up the rear. They are sleek-looking innocent creatures; some of them try their milk-teeth at grass-cutting, but their parents cut for them, and the little creatures feed on the tender parts.

We are in the leafy month of June. It is dinner-time at the home farm,—this particular farm being one that supplies the mansion of a large estate.

We hear the tramp of the horses and the rattle of their harness, as they pass into the yard on their way to the stables to have their mid-day feed. Through the open kitchen we can see the table set out for the farm hands. From the old-fashioned garden comes the hum of bees about their hives; outside, on stakes in front of the door, are the dairy pails, scoured to the utmost degree of purity; as to the pans, it makes your eyes blink to look at them,

the metal is so highly polished. The pigeons are on the old roof, cooing and sunning themselves, two things that they delight in. Then the pigs are stretched out on their sides, grunting now and again in sheer delight; for there is nothing that they like better than a sun-bath. The old sheep-dog lies in front of the kitchen-door with his head on his forepaws, apparently asleep; but one at least of his eyes is open—for as a trusted and faithful four-footed servant, he knows he may soon look for the scraps from the dinner-table.

Some fowls are busily scratching and pecking along the bank that divides the meadow they run in from one of the home-covers; whilst their neighbours, the ducks, are fast asleep on the water of their pond, after feeding well.

All at once something goes wrong with one of them, a game-hen, that had just done duty as foster-mother to some young pheasants. We hear carke-car-cluck-cur-ure-cark-er-cluck-carke-r—! the cry of a throttled fowl: something has dragged that unfortunate bird up the bank and through the hedge. The game-rooster, at the first cry of alarm, comes rushing at top speed, shrieking with rage, to protect

and deliver if possible one of his hen seraglio; he shoots up the bank and into the copse, but evidently meets with some obstruction there, for strange sounds proceed from him. The sheep-dog forgets his scraps from the dinner and leaps over into the grass-field, very much alive, and ready to go at anything. As for the retriever, he would break from his collar-chain if he could.

Out come the farmer and his men. The master has his double. Directly he sees the marks on the soil of the bank, he turns on his heel, saying, "Don't let them have the fowls if you can help it; but the hunt will settle."

In less than ten minutes one of the hands, followed by the sheep-dog, brings the slaughtered fowls into the meadow. It may be hereditary instinct, or fox villainy, which is never to be eradicated, but it is a fact well known, and in some instances a very expensive fact, that Master Reynard's young folks, pretty and agile as they are, do require a large amount of the most dainty nourishment in order to fully develop all their vulpine faculties. Yet in spite of all their fond parent's misdeeds done for their benefit, together

with their own inborn tendencies, cubs do not come to grief. In fact, no one could try to hurt them or their parents in their childhood, if he once saw a lot of them at play.

Click, clack, click, clack—clack, click! comes from inside the mill, these sounds being mingled with the slush, slush, slush of the wheel, and the rush of water over the apron of the sluice.

The very look of the place would be enough to make any angler go through the pantomime of using a rod, if he could not fish there. A quiet place this is, one of the old-fashioned water-mills that have only recently been altered—that is, spoilt for ever, so far as the picturesque is concerned; for where the fine chimney-stacks used to be, tall shafts now are. Steam-power has altered some mills, and the ponds that once supplied the water-power to work them, almost beyond recognition. Not only that, but the old class of millers, and the men that worked for them, are gone also.

In the course of a short two years, 1892 and 1893, there have been more alterations than at one time could have been thought possible.

There were old tumbling bays, crossed by plank

bridges, where the water rushed under the elm-shaded road into the river below; the bay itself, on both sides of it, was littered with great stone slabs, some above the water and others beneath it. These had been pushed out from the ancient walls of the tumbling bay by the roots of the great trees that lined the banks on either side. Perch, trout, eels, and dace flourished here to perfection.

When the river was in flood, the fish we have mentioned rushed up the stream under the road, into the tumbling bay, and stayed there. If it had not been for the otters that made this place one of their favourite fishing-pools, the fish would hardly have had room to swim about in.

At the small lead-light window that looked out on the pool, many a time has "Old Thomas"—rightly so called, for he was old, like his master—seen the animals fishing in the early morning, when he had been at night-work in the mill. The size of any otter, quite irrespective of sex—although the dog, as he is called, is always the largest—depends on the quality and quantity of the creature's food; and how hard they have to work for it! I have seen some fair-sized otters recently, but I am very sorry

to say they were dead ones—the more's the pity of it! They are fairly numerous, however, still, within twenty minutes' walk from my own door.

Silver-bellied eels are sought for by the long-tailed brown-coated fisher most eagerly; and where these are in abundance he does well, increasing in size and weight. At one time he could rest in peace, for no one molested him or tried to do him harm: now he hardly dares to put his nose up to vent, if any one is about; and what is the real reason of this? Simply the fact that he fetches a few paltry shillings for stuffing purposes.

As to what he may do in some preserved waters at times, I am not prepared to say. He must come a long distance to get to some of them. The very worst "otters" that ever I knew were nets fixed just above a deep pool when the fish were out feeding on the shallows a quarter of a mile above it. The "otters" that worked that net got in above it, and drove the fish down into it.

So the game goes on. If it was in one's power to prevent it, one would not have any of those brave animals killed. Not that I am prejudiced—at least I hope I am not—but so many innocent creatures

have suffered lately, being harried almost to extinction; and I would earnestly plead for this fisher, and for this reason—before he was harried, any boy that could be trusted by the water could catch enough fish for a good fry.

As to their elders, they caught as many as they thought were needed, and then left off. This is altered now, and chiefly because there are no fish to catch.

The young of furred and feathered creatures resemble the children of humans. You can see all the troubles of common humanity, the shifts and accidents to which all are liable, before your eyes, in and about the woods and fields, acted over again by the creatures that live and shelter there.

All wild things, if man does not interfere with them, live out their lives joyously; but there is no such thing as perfect peace or happiness, even in their forest sanctuaries. When robbed of their young, or when these are wantonly killed, they mourn for them in their own way, and in very doleful fashion.

Pike are all very well in their place; but when one, or for the matter of that a couple, came up

from the river into the tumbling bay I have mentioned, they were harried out of it as quickly as possible. The bay being only a deep basin like a pool, surrounded on all sides, the rest of the fish had not much room to get away from their destroyers. Not only that—it was not what they swallowed, but the bites these gave the large fish, that were far too large for them to dream of pouching, that were to be deprecated.

All anglers—and we hope some of our readers fish—know how they feel when they see a good trout, dace, or roach with a piece bitten out of him. The bite shows white under water as the fish swims about; and after a time fungoid growth appears, and the fish dies, covered with a film that looks like thick mildew. When this is the case, night-lines are set, baited with fish from different waters—namely, goldfish—and the pike are captured as a rule, but at times exceptions occur. Night-lines or trimmers require looking after very early in the morning. We have started at two o'clock in early summer—this was long before the present restrictions were in force—for a six miles' walk to reach this very pool. As we had permission, we could

have stopped there all night, but that would not have suited our purpose. There is no telling what you may see in the dead quiet of the morning, before a bird even has woke up from his sleep, or the robin comes to look at you as you pass along.

The animals and birds that get their living in the night-time are about in full activity. Strange sounds come from the tangle of the river-side; there is no need to go there, for we know the creatures they proceed from. I have silently, and alone, swam this river between the hours of night and morning to find them out.

A cry which, once heard, is always remembered, a whistling kind of call not to be rendered or put on paper, comes from the pool. This is answered by pup-like voices, we might say kitten-like—indeed the two blended together might answer in some degree for it. It is the answer of the cub otters—or, to write correctly, otter-kittens—to their dam.

We have often alluded to the adaptability of the colouring of some creatures to their surroundings, and in some instances this is carried to a very remarkable degree: the otter is a case in

point, for when flattened out on some half-submerged log or stone, the animal is not to be made out before he moves. Even when fishing, — and in lonely quiet places he fishes in the daytime, — although your eyes may be on the water, the vents are got with such rapidity, that if you were not fairly acquainted with the animal's ways you would not know what you had got a glimpse of.

If you wish to find out how quickly you can get wet through without jumping in the water or going out in a thunder-shower, crawl through high grass with heavy night dews beading every blade of it. I have been drenched summer and winter, and have had my clothes frozen in that hard time, but I never got so perfectly saturated in so short a time as I did when crawling, with snake-like caution, to crane my neck over that pool. And when I got to it, to my mortification and disgust, I could see nothing, not even a fish.

The words "sick at heart" would about sum up my condition then. As to moving, that never entered my mind. There I lay, sprawled out, thinking; and my thoughts were chiefly about "a fool and his folly."

Spat-spatter-spatter-spatter-splash! The sounds come from a large hole at the bottom of the wall, where a stone, or we ought to say a slab, has fallen out; there it is, just above the water, as large as a paving-stone. A nice lot of fish on the feed these are, is my first thought; for they dearly like such places. Squash! then a whining cry, and out shoots a kitten-otter with a large dace which his dam had given him, followed by a couple more young ones that were trying their utmost to rob him of it. They squealed, bit, scratched, and carried on like little demons; first one had the dace, then another. Sometimes they were on the slab, then again they were in the water. The thing they looked most like was a lady's brown sable boa, twisted up and endowed with life; they writhed and twisted about like eels. How it would have ended I cannot say, for the dam at that moment put her head up with another fine dace, and in my eagerness to see I pushed a stone off the crumbling wall.

A long wave passed under the arch, and I got up to dry myself.

The skylark, because it is so common, only re-

ceives casual notice from those who are privileged to hear the bird's song, and watch its mounting flight for the greater part of the year. Bird calendars have been compiled, giving the dates of the first singing of birds. These are not to be entirely depended on, for what has been is not now.

Seasons have changed considerably of late, well within our own time that is. And this matter has affected bird life more or less, especially so far as the time of their first being heard is concerned.

Again, the records of one county will not do for another. What books can do is to suggest an average estimate.

The singer under notice and his ringing upward flight are two of the very commonest sounds and sights of the country. If, after hearing larks sing from year to year, the birds should suddenly vanish, how much the loss would be deplored! That is ever best that is nearest to us; and indeed the commonest pleasures and duties of daily life are, after all, our greatest blessings.

Now, although larks are far more numerous in the fields than sparrows, during reaping-time ex-

cepted, not one in twenty that may be in the habit of seeing the birds daily could describe their plumage or the structure of their feet. Even those who keep these birds and value them highly, for they do that in the country, would not be able to tell you how many feathers the bird had in its wing or tail. I once pointed out the beauties of a fine lark to his owner. "Ah well, 'tis just as you says," he rejoined, "but I niver sin it afore; I shell valley him more 'an iver I did, now." There are unexpected and untold beauties to be found in common birds, if looked for.

Apart from the raids made on them by bird-nesting boys, young larks rarely come to grief; and even at the hands of these they do not suffer much. The knowledge that there may be three or four nests in one field, and the finding of one of them, are very different matters. A lark's nest is a very artless affair to look at, but the most consummate art is used by the bird for the purpose of its concealment. Any hollow where the hoof of a cow or horse has splodged in when the ground was soft, is carefully rounded up by the bird. There is something game-looking about young larks.

Once, and once only, I accidentally touched with the toe of my boot a lark's nest, in crossing a grass-field. The young ones were nearly ready to fly; out they turned like so many sentries, and challenged me. Those who may have had a similar experience will know all about that challenge note, for it does not mean fear or defiance. No other young birds that I have seen ever stand on their legs so high, or with such confidence, as these larks do.

Considering that they are field-songsters, they suffer little from their natural enemies in the nesting season. It is one of the mysteries of nature, this protective power that is accorded to all youngsters, furred and feathered ones included. No matter where the place chosen may be,—and the closer to man and his surroundings the better—so very close is it at times that from that very fact their presence is never even suspected,—they rear their young in peace. Cattle pass to and fro, biting a bit here and a bit there, but never in the course of a lifelong experience have I ever known the tuft that hung over and concealed the nest bitten off by grazing cattle, or the nest trampled on by their hoofs. Others

may have seen this, but I never have. It must be borne in mind that I refer to cases when the creature and its home have never been touched by human hands. No matter how clever the human bungler may think he has been, the birds know he has been there, and they act accordingly. Look at them and pass on, as I did when I watched those young larks walk into their nest again.

Cuckoo! cuckoo! shouts the grey long-tailed bird as he flies; and those that hear and see him always note him, for he is considered by country-folks to be a bird of good or evil omen.

To see a cuckoo before breakfast is by some considered a bad omen. Things, as they have it, will then go crooked all through the day. But if the bird is seen after breakfast, everything will be propitious. There is hardly any ending to cuckoo lore. One fact is quite certain,—the bird is a good friend to all those who cultivate the soil in any shape or way, as caterpillars form the principal part of its food. So partial is the bird to one hairy caterpillar, locally called hairy outhit, and devil's ring, that the bird's stomach is lined with hairs to a very remarkable extent.

When I was younger, one I knew who posed as a very great authority would not believe that the young cuckoo shouldered the young of its foster - parents out of the nest, so that it might have all the food they could get for itself.

It is a most wonderful phase of natural life, those dead young that the cuckoo has shouldered out, beneath the nest, and the speckled parasite filling up the whole of it. And in spite of all that, to think of his being most carefully fed and tended by his foster-parents! A young cuckoo is a bad lot.

On the moors and commons of southern counties, in certain localities, cuckoos in their season were abundant before alterations had taken place. They are fairly numerous now, for I can get a young one from the nest out of which he has turned the right owners, at almost any time in the right season.

The egg of the cuckoo is very small, considering the size of the bird. This, when laid, the cuckoo—in seven cases out of ten, but there are exceptions—carries in her capacious mouth, and drops it in the nest of the bird she has selected. Those that know the nesting habits of the tree and meadow pipits look for them where others would not. A small hol-

low, for instance, which a water-vole has scratched, just to keep his little nails in proper order, in the almost perpendicular bank of a small dyke that acts as feeder to a watercress-bed, is very frequently finished up by the pipit as a nesting site. Now, it would be impossible for the hen-cuckoo to lay in a nest of that kind, but she can shuffle down and drop the egg into it from her mouth.

The life of a naturalist—if it were prolonged for him well beyond the allotted time of threescore years and ten, and all his faculties preserved, until at last the golden bowl is broken and the light dies out—is only long enough to learn a little of what we shall know more about hereafter; and, by the way, the life-odour of fresh earth and the aromatic scent from waving trees will keep a man young for a long time.

In case our readers might fall in with a young cuckoo in the conditions above described, let me give a minute description of what it looks like when it is feathered but not yet able to fly. At first sight it is very like a young hawk. The bill is dusky, and not so much hooked as that of the old bird; the margins of the gape, or mandibles, are yellow, the

eyes brown. The upper parts are banded with dark grey-brown and light red, the greater part of the feathers being tipped with reddish-white. The short wings—short compared to what they will be—are mottled much after the same manner. The fore-part and sides of the neck are banded with blackish-brown and white, with a tinge of red. The rest of the lower parts are white with dusky bars; the feet yellow.

Nothing amiable can be said about young cuckoos, for as they increase in size they compel their foster-parents to slave for them. They are pugnacious to a degree: if you place your finger near them, they will peck at it and strike with their wings. This is not a peculiarity that belongs to the swallowing parasite alone; to be just, we must state that the young of the turtle-dove—that emblem of gentleness—act in the same way as do the young cuckoos.

The snipes, or heather-bleaters as they are called, have not yet quite deserted one of those old haunts in Surrey that I know, where at one time they could be seen all the year round in considerable numbers. But in the course of next year, 1895,

the few pairs that now frequent it will go; for preparations are well advanced for draining the moor—the bog portion of it, not the heathery parts—for purposes of spade-husbandry. Miles of what four years ago was swamp-bog are now covered with vegetable-gardens, and more will follow.

Last November—1893—I was walking up the side of the bog-meadow looking after snipes; this February—1894—I went there again for the same purpose, and found, to my astonishment, a fine double-span glass-house, quite 200 feet in length, erected in the centre of the now completely drained meadows, for fruit-growing; the alders and reeds are all gone.

Our favourite hunting-swamps are almost things of the past now. I have never heard that snipes move their young as the woodcocks do, and have never known them at any time to lead their chicks about in the open manner that the woodcock will do at times under favourable conditions.

Young snipes, like their parents, are hideling squatters. At first they are not firm on their legs, at least they appear to wobble a bit as they tumble out of their flag-and-rush nest if alarmed. At the

very first glance they might be taken for frogs on the jump. That is all you will see of them. As to looking after them, do not attempt it, for they are gone where you will not be able to follow. Young woodcocks we could always have had, if we wished, but young snipes were never offered, because they were not to be got at, alive and uninjured.

Furred and feathered youngsters have the instinct of self-preservation largely developed; in young snipes it is so to a remarkable degree.

CHAPTER III.

SUMMER VOICES.

JUST now the woods and the fields that surround them are never still; by day or night the pulse of Nature beats audibly.

It is mid-summer in the woodlands, and so hot is it that the seed-pods of the furze bushes pop and crack, the seeds sowing themselves in all directions, Nature being her own seed-distributor. The lizards stretch themselves on the bare stones out in the open, or climb to the very top shoots of the furze bushes, inflating their throats, apparently from the pure joy of existence. It is hot, but this is a life-giving heat; and there are various kinds of heat—one will take all the life out of you, whilst another will make you feel,

as our old folks say, "As brisk as a bumble-bee in a tar-pot."

The simile is not a bad one; insects are attracted by scent. When bees, the common hive-bees, are on the wing, although none to your certain knowledge may be near you, if you melt a bit of bee's-wax in an iron ladle and wave it about, in less than twenty minutes you will have your place swarming with hive-bees. So well is this fact known in the country, that when it is necessary to melt the wax for household purposes, though it be in the middle of summer, all the windows and doors are closed.

As you look up through all the greenery of the woods, you can see the leaves on the very topmost shoots quiver. Where does the air come from, for we can feel no wind stir?

When we gain the crest of the hill crowned by a clump of firs, a noticeable feature of our Surrey hills, we rest for a time. All is still; there is not enough air, so far as it can be felt, to deviate the course of one falling fir-needle. But in the air above us the summer voice of the firs is whispering. The voices of the trees change with the seasons; just now they speak in a dreamy monologue of undertones.

The birds know in some mysterious way that this is the time for them to renew their strength after their arduous maternal duties. In the bright spring-time the wood-pigeon—the “cushat-doo”—could not give full vent to all the exuberance of his vitality. He crooned to his mate, rose in the air, spread out his tail, inflated his neck, and clapped his wings above his back loudly and frequently for her admiration.

Now, as we look up through the heavy dark-green tracery, we can see them both sitting side by side in a kind of Darby-and-Joan fashion. The land itself must rest. There are seed-time and harvest, and the rest-time of fallow lands; this is an imperative law of Nature, carried out by all created beings.

You can see the creatures that the woods hold by fits and starts only; for they know that a man is in their haunts, and they come in their quiet manner to find out if he intends them harm. Recently a squirrel ate his provender just over my head, and the fawn-backed, white-bellied, large-eyed wood-mouse, or, as he is called from his love of cultivation, the garden-mouse, sat up on his haunches and trimmed his fine long whiskers al-

most at my feet. The two great problems of life and death follow quickly on each other, for hardly had the little fellow gone when one of his most determined enemies, in the shape of a weasel, made his appearance, looked at me with his bold dark eyes, and then followed on the track of the mouse.

The southern slopes of hills are naturally preferred by all creatures furred or feathered, and our road home will lead us to descend in that direction. Now and again we come on bare places where huge beech-trees have been felled for timber. Before the remains in the shape of "lop" and "top" are cleared off, a crop of vegetation never seen there before springs up like magic; one of the magical workings of the woodlands this is. To these newly opened spaces the larger species of the fritillaries are singularly attracted.

Travellers in tropical countries have mentioned a distinct sound made in flight by some of the tropical species. The Queen of Spain fritillary, and the high brown fritillary, and also the silver-washed fritillary, when on flight, click with their strong wings. This I have heard distinctly as the grand creatures have flown within a yard of me,

So quiet at times are these open spots, that a beetle can be heard running or crawling over the dead leaves. When the sun dips down, then is the time to hear summer voices and to see the various creatures that they proceed from.

Some are impelled by the power given them by their Creator to sing their song of thanksgiving for daily life and provender before the night falls. Others that live and move when other species rest, are ready now to begin their crepuscular wanderings. Rabbits come out, and stoats also. From one old ash hollow, from three parts of its length, strange sounds proceed — snores, whines, clicks, and hisses. A pair of white owls are just waking up. Beetles drone up, and down, and across the road, sometimes butting against you with considerable force and falling at your feet. Bats show, dashing about in their erratic flight. Not that it is yet fairly evening; but something tells them that the day is drawing to a close. The cows and the sheep are making for their accustomed summer resting-places for the night, the bells of the leading animals tinkling pleasantly in the distance.

Then comes the çhur—er—er—churr! of the heave-jar or fern-owl; but this is only a preparatory note or two from a bird of that species, whom something has woke up from his sleep earlier than usual.

From the fields and meadows where they have been feeding all through the day, occasionally going to the sandy shallows of the trout-stream to bathe, great flocks of linnets and sparrows and green-finches whirl up into the trees to roost for the night.

As the “dims” come on—the light that is, as our folks say, “not one thing nor yet t’other”—you will hear coming up from the moist meadows below a sound of clicket, clicket, click, click, click-click-click; and as the sound or sounds get nearer the clicks appear to run into each other, exactly like the sounds made by a brown owl when he is enraged; but, as the bird dashes over the road clicking, you see that it is a moor-hen making all the fuss.

The sun has risen; it rose a full hour ago; early morning in the summer woodlands it is. What do we hear now, when all around is sparkling with dewdrops, each one, as the sunlight catches it, a

prismatic jewel? From hill to hill the songs of birds ring out, first and foremost those of the blackbirds and thrushes, for moulting-time is far off yet. Then in the lulls come the notes of the minor singers, all in perfect harmony and keeping with the surroundings.

And with it all, at intervals, as if time was specially set apart for these little birds to make themselves heard in, comes the protesting plaint of the wood-wren; and distinct, and in fact above all, sounds a voice apart, which, if once heard in full plaintive wail, will never be forgotten,—the song of the hedge-sparrow, a sober-coloured little singer. If you have the good fortune to hear it, you will wonder at the power of the song.

Only a few years ago—it almost seems but yesterday—I could hear the bubble and croon of black-game, the crow of pheasant, also the chirr of partridge, and the occasional wet-my-weet, or as some interpret it, bit-by-bit, close to my own home; indeed, a fine blackcock once took refuge under a fruit-bush in my own garden, where it could easily have been captured, but it was left to go in peace.

It takes a lifetime of study, for the pure love of it, to distinguish, not to speak of describing, the voices of the woods; they vary so, according as different passions actuate their owners. As it is with common humanity, so it is with other creatures: hate, love, fear, distrust of others, and confidence influence the furred and feathered dwellers under green leaves. When they are far better understood than they are at present, it will be better for all interested in this question. That is, if some of the most interesting and useful are not exterminated.

Quite independent of the usual dwellers in and about the woodlands, there are stray visitors that only pay temporary visits there; but these lend their voices to the general company. Rooks, jack-daws, and starlings pass over or settle at times on their way to or from their feeding-grounds. As to the jays, they are squawking about from sunrise to roosting-time, unless they are visiting the gardens in quest of green peas or cherries. When that is the case, they flit from the woods to the gardens in silence. When the jay tries his vocal power for the edification of his mate in the courting season, he

makes a curious job of it. Where numbers of wood-pigeons and turtle-doves are about, their coo-roo-coos would be monotonous unless sharper and clearer voices broke in. The finest time to hear summer voices is after a thunderstorm when all is over. Whilst the storm is gathering, the birds seek shelter and are mute; directly the sky clears, we all know how they break out into full song; even the wren holds forth, and for his size he is a first-rate singer.

Little by little, in some instances by great and violent alterations—we mean so far as the furred and feathered creatures are concerned—their voices are no longer heard in what at one time were their favourite haunts. This is the necessary outcome of building, and the reclaiming of waste lands for that purpose. As the population increases, folks must have living room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MERRY SANDPIPER AND THE CRUEL
SPARROW-HAWK.

WHEN the swallow and the swift are in our midst once more, a longing steals over us town-dwellers, a longing that refuses to be satisfied until we can visit the brooks and the creatures that live on their banks and in their waters, amongst which our life was once more freely spent than it has been of late years.

Just now there is no one to ask leave from, no one to control us, so we go, as we did in the days gone by; only now we have to go to the sources of the streams, or very near them. So far as my own experience goes, the waters in the near neighbourhood of country towns and villages are more

or less polluted, although the drinking-water is pure, bright, and good.

It would be well if the same could be said for the rivers, streams, ponds, and brooks. We get away from all this, however, and wander till we are close to the hills that the waters come from which supply all.

Sandpipers, both species—the common “fiddler” and the far rarer green species—are fond of hill country, so we shall saunter up this moor-stream, which is of no width, but yet is full of red-speckled trout, to see if we can find one.

Slowly moving up one of the fairest moorland hollows that to my thinking human eyes ever rested on, we find that even here content does not reign. A woman who has not passed her prime, judging from her looks, tells us, in answer to a few simple questions, that some folk think it grand here; but, added she, “I wish I was out of it all: I am not well, and my poor children are but weakly, ailing little souls. There is little to be seen from one year to another—nor yet to hear, but the moaning of the firs.” One feels there was much truth in this; indeed moorland mists, and exhalation from

the bogs, are to be avoided. The spot is very beautiful and very lonely, and that is the reason we visit it, but one would not wish to stay there. Dull thoughts, however, must be left behind; for we are in search of a creature that is the feathered embodiment of active joyous life, the sandpiper, or fiddler, as the bird is called.

The trout shoot like arrows up the stream in front of us as we march along. We shall come to a pool presently, and then must very cautiously examine it.

Here it is; only there is nothing but trout to be seen merrily rising in all directions; the pool is alive with them, but as we have not come to fish, we move on. Green ferns, waxen-leaved whortle shrubs, and heather, are all around, and the moor is plentifully sprinkled with stunted firs. It is no use to look here, so on we go, following up the stream. The sound of falling water reaches us; it is the natural overflow from the pool above,—the largest pool on the moor, one side of which is bordered by the whitest glistening sand that has been washed down there from above by the feeding stream. It is just a moorland mirror,

fringed on one side with low alders. On a spur of peat and gravel a fine birch has managed to plant itself, throwing faint lines of shadows on the bright sand. All this we can see from behind the screen of alders; and we see something else, for from the edge of the turf something runs on to the sand, to the edge of the pure water, and some small grey dots with it. It is a hen sandpiper. As the birds run they look like grey stones moving about, when they are reflected in the water; so closely do they fall in with their surroundings that even with glass, at very short range, we are barely able to follow them.

As we watch, the grey dots vanish like a flash, and the mother shoots over the pool, wheels round rapidly, and joins her chicks somewhere. The cause of their alarm soon shows itself, for the broad wings and light breast of a heron are reflected in the still waters of the pool over which he floats.

If ever a bird deserved the title of feathered freebooter the sparrow-hawk does. Of dauntless courage, although he is small in size, nothing is too much for him, apart from the question of

weight. He has left the marks of his bill and his needle-like claws in my hands many a time. His bright, yellow eye has a determined look which bespeaks him a warrior bird, and his compact build bears out the idea. At all times, and in all places, he may be seen: on the hills and in the wood, by the river-side and along the sea-shore, and—where his company is very far from welcome—in the farmyard.

It is feeding-time, and what a commotion there is among the poultry! Geese hiss and cackle; turkeys yelp and give vent to their half-throttled “Gobble, gobble, gobble;” cocks crow and hens cackle, while the guinea-fowls yell out their frantic “Come-back, come-back!” cows bellow and pigs grunt,—the noise might be heard a mile away. The sparrow-hawk does hear it, and he knows the meaning of it all; more than that, he intends to profit by the occasion. After one or two sweeps round the grass meadows, he turns his course in the direction of the farm. A flicker of the wings, and a sail along through the air, with his long tail spread out a little, bears him rapidly along. As he nears the old farmyard he glides into the

great elms that stand in a circle round it, making his way most cautiously ; for if the sparrows and finches noted him the alarm would be given directly, and his plans would be frustrated.

Quack - quack ! Up paddles the old drake for his share of food. This is resented by the principal rooster, who makes a fly and a stroke at father duck. The latter bobs down, and returns the compliment by seizing the cock by the breast, pulling out a billful of feathers. Now would be the moment, surely, for our sparrow-hawk to dash down and clutch one of the nice fluffy yellow ducklings. But he resists this temptation ; he knows that his time has not quite come yet. It is not far off, for from the house comes the farmer's daughter, carrying on her arm a basket of food for the pigeons. The sparrow - hawk makes one more move, and now he is right opposite the dove-cot. "Coo-coo-coo," the birds murmur, as their mistress approaches. Pouters, tumblers, nuns, Jacobins, runts, and fantails—all are there, with one exception, feeding at her feet. Her small pet fantail, alas ! stops on the cote, just to show off before his mistress until he thinks it time to secure

his share of the supper. As he flies down something swishes right past her face, and strikes the fantail before he can settle. A cloud of pure white feathers stream out as the sparrow-hawk carries off his prey.

He tops the barn and he clears the yard; but just as he gains the meadows he gets into trouble, for the farmer, who has been after a rabbit, happens to catch sight of him as he comes over the barn, and presents him with the barrel not yet fired off. Down comes the sparrow-hawk with the pigeon; he is not quite dead, and his last act is to show fight, being game to the backbone.

The keepers detest this bird, for he works their young birds terribly. The female is much larger than the male, very powerful, and capable of lifting such a bird as a wood-pigeon, partridge, or young pheasant. Young rabbits, too, lose the number of their mess when she comes across them. Even her young are fierce. I remember once giving a shilling for one of these, a little long-legged ball of fluff, at one end of which were two eyes and a bill. Perfectly helpless it was, having been taken from the nest that very day; yet when I

fed it the creature showed fight in its feeble fashion. By degrees it gained strength, and, although it was carried about and well treated, the bird was never at ease or at rest, the wildness of its nature always asserting itself. Sometimes from a state of perfect indifference it would suddenly pass—though I could never see cause for this—into the opposite extreme, and shriek in its excitement like some mad thing. One morning I found the poor bird dead at the foot of his perch; no doubt an outburst of temper was mainly the cause of this.

It is difficult to detect a sparrow-hawk when he sits upright on a limb close to the trunk of some tree, the tones of which blend closely with his plumage. Any number of young squirrels get whipped off the slender branches just when they are beginning to run about. The birds hunt rather late, and frequently he will come driving through a flock just as they are about to settle for the night. His own young are well provided for; finches form a considerable portion of their food, with blackbirds and thrushes at intervals, and young pheasants and partridges occasionally, if they can be got. But the finch tribe, in quest

of whom the parent bird hunts over fields and hedges, are what they trust to most. The sparrowhawk certainly helps to keep up the balance of things, for where he and others of his species have been killed off matters have not gone so well afterwards. Man has claimed, and set on one side, all that he can get from bountiful Mother Nature. Who, then, can wonder if other creatures try to take from him their own small share when they can? One of them I know will do this whenever he gets a chance, and that is the bold sparrowhawk.

CHAPTER V.

IN SUMMER HEAT.

THE spring and early summer of the year 1893 will be long remembered as an exceptionally dry season. Four months of uninterrupted sunshine we had in the neighbourhood of the Surrey Hills. How hot that weather was those only who have had to be out in it, busy at their various avocations from sunrise to sunset, can tell. It may interest some if I give a few notes made here and there, as I wandered to and fro, all connected more or less with the recent dry, hot spell of almost tropical weather.

Now and again I have heard some amusing squabbles concerning the dryness of the season. "Ah well, you ken jist say what you likes, Master

Wiggins,—ef you don't 'zactly 'member sich a time as this 'ere afore, I do. Weather like this 'twas when I was married; some of the folks went chouterin' about, poor silly critters, sayin' as how the fust sign of the end were cum, fur the world, was to pass away in a great heat. But it didn't; an' here I be now, grandmother to a rare lot on 'em. There was allus a seed-time an' harvest, an' there will be, for the book says it. We'll get rain when the time cums."

Day by day the heat increased; after a time green places exposed to the fierce rays of the sun lost their freshness, changed to brown withered patches, and remained so,—no food or shelter there, even for a mouse. A certain amount of moisture is necessary for the development of insect life in all its various forms; and birds and animals follow their food-supply. Where streams run through the woods covered over by the underwood and grass tangle; where the water in ordinary seasons forms small pools in the water-meadows—dry often on the surface, but moist enough below—there are the places in which to look for natural life. If you know the run and lay of water, whether in

stream, pool, or as a mere splash, you will find the creatures you are in search of not far from it.

Some of the wilder park-lands have shown most significantly how the heat has affected them, for there has been an almost complete absence, in the more exposed places, of certain creatures that in ordinary seasons you never missed seeing if you passed along. It is all owing to the great heat: they have followed other creatures and gone for a time to low moist dells and hollows, where the grass grows green. Necessity recognises no law, and to all intents and purposes the earth has been bound as fast for all insect-feeding birds as it is in mid-winter.

The pewits have chased the rooks like a lot of hawks striking at their quarry; food they must have of some kind, and in default of worms, grubs, and wireworms, they have gone in for plovers' eggs, when they could get them. As to fruit, I have seen some barefaced depredations in that line. Yet they will repay all these a thousand times before long; for rain has come at last, and the rooks and jackdaws, rejoicing greatly at the change, are

in the fields hard at work on the store of life which has now come up to the surface.

The poor little jackdaw has suffered terribly this season, for he has been found in the very act—there is not the least use in denying it,—he was caught red-handed, as the saying goes, killing young pheasants and partridges.

The experience of a lifetime devoted to the observation of natural life has taught me that there is no hard-and-fast rule for any living creature that is in a state of nature; and before long I believe that many mischievous theories will be swept away. Some indeed of these have been originated by men who have gained much of their knowledge—of bird life especially—from boxes of dry skins. All the elaborate lists of genera ever compiled would not give their readers the life-habits of a sparrow. This is a digression, however.

The late spell of burning sunshine has had a peculiar effect on our reptiles, which are harmless, with of course one exception, the viper. They have left their usual haunts, although they do like heat, in order to follow their prey to lower ground at the bottom of the hills. Some very large specimens of

vipers have been killed, far exceeding any that I have ever seen or handled. These were females, for it is with them as it is with falcons and hawks, and in fact with all birds of prey,—the gentler sex is the larger and the stronger, and in some instances the most vindictive.

This season, although I have been in those haunts where they are as a rule generally to be found, I have not myself seen one of these vipers alive; and those men I know, who look for them for their precious “ile,” as they call the fat inside of them, have had the same tale to tell.

Two blindworms and one heath-lizard—killed, it would seem, by some one as the poor things were crossing the highroad in self-defence—are all that I have noticed. No matter what the creature may be, furred or feathered, it will get as close to the highroads as possible. Those giant viperesses I have mentioned were killed in a much-frequented road, as they were basking, stretched out full length in the middle of it. I know why they got there, but cannot enter into that matter here.

Rooks and jackdaws make short work of any creature they can settle. In hot dry times they

will go for anything that moves. Game-birds, again, make short work of small reptiles, and they help to thin them down in hot seasons.

The hedgehog has been remarkably busy, at night of course, in foraging for any creature he can settle: not only that, but he and his spined partner have had little pigs to provide for; and early in the morning I have noticed their tracks in the dust of the road, where father and mother hedgehog and the little one have been all on the root. They leave a very plain track; you may note where they have crossed and recrossed the road, always in the direction of spots where they were certain to find some little "varmint" or other. Their noses are remarkably keen ones: the crawlers may have settled comfortably for the night on a bed of dead leaves and moss, very full of frogs, mouse, or lizard, as the case may be; but let that energetic pair of prickly wanderers nose them out, and the forked tongue will never examine anything with lightning-like rapidity again. Out the creature is dragged, neck and tail, the long fore-feet of the pair are placed on him to stop all wriggling, and the body is passed through the

jaws; one of the hedgehogs starts from the neck, the other from the tail. That wonderful cup-and-ball mechanism of the creature's backbone is quickly broken up, jointed in fact, and embalmed by the hedgehog family.

Some of the uplands have been scorched up, others covered with trees and scrub have remained fresh and cool through it all, the brake being of the richest green; all depended, of course, on aspect and locality. Water has been a precious article on the tops of some of our Surrey hills recently—in fact, people have been forced to buy it. I have heard that in some places as much as sixpence a pail has been given for good drinking-water. In the most favourable times they rely generally on their rain-water supply, filtered. One favoured place was full of life, for the grass was fresh and green there all through the dry time, and the bracken flourished in rank luxuriance. Honey-suckles twined thickly about the bushes, and the foxgloves held up their stately flower-beds in all directions, mixed with the cool mothmulleins, and other plants too numerous for us to mention.

As I have often said before, wild creatures can

and do adapt themselves to their surroundings. If they did not, some would cease to exist. The veracity of some writers has been questioned when they wrote only the simple truth, because they have seen animals and birds act in a certain manner, influenced by their surroundings, in one county; whilst other writers, equally accurate, have seen the same creatures act very differently in another county, perhaps an adjoining one. The nature or the food of the creature does not change; it simply alters some of its tactics in order to procure that food, or for the purpose of self-preservation.

Numbers of birds have followed in each other's traces to spots where the grass was growing green, in search of the water which in some shape or other was to be found there. The herons that were not usually seen before the fall of the leaf, when the trout run, have been wandering about in the middle of the day fishing, for the streams have been low, and all the fish, without exception, have congregated in the deepest and most shady water-holes they could find, under overhanging boughs of trees.

The heron has visited the ponds on the uplands, swarming with small carp about three inches in length, well knowing that he could fill his belly, without the least trouble, out of the muddy pits the ponds have dwindled down to. One morning I put out a kingfisher from a clump of trees a good mile away from any stream; he also had come up for some of those small carp that could be captured so easily.

I have seen roach about four inches in length lying on the short grass of a bare hillside, very early in the morning, recently. A strange sight truly to see dead fish in the short tangle; but the fly-lines of the herons are directly over the hill, past the fir plantation, where the fierce sparrow-hawks have kept watch and ward lately, because the young wood-pigeons, now well on the wing, have been bred there in great numbers this season. Both old and young are in great force here. The hawks are not particular so long as it is a pigeon; but the young birds are captured with the least trouble.

I have not seen one hawk shot this season; not that there is more mercy shown them than of old,

but for this reason — all the time during which they are devoting their energies to the capture of wild pigeons they do not go at the young game. From the number of pigeons I have seen come from the furze, I should imagine there were enough of them to feed all the hawks in the county of Surrey. Sparrow-hawks will strike at anything, and when they watch for the pigeons to come out from their nesting-place, if they catch sight of the great heron as he flaps over the hillside, his gullet filled with fish, at him they go at once. The heron gets frightened, — not that they could damage him much; but out he throws some of his fish, to lighten himself so that he can ring up higher, and that is the reason small fish are sometimes found on the hillside.

Weasels and owls are required now to keep the small deer under (but they are not to be seen; oh, the pity of it!); steel traps and tile traps combined will not do the work they would. Where we are, the mischief mice will do in gardens where choice fruit is cultivated must be seen to be believed. I have seen two very fine and choice cherry-trees, trained on trellis-work against a sunny wall, nearly stripped

by them, for they climb like squirrels. A number of square holes, just large enough to get your hand in comfortably, let the air through the grating into the cool-houses on the other side, where plums are grown. From certain signs I thought that those very pretty and innocent-looking, full-eyed, long-tailed creatures were the robbers. A short ladder was brought and the holes examined, and from each of them a handful of the ripest and finest cherries gave a convincing proof of their refined taste. They had been cut off as close to the stalks as if they had been snipped with thumb and finger-nail. Some were half-eaten, others had their skins broken, and a lot were perfect; you could just see where the teeth had pressed, and that was all. When I showed the fruit to the owner of those trees, he expressed wishes towards the mice that need not be mentioned here.

The landrails have not been heard in this district: their crake, crake, crake has not sounded even in the most favoured parts, let alone those that have been parched up. This bird requires thick pasture-cover; fields laid down for hay will in ordinary seasons be sure to have one pair at least nesting in them. The size of the field has nothing to do

with the number of birds found. But this season, as a rule, there has not been any hay to cut ; even the sheep have been fed and watered for a long time, horned cattle also ; in fact, green grass has been a very scarce food-supply ; even the wild rabbits have been put in some straits, and they are supposed to do well on hard fare. Chalk-hills, however, have only a crust of mould on their tops and sides, so it is small wonder that they have been burnt up.

A certain amount of moisture is of vital moment to the landrail, or corncrake as the bird is generally called. One small meadow of about two acres, which I have passed twice every day during April, May, June, and July, is usually a sure spot where they may be found. On both sides and in front of it run roads, well-used ones too, and a railway is at the back of it—and yet here they come in preference to places that might be considered far more suitable for them ; but the birds know best about that. As the field is small, the owner has it mown, not cut with a machine, and the nesting birds are spared, if possible, for a small tuft is left for them ; in fact, the mowers cut round them and pass on. But this year the rail is absent.

This bird, when sitting, has no fear, for although the haymakers were tossing the grass up in all directions, spreading it out to dry, and coming now and again to have a look at her as she sat on her nest, the bird has never moved. Between three and four in the afternoon, when she hatched out, she went off with her little black mouse-like brood, just like a farmyard hen.

Pheasants and partridges are treated in the same way; the mowers cut round them. Accidents do occur at times, but they are accidents pure and simple, and the wonder is that there are not more of them, for the birds sit very close.

This long spell of hot weather has caused all birds to get their young out a month or five weeks earlier than in ordinary seasons. The tree-pipits, very numerous this season, are gone with their young from their usual haunts. The white-throats, the greater and lesser, are ready for moving. So are the turtle-doves; young and old cut through the air in all directions. Starlings have visited the fruit in numbers; the poor things must have something for their young. I have even seen the skylark in gardens—most unusual places for him to come to.

Wasps, through the hardness and extreme dryness of the ground, have made their nests in blackthorn-bushes and the like. They are beautiful structures. At first you would take them for the nest of the long-tailed tit. That is exactly what they look like a short distance off, but a close inspection at once convinces you that they are nothing of the kind. I have been fortunate enough to procure a fine specimen—without its tenants.

The doves have worked hard for their young this season, when they were in the nest and after they were able to fly. I live on the edge of a small common. As a rule this is fresh and green all the year round, but this season it has been baked. Even the cockchafers, that at certain seasons the rooks hunt for with the greatest eagerness, have been scarce through the drought. The poor birds knew it was not the least use trying to pick anything up in the daytime, so directly it was light some of them brought their young on the turf beneath my window, and there they kicked up a row. There were the old rooks stocking away at the grubs and chafers, croaking now and then, because they have to work hard for small returns;

and there are the young rooks hopping round their parents, with open mouths and quivering wings, in a state of eager expectancy. There is nothing to be heard but tremulous war-are-are-wark-war-ke are-ar, wark-e-e. As we are in the habit of sleeping with our windows open, their music wakes us up very early. Sometimes I get up in the grey of the morning to look at their amusing antics; but they are not good songsters.

Rain has fallen—genial refreshing showers—all in its own good time, as the old lady told Master Wiggins it would. They are cutting the corn, and the corn looks well. They sowed, and now they reap, as they have ever done.

The trees are changing; the leaves will fall early, we think, this season. From certain movements I have noted in some birds—the migratory portion of them—it will not be long before they depart and others arrive.

Look where you will, the brown colour has gone, for we have had the blessed rain. Go where you will, in all directions and in all places the grass grows green.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM WEIR TO MILL.

ONLY a mile at the most is it from one to the other; but to those who know that bit of winding woodland river well, it is a mile teeming with wild life, finned, furred, and feathered. In that short stretch I have seen nearly all the fauna of a southern county. For good reasons doubtless, but known only to themselves, wild creatures will not leave certain places, whilst others they will not even visit. For forty-five years I have visited this mile of water and water-meadows, and wandered through the trees that border the streams. Creatures can be seen there that you might look for in vain elsewhere.

There is a mystery about this partiality that no

one can explain, for the roads and paths, as also the meadow tracks, are well used by people all the year round; yet in the grey of the morning, or after the sun has gone down, if you know where to stand and how to keep quiet, three of our most astute animals, the fox, the otter, and at rare seasons the badger, will pass within a few yards of you.

And these creatures seem ever ready to take advantage of any alteration made by man for their benefit, though it may have been made all unwittingly by him. They locate here, and they will not leave their surroundings. When they are forced, however, by various circumstances over which they have not the least control, to shift their quarters, they adapt their ways of living to the places they frequent, not from choice but from necessity.

For three months, early in the morning and late in the evening, have I lately visited that run of the river Mole from weir to mill, just to get some fresh facts about the wild things living there. One day in coming along, after a heavy gale, I was greeted by "Ah, he's down at last; 'twas the biggest beech on this 'ere place. That 'ere last flood

settled him. I've noted as he's bin tottery like fur sum time. Massy o'alive, the pity on it! There he lays, blockin' up the river, an' the top on him lopping in the medder t'other side. A lot o' things lived in him an' about him, an' the critters 'll miss him sore, tell 'ee. They gets out o' their homes same as we does at times. A couple o' yaffles got young uns thear, near flyin'—I'd seen 'em out shinnin' round the limbs; but the jar o' the fall has killed 'em, poor things." The woodpeckers' home, a hole in the great stem, showed, being above the water, and the old birds were creeping and moping round, knowing full well that it was all up with them.

"An' them 'ere bellus bream," continued old John, "wunt know how to take it, it was theer reg'lar swimmin' place; backards and forrards under that 'ere old beech they went. They're bound to drop down the river now, to find a fresh swim arter this. Then some who comes to fish this stream will be sayin' there ain't no bream here. The critters has to shift; an' 'tis a very good job as ivry 'cuckoo' don't know the ways o' them, and whear they gits to."

John is as conservative as his so-called betters in these matters.

It is three o'clock in the morning in the middle of summer, and we are in one of the lush meadows that border each side of the river. The rooks in the lime avenue have not wakened up yet properly. Only a few gabbles, croaks, and shriller notes from the young branchers, let you know that it will not be long before they are all wide awake for the day.

It is a warm dewy morning; the vegetation is drenched with moisture. The sun will be well up before the yellow irises and the marsh-marigolds open out. The fish take up most of our thoughts, however. We know of some very large chub and dace that have their hovers in and among the submerged roofs of some large pollard willows that lean out from the bank over the water.

Some folks say that fish are silly, and devoid of the instinct given to other creatures; but such have never fished, or they would have known better. These large chub and dace know something too much for me at any rate; for try how or where I would, not one of the large ones have I captured. The great white lips of the chub

showed as they rose and sucked in chafer, beetle, or caterpillar that had fallen from the trees into the water; and the quick dace made their darts at the provender on the water, but not a rise or a dart from either did I ever get, worth mentioning. Large fish that have lived long have all their wits about them. One small island close to shore, which in the season was white with snow-drops, was a favourite place for perch in passing on their way to deeper water above. It had a course of clear water, with a bottom of golden sand—a perch-swim if ever there was one; but not a fish was hooked there, for this reason—the creatures had been feeding on the shallows, and were going that way home to a deep hole by the side of the weir.

If the fish would bite, all well and good; if not, it mattered little to a naturalist, for there was plenty to see there. The heron would rise from his stand where he had been fishing; moor-hens flit in and out, flirting their tails; and now and then you would get a sight of that hideling the landrail or corncrake. You would hear him in any case. More than once have I seen fine specimens of the

domestic cat, very full of something, where they would not be expected to be; and one morning I was fortunate enough to meet with a wild bred house-cat—that is, one of a lot of kittens littered far from any house. Unless they got shot or trapped, these wild litters do become wild in the full sense of the word, and they grow large. When this is the case they are mistaken at times for the real wild cat, but one feature alone will at all times distinguish them: the genuine but at the present time very rare wild cat has a thick bushed-out tail, which the ordinary house cat, or domestic cat that has run wild, never has. When met with, the wild things are always eager to get away, if by chance they are cornered: unless you have a gun or a good dog with you that can bite hard and hold fast, you had best let them alone.

The sun is well up over the hills that rise on either side of the beautiful Holmesdale valley, and light mists float over the tops of the firs that cover the sides of the warren. Box-Hill shows clear, the light clouds of vapour having drifted up the valley and over the hill. The cattle rise up from their resting-places in the meadows and

begin to feed; and the rooks have now returned with food for their families of "branchers," that will not be shot this year. If noise is with them an expression of pleasure, they are certainly rejoicing over their early meal. The heave-jars left their chafer-hunting just when we first entered the meadows to fish; they are now resting somewhere on the limbs or branches of the fine oaks around us—not as other birds rest, but lengthways, in a line with the limb or branch the birds squat on, so as to be invisible from below and quite secure from harm above it. The last late owl has gone home to the farm at the foot of the hill. I call him *late*, for the sun is high up now, and it will be very hot before long. Where these grand vermin-hunters are protected, they show great confidence, coming out to hunt directly the sun is down a little, and continuing to do so until the farm hands take their horses out to work in the morning. The mouse-hunters, the white or barns owls, come out earlier and hunt later than do the wood or brown owls. These fine birds are, happily, now valued here as much as they were at one time detested. The grim superstitions that have

for centuries clung to them, like their own feathers, have at last fallen from them, thanks to the pleadings of many a naturalist.

Bird-music sounds above and around us, for this has not been a forward season; the weather has for the time of year been damp and chill. Now that there is every appearance of fine settled weather, the feathered songsters seem to know it, and the river-side rings with the songs of black-birds, thrushes, and blackcaps. The chatter of the sedge-warblers comes in between. The music floats up and down and over the water, like the films of mist that yet rise from it; larks ring out their glad notes as they circle round far above us; while the tree-pipit, not willing to be out of it all, rises from his twig, mounts up, and comes to it again, singing merrily as he floats down. In between—for there is not a break—you hear the notes of other songsters,—the bright little song of the chaffinch, also the scolding of whitethroats, and the soft little song of the willow-wrens; whilst ever and anon the greenfinches call “breeze—breeze.”

This favoured bit of woodland river is one of

those bird paradises that can be found close to home. And what can be more beautiful than these meads, meadows, and fine park-lands dotted over with noble trees? The valley of Holmesdale is before us, and the hills are above and around us. A man I once knew said to me, "I have been in many lands, but you have shown me one of the fairest sights I have ever seen." Yet it is only one out of thousands to be found at any time in fair weather or foul, in summer or in winter, quite accessible too, round and about our Surrey hills.

As we stand thinking, all the life-giving odours from trees and plants come to us and then leave us for a time, as the light air left them. Swallows dash under the arches of the grey bridge, and the sand-martins flit like butterflies from their holes in the banks; all is full of joyous life. Even the voices of the rooks are in harmony; they fall in like the chanting of black friars. The whole surroundings, if we set on one side the unrivalled beauty of the scenery, are full of interest, for they have historical records of their own.

Religious establishments once flourished near the Mole, with their monks and friars; and the great

of this world, as well as many a poor pilgrim, have walked by the roads and paths that led by devious ways over the hills and under the hills, through woods and over heaths, at last to the ford of the Pilgrims' Way, on right away into Kent.

Even the mills have records of their own. Some of the millers will certainly not be forgotten yet awhile. I can recollect so many that have gone before, that it makes me feel very old. Good men and true were some of these old millers, but fiercely conservative and cantankerous in all that pertained to fish,—the pike, perch, carp, bream, roach, dace, and trout, to say nothing about the fine silver eels that the river was and is still noted for. Eels of 3, 4, and 6 lb. weight I have known to be taken from the weir and the trap of the mill below. If you had work to do at the mill-houses, you were hospitably treated; but if the miller or his men knew you had a fishing-line in your pocket, woe betide you! The fish were for the miller or for his landlord's sport, if he wanted a day's fishing, but for no one else. Some of them at that time were called "men of their inches," which meant that if in the settlement of a matter they did not require any one to help

them, they did not appeal to the law. As they would not always give permission to fish when asked to do so, some—that is, two or three that, like their “betters,” were also men of their inches—fished fairly at times without it.

The weir is left behind, and we have made our way to the mill-pool where the river above makes its way over and through the sluices into the pool below. Tench and fine carp once had their home here with other fish; and we can assure our readers that river carp and tench are very different from muddy pond fish of the same species. But it is no use coming here now to tempt those carp, 5 and 7 lb. in weight, with a small fresh-dug new potato, or an amber-heart cherry fresh from the tree, the hook being inserted in it while the cherry was held by its stem, so that the fingers did not come in contact with the fruit. When all was ready the stem was pulled out and the bait dropped in. If our old gardener friend, whose most bitter foes were hawfinches, because they ground up his marrer-fats, could provide us with a pod of his most “per-ticklers,” as he called them, it would be no use now. Yet a fine green pea, or for that matter a couple, is

a deadly lure for a large carp. If you wish to catch fish, you must know how they feed. The carp family feed heads down and tails up as a rule: they pick the bait off the bottom and rise with it. As they are to a great extent vegetable feeders, and have throat teeth, all our fishing readers will understand my meaning here.

Now for the reason why it is of no use fishing, at the present time, in the stretch of water above mentioned. Otters, those highly sagacious beasts, are there in numbers.

The bleak have left off rising for the midges that fall in small clouds on the water; the shadows of the trees are dark and dim, a dull tawny hue is all that the setting sun has left behind it, and the river mist is curling over it.

Hark! what is that mysterious sound?—something like a deep whistle, mixed with hissing. It is answered more faintly higher up. It is the otters' dinner call; they are answering each other as they come down the river—not a couple, but three or four of them. Small heaps of large scales and bits of fish bones have been found for a long time now by those who know where to look. Until they must shift,

the otters have their own way here, and they have had the large fish on their spawning-beds and in their submerged root sanctuaries; and eels are now scarce. Who can wonder at it! Recently the otters have drawn as close to man and his works as rats. Leading from the bridge that spans the tumbling bay of the pool, rushing floods have washed the path away. This, some time back, was remedied by fixing railway sleepers, in the most solid manner, so as to form a platform from the pool bridge to the fields beyond. One moonlight night, a wanderer crossing from the fields saw what he at first sight took to be three of the mill cats at play, cutting high jinks; directly he reached the platform, he saw at once they were otters. All this close to the mill-house, and where people are passing day and night. Even the miller laughed and was incredulous when he was told that they were close to him. But he does not smile now, for not only have they cleared off all the large fish, but they have had the moor-hens and rabbits as well, to say nothing about the water-voles. It used to be said that this water smelt of fish; the scent has now left it, for a time at any rate.

I know where they come from, and where they

go: their roads overland are only a few feet from the river above to the pool below; to this they most pertinaciously cling. Some of my readers may wonder how it is that they are not killed off. Those who have tried to do this, either with gun or trap, have met with but little success; for they do not know how to go about it, and those who do know keep their mouths shut. It is too great a treat to see a fine dog-otter come whistling down the river, head up, rush up his favourite tunnel out on the grass, and pass in front of you down into the pool; and this is what they have done and are doing still, for their tracks are as visible as those of sheep to people that understand them.

I used to think that it was not possible that the otters would make themselves at home like barn rats, but I have found lately that I was mistaken: one is always learning, where wild life is concerned.

From the nature of the locality and the depth of this water, the fiercest and most eager pack of otter-hounds could not hunt them: this the otters know, and they act on it. When their old haunts came to grief by the great trees falling, and taking down the banks with them, they shifted their quarters, and

there they have increased, and still flourish. A change of habitat does good at times to beasts as well as men. In the case of the otters it has been to their advantage, but how long this may continue one is not able to say. Wild creatures are capricious at times in their movements.

If they get at the fowls and ducks, something will be said and something done for their thinning off.

How far the otters wander in the dead of winter their trails and seals plainly show. They are watched for, but the watchers have been a little before or a little after the time: so much the better for our friends. The otters belong to that very astute family that includes the weasels; and these, we know, we never catch sleeping.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE ABOUT GAME-BIRDS.

THAT very beautiful bird the *blackcock* has for various causes become scarce in some of the southern counties. In some parts of them, where he was at one time fairly well known and frequently to be seen, he has gone, it is to be feared, for good and all. One of my trusted companions, long since gone home, used to sing, when he left me at the gate of a moorland cottage after a hard day's tramp—

‘ Oh, I’ll be up in the marnin’ airly,
I’ll be up to give ye a call.”

For it was a sight to see the black-game play up in the silent misty dawning. One may rise just as early now as in those days, but never any more

will the blackcock be seen in the spots where once I often watched him. He had been there in the time of the old men's fathers, and he was there a few years ago; now he has disappeared. The old haunts of the black-game are still remaining, and even their playing-places. I recently examined one of these; it was a flat outcrop of moor-stone covered with the finest turf, and raised above the level of the rest some three or four feet. Three ragged storm-broken firs stood on one side of it, and the rising sun lit up the place till it looked unchanged; but never, from any quarter, came a coo-croon, bubble! or well-remembered sneeze! I could only picture to myself the princely bird, with swollen throat and trailed wings, his curved tail thrown back, making him look from a direct front view like a large mass of steel-blue and white feathers. Here was once his platform; but he and his sober-coloured admirers, the grey hens, have gone. Natural events, which are now taking place around us almost daily, have been in great measure the cause of this disappearance of black-game. But there have also been other causes at work.

When first I knew the blackcock's haunts, they were unknown lands to the general public, and very rarely visited even by those who were acquainted with them. The black-game dwelt in a land of hills and valleys covered with trees—a land of fir and heather, with morass and bog at the bottom—a land where, from the hills above to the hollows below, springs of the purest water were continually trickling under the moorland mosses into the trout-streams that ran down the moors.

There were countless very beautiful cushions of the richest greens, sulphur-yellows, and pale creamy pinks. And between these moss cushions rose great clumps of rushes here and there. Thick cover ran to the very edge of the mosses, which rose above "quakes" far too shaky to travel over.

Here the ferns grew breast-high. No one ever cut them for litter as "farn-brake" when they withered. The bent and broken stems, falling and crossing in all directions, formed safe cover for the black-game. The birds were in a forest sanctuary, and they knew it.

The nest of the black-grouse and the grey hen is made on the ground in cover, or rather under

it, not far from water or moist places. The eggs vary from seven to ten in number, and are less warm in their ground tint than those of the wood-grouse, but the spots and blotches on them are brighter and larger. The length of the blackcock from bill to end of the tail feathers is twenty-three inches. The length of the grey hen is eighteen inches.

The human population was very thinly scattered. Here and there the tops of chimneys might be seen through the trees, with the thin blue-grey smoke from the pinewood on the hearths curling up and gently vanishing. Now and again you might just see a bit of some tiled or thatched roof, but not often. The forest-folks built their houses in sheltered places to gain shade from the heat of summer, and protection to a certain extent from the fierce biting winds and the snowstorms of winter.

The people left home very early in the morning, returning in the dusk of evening, their daily labour being a long way from their dwellings; and at that time there were no roads, only forest-tracks, which crossed and ran into each other most bewilderingly,

and broke off again in all directions. I passed three or four years in the district before being able to make straight for any given point.

Those who then lived there had very little to do with the outside world. A strange face found little favour in their eyes; in fact their general bearing, although not absolutely rude, bordered very closely on it, bidding you plainly keep your distance and they would keep theirs.

It would have been easy to form an unjust idea of their manner. They were not really of a surly nature; they were only putting into practice lessons which the wild creatures had taught them of never going near strange beings before knowing who and what they were, and whether they meant mischief or not.

These men knew all the haunts of the black-grouse; where they were most likely to be found at different times of the year, and when the seasons changed. So sure were they about such matters that frequently have they said to me, "You come on along o' us; you'll see 'em there or thereabouts."

Yes, I am up in the morning early. The moor mists are thick and low. Half of the firs on the

hills can be seen, but the birches on the knots of sandstone, and the alders lower down, only show like large blots through the warm mist that damps one like rain. As I make my way up the large hollow, from the opposite side some large birds rush overhead through the mist. They are black-game making for that side of the hill which the sun has just lit up.

Another glimpse may be had of them presently, feeding on their favourite spots, the dark damp peat patches, if fortune favours; for it is a difficult matter, even at short range, with a good glass, to distinguish them as they glide like shadows with arched backs and their heads and tails down, among the dark peat lumps and hollows. A black-cock seen on the green turf of the moor is a very imposing-looking bird, but when on the peat patches he is almost invisible. No one but a forester or a keen-eyed naturalist would pick him out there.

I ask my companion if any one kills the birds at times.

“No, not as I knows on,” he answers. “What for? They’re most outlandish sort o’ critters, ain’t em? cutting capers and flourishing about as they

does at times. No other birds 'bout here has got curly tails but they. No, I don't think as they're much meddled with. Toby an' old thirsty Chubb has a flick at 'em now an' again with that 'ere old crossbow; but, bless ye, that ain't nothing! That don't hurt 'em. There's lots on 'em about these parts, if you knows where to look for 'em. Toby, he give me a brace on 'em, but I reckons as they're a lot better to look at than what they be to eat. I don't keer for 'em. There're lots o' things about better eating 'an they be. That's my 'pinion on 'em. Some o' these nights, when you cums home, you'll find summat worth eating and no mistake. Mushrooms is jest cummin' up like. You shell hev some young rabbits cut up and fried with a lot o' mushrooms, with the best part of a cup o' cream put in the gravy, afore the missus dishes it up."

"Ah! that's something like eating!"

"Now look here, did ye ever in all yer martil life have a pheasant-pudding?"

I tell him that I have not, but I have had them roasted.

"O' course ye have, but ye don't get the real

juice and nature of the bird that 'ere way, not the real virtue on it. Now when a pudding o' that sort is in front o' ye, and you cuts it, the gravy spins out all sparkling and goldy-colour like. If you was going by any place where they was eating one and you got a sniff on it, it would make you feel fit to bust the door in, just to get a taste."

He would doubtless have continued to give minute details of the virtues of woodland luxuries, but I ask him to postpone such descriptions, as, not having yet breakfasted, what I have already heard has aroused in me a ferocious appetite.

At the time black-game were so numerous, the foxes, badgers, polecats, stoats and weasels, hawks, owls, crows, and jays were present in full force, scattered all over the place, and particularly so near the haunts and playing-up places of the birds; and yet in spite of all these supposed game-extermiators, the black-game increased. The only bird that now and again killed him was the hen-harrier. I have seen this happen, and therefore I state it. The culprit was not the ringtail, although the hen is the more powerful bird. It was the gull-like plumaged male hen-harrier. I have seen him at

work, and have also put him off his quarry after he had killed it.

This is a beautiful part of the country—a circle of twenty miles, and far more beyond—a fir-and-heather sanctuary,—a home and hunting-ground for all wild creatures. A generous land was this, where food was abundant and where the wild notes of the ring-ouzel rang out in the season when he visited there. All this wild beauty and wild life by rail almost within an hour of London town to Dorking station, and a five miles' walk afterwards. This beautiful country, with its hills and wood and valleys, is still unchanged; so too are some of the bog-quakes, and also the vast ranges of fir and heather districts beyond it. But the black-game are seen no more.

I knew this district before any railway was thought about, and I knew it before any new buildings were there,—before, in fact, it was thought possible to build them where now they stand. Two or three old mansions belonging to the gentry had been there for centuries, but they were very wide apart, and there were no others in the district. Things ran smoothly then so far as concerned the sym-

pathies of the woodmen towards the owners of those mansions, and all was mutual goodwill and peace. The country was a kind of Sleepy Hollow, where the foresters, both men and women, lived nearly as long as they pleased, just dropping off at last for apparently no other reason than to aggravate their relations; as those of them who had a little bit of property would die without leaving any kind of will regarding its disposition. This neglect would naturally "aggravate their relations," who would then be at deadly feud with each other for years afterwards, until some new annoyance arose to take their attention a little from the prime grievance.

This line of country was at one time full of water, even on the top of the highest hills. The first new-comers were not slow to avail themselves of this; pipes were laid, and their reservoirs and open-air baths had a continual supply. This arrangement made little difference while people were so few; but others came, who naturally followed their example, and after a time the bog-lands did not have so much water flow into them. This, however, did not affect the grouse.

Presently new houses arose in all directions.

Those new-comers who bought the lands bought also the farms and cottages, together with the freehold and copyhold property of all who would sell it, and who did not in all cases quite understand how much they had parted with. They were destined to find out later how impossible it is to sell a thing and to keep it; and that having sold their property, all rights, either freehold or copyhold, belonged now to the purchasers.

From very early times there have existed free to all, without let or hindrance, the simple common rights of grazing stock, and the right of range for swine in the mast season, subject in some cases to a nominal heriot to the lord of the manor upon whose property the owner's cottage might be situated. These common rights belonged to the commoners, who had never from the very first been in touch with the new-comers. This was not surprising, for it was evident that some of these new-comers thought that the beautiful country, with its sturdy inhabitants, had been much honoured by their arrival—which illusion was soon dispelled, however.

Certain landowners who had no right to do so

ordered some of the commoners to desist from cutting fern and fagot-wood, in their several seasons, on land where they had been cut for generations. One rash individual, who has since become wiser, placed restraining hands on one of the fern-cutters, and, as the latter afterwards said, to his "most uttermost astonishment," he found himself on his back, the astonished but not proud possessor of two black eyes, as a reward of his fervour. This incident led to a meeting of the would-be appropriators of all common rights, to protest against such very demonstrative opposition, and to pass measures for stopping it.

It was stopped for them. No one ever knew how it happened; but there is now a hillside which rises bare compared to what it used to be, with its hollies, junipers, and furze clumps at the very least a hundred years old, which were all swept away by a forest-fire that carried everything before it. At its furious, rolling flames, driven by the wind at fearful speed, the wealthy new-comers gazed in horror.

If ever the loss of sylvan beauty, with all its wealth of animal, bird, insect, and reptile life, was

to be regretted, then was a time; for one of the best hunting-grounds I have ever had, or that a naturalist could hope to find ~~again~~, was destroyed, for me at least for ever, by that forest-fire. I have described it fully elsewhere.

Peace followed for a time, while the new-comers pondered over such an unlooked-for dispensation; but at last a bright genius among them discovered that if the birds belonged to any one at all, they certainly belonged to the lord of the manor on which they were found, and that they ought to be protected for the exclusive benefit of such lords of the manor. This discovery did not tend to prolong the peace between the commoners and the new-comers.

That old weapon the crossbow has, to my certain knowledge, been used recently for as good shooting as in the days of old. I knew a farmer's son, active as a deer and with a grip powerful as a fox-trap, who owned a crossbow and used it to clear off the rabbits that fed on the produce of his father's farm. The slaughter among them was great; some were left where they fell, and the greater number buried for manure, but the cry

was, "And still they come." Toby, scores of times, told thirsty blear-eyed Chubby that he reckoned himself middling good, but that really he "waunt fit not to hold a candle to 'Eddard' in the way of using a bow."

So expert indeed was Edward in the use of this weapon, that he would stand opposite the stable-door, where the light fell steadily, and shoot at as many penny-pieces as his spectators chose to throw into the air, hitting them, not with a bolt but a marble.

That very crossbow may some day hang up in my painting-room as a memento of past days; in the meantime its prospective owner thinks of an ancient copy-slip maxim which says, "Put not temptation in the way of youth," and he feels that a man who does not yet number sixty years is far too young to enjoy the custody of such an alluring weapon.

Those who choose to oppress their fellow-men for the sake of their own interests, whether these are real or fancied, can generally find dirty tools to carry out their purpose, and soiled fingers that will do their bidding, at the expense of gaining

the lasting ill-will of their neighbours, and one or two such tools appeared on the scene at the time of the grouse-conservation experiment.

“Mind as you don’t meddle with them black-cocks,—master says he won’t have it.”

“Who the devil are you? Now, look here, clear out. Off you go, or——”

Passages of this sort were frequent; then after a time the commoners by common consent arrived without exception at this verdict: “That the birds were a damned nuisance, and the sooner they was gone the better. They must go.”

And suddenly they all went.

There will be but little to say concerning this handsome game-bird, the *red-grouse*, or, as he has been called by some, the *brown ptarmigan*, as all that can be said about him has already been written by those who were well qualified for such a task, veteran grouse-shooters among their number.

In the Highlands of Scotland he was at one time called the “the blessed bird.” He has very certainly been the means of distributing over poor districts a great deal of money, spent by those rich

men who have taken grouse-shootings. In past times the red-grouse did not contribute in any way to the welfare of the inhabitants of sparsely peopled regions. Now he is a benefit to all who are in any way concerned, from the railway company down to keepers and gillies. There is a saying that grouse-shooting is sport for princes, and there is not the least doubt as to the costliness not only of grouse-shooting but of renting the grouse-moors.

The natural enemies of this bird are fairly numerous. The fox, marten-cat, eagle, peregrine, and harrier all wait on him, when chance offers; and last of his foes, but not the least deadly, the vipers, which swarm on some moors, kill and eat the young chicks. But in spite of the army of grouse-shooters and of his many other enemies, and of the dreaded grouse-disease, the fine bird survives in great numbers and multiplies exceedingly.

There is no need to enter into the various methods of grouse-shooting, whether over dogs, driving, carting, or kite-flying. All these methods have been described with minute details by those who have followed the sport. It is to be hoped that the red-grouse will never from any cause diminish in numbers

as a game-bird. He is, I believe, the only true red-grouse that is known, and it seems a thing to be proud of that such a fine bird should be indigenous to Great Britain. His nest is made on the ground, and is a slightly built structure. The eggs are numerous, sometimes as many as ten or twelve, and they vary greatly in colouring, some being very richly tinted. Their general ground colour is some warm shade of buff mottled and blotched with rich brown.

The nest of the ptarmigan is placed in some hollow among the stones and rocks. A very slight structure scantily strewn with twigs and stalks of mountain vegetation seems to serve the birds' purpose. The eggs, from eight to ten in number, are laid on the bare ground, and their general colouring is warm yellowish white blotched and spotted with dark brown.

This mountain-grouse is a true child of the mist, and he has until, comparatively speaking, recent years been to the general public a mysterious bird, owing to his changes of plumage, which are caused by a moult in one case, and by a direct change of colouring in

the feathers, without moulting, in the other. His plumage, as we all know, changes from a brownish black, grey, and white, to a pure white. The ptarmigan is a bird of the rocks, and very few creatures are there to bear him company. The little snow-bunting, that flits from rock to rock and trips nimbly over the scattered stones, has a changing plumage something after the same fashion. The dotterel pipes there in the breeding season, for he has his nesting haunt in high places. Huge mountain masses rise tier above tier, their summits hidden in mists, which suddenly descend and clothe their sides with rolling masses of vapour, so thick that for a time the mountain-hare ceases dotting here and there in search of food and squats motionless. Sheer precipices with dark sullen tarns below, and jutting platforms of grey rock—such are the haunts of the mountain-grouse.

His grey-and-white mottled feathering is so very like the rocks and stones, that to human eyes he is practically invisible. The frog-like croak of the ptarmigan tells that they are feeding among the shattered *débris* of the rocks; but unless the flock

is accidentally walked into, causing them to rise from the scattered grey stones in all directions, the birds themselves will not be seen. In winter, when the rocks are covered with snow, the ptarmigan's plumage is pure and white as the snow itself, and thus the gentle bird is in a great measure protected from its natural enemies, the eagle, the raven, and the mountain-fox.

No bird with which I am acquainted sits closer on its nest than does the mountain-grouse. Those who, after most diligent search for their nests, have at last been successful, have had very ludicrous experiences of their close sitting.

The so-called ptarmigan that are exposed for sale in such large quantities are not the real ptarmigan, although they are white in plumage. They are northern willow-grouse in winter plumage. It is doubtful if any of our true Scottish ptarmigan come into the English markets; for the pursuit of them is so arduous, and in winter so dangerous, that a case of ptarmigan which have fallen to the sportsman's own gun are highly valued trophies.

This bird, in consequence of the nature of his

haunts, and of his wonderful faculty of making himself almost invisible except when on the wing, is free from much of the persecution to which other members of his family are subjected. The elements help to protect him, and whatever be the weather—storm or sunshine, snow, hail, rain, or mist—the ptarmigan flourishes through it all. He was formed for the haunts he frequents, and there he dwells.

Should any one wish to see the ptarmigan in their summer, autumn, and winter plumage, and to see the male and female birds with nest and eggs, or to look at the parent birds with their young brood, these can be examined leisurely in the matchless collection of British birds presented to the Corporation of Brighton by their collector, the late E. T. Booth, whose name I write with feelings of admiration and respect.

The same changes of colour can be seen in some specimens in the New Natural History Museum at South Kensington, set up on the same lines as the magnificent collection at Brighton. It is a most interesting study this change of colouring in creatures who remain in the same haunts in the winter,

—the white fur of the mountain-hare and the white plumage of the ptarmigan.

The nest of the *common pheasant* is only a slight hollow made by the bird in the long grass, or under some bush, and lined with leaves. The eggs are from eight to ten in number, and they vary in colouring, from greyish white with a green tinge, to pale greyish brown.

This bird is very generally supposed to have reached us from the country which borders the Phasis, one of the rivers of Colchis. Other closely allied species which have been introduced from other countries have bred freely with this; and some very beautiful birds, which are now called common pheasants, are the result; and these are spread all over the country. The mixed breeds have ousted the original type by this process, with the result of perpetuating a far more beautiful race of birds. The question of hybridity does not come in here; it has simply been the fusion of beautiful varieties into one almost universal type, the pheasant of the present time.

That the common pheasant was naturalised in

this country at a very early date is proved conclusively by ancient records. We have one to the effect that the abbot of Amesbury obtained a licence from Henry I. to kill pheasants A.D. 1100. In the year 1536 Henry VIII. issued a proclamation from his palace at Westminster to preserve the pheasants and other birds at Highgate and Hornsey Park. Although not a native, the pheasant has become thoroughly one of our own game-birds; he is a very beautiful but common object, met with, in fact, everywhere. This is due in a great measure to the protection given him. Where these birds are reared in large numbers they are for a time almost as familiar as farmyard poultry; but this soon wears off, and their wild blood quickly asserts itself even in captivity. When kept in large aviaries the wild traits show nearly as much as when they are at perfect liberty in the woods and about their borders.

The pheasant has had as much notice taken of him as any game-bird in the United Kingdom, and some of it not to his own benefit or the benefit of those who preserved him. In the 'Comic Annual' for 1837 some lawless proceedings con-

nected with the pheasant are pleasantly touched on in the exploits of a certain Jonathan Duggins, who records the following:—

“Got within gunshot of two of the birds, vich Higgins said they vos two game-cocks, but Hicks, who had been to Vestminster Pit, said, No sitch thing; as game-cocks had got short square tails, and smooth necks, and long military spurs. Shot at 'em as pheasants, and believe ve killed 'em both; but hearing some 'orrid screams come out of the plantation immejiately hafter, ve all took to our 'eels and ran away vithout stopping to pick either of 'em up. At the end of a mile came suddingly on a strange sort of a bird vich Hicks declared to be the cock of the woods, so ve sneaked behind him and killed him, but it turned out to be a peacock.”

I have not the slightest intention of entering into the question of the game laws. I have never broken one of them myself, and, indeed, I would not give sixpence, so far as eating them goes, for all the game in England. Nor yet for the sport: so far as that is concerned, I prefer wild-fowling to the best of game-shooting.

If facilities did not exist for disposing of large quantities of poached game, the poacher's occupation would be gone; and if certain conclaves of Sol-

omons would find out who purchases contraband game, they would be in a fair way to finding measures for stopping it. It is not the poor fellow who gets a brace of rabbits to feed his hungry children with who is the real poacher; but I do not like to dwell on this question.

Game can, however, only be preserved at a high price, and there is a much wider view to be taken of the subject. No matter what the sport may be,—hunting, shooting, or fishing,—it is the means of distributing money and of employing a vast number of people. If all the keepers and their assistants could be brought together from all parts of the United Kingdom, they would form quite an army of sharpshooters.

At one time, when large quantities of game were preserved, matters were carried with rather a high hand, bordering indeed on the feudal system; but that is a thing of the past—it would be simply impossible in the present day.

I know well some out-of-the-way places where the people are still from their very nature lawlessly inclined, because they are the descendants of a wild nomadic people. Charles Kingsley, when he wrote

“A Rough Rhyme on a Rough Matter,” knew also of such, and he did his best to make these people better :—

“A poacher's widow sat sighing
On the side of the white chalk bank,
Where, under the gloomy fir woods
One spot in the ley throve rank.

She thought of the dark plantation,
And the hares, and her husband's blood,
And the voice of her indignation
Rose up to the throne of God.”

But so also did the voice of a keeper's widow I once knew, the mother of a young family, whose husband was shot through the heart by a poacher whom he had not even laid hands on. This happened a few years ago close to my own home.

The real case is in a nut-shell : innocent creatures have always been made the scapegoats for lawless misdeeds, and people who mean to do wrong at the expense of others will go on doing so, if not in one way, in some other.

From a naturalist's point of view the pheasant is a great favourite of mine, his form and general bearing are so very graceful ; as to colour, a few of his fraternity will give warmth and life to the monotony

of a bare fallow-field. When he steps out from the cover to the edge of some stream to drink, he is a fine bit of colour, standing cautiously listening, with one foot drawn up before he stoops to drink. At other times one sees him daintily picking his way in and out of the tangle of green stripes lining the edges of the woodland roads, and the great masses of golden orange-coloured hawkweed flowers are less brilliant than his own burnished breast.

Wild birds of this sort—I mean such as have wandered from coverts to wild lands and made their homes there—are as keen as hawks. If you come on them, they rise with a rush and go sailing like feathered rockets over the tops of the firs, to pitch down again in another place, as wild as the one from which they started. These birds, when discovered, are eagerly followed for the sport they give, if only there is time to follow them up, they being as a rule fine heavy birds in splendid plumage. They will go forward before dogs in the same fashion as black-grouse, drawing on and on, until at last there is hardly a tuft of grass or a clump of rushes large enough to hide them, closely though they can crouch. At last they get up, and then it is a case of hit or

miss, the bird either dropping with a thud, doubled up, or else going off, sounding his derisive notes, to some inaccessible spot, and you will not see him again that day.

The pheasant challenges on the ground as well as when in the trees. I have watched him step in all the glory of his war-paint on one of the countless ant-hills so common in some park-lands, and challenge and drum in the most defiant manner possible, with one or two hens close to him.

The bird is considered to be a general lover, but I have seen him with only one hen and her brood, finding food for them with most affectionate assiduity. I have seen this more than once. He is a most determined fighter, and when a couple of cocks make up their minds to settle some family affair, the fray often ends badly for one of them.

In my mind this beautiful bird is associated with pleasant memories of old farms surrounded by orchards, and oak copses beyond them; and in some old farmhouse, where sturdy keepers, men of a bygone generation, were often coming round or just dropping in, to hear how things were going, and to have a jug of real honest, wholesome, home-

brewed beer, in the cool flag-paved porch. Surely there were some things which went more smoothly then than they do now; for the keepers were always welcomed when they called there in those days.

The last, but by no means the least, instance of kindly feeling would be shown when the shooting season was well on, by the keeper arriving with a brace of pheasants and the squire's compliments. After delivering this message he would go inside, and the farmer would produce from some mysterious place of concealment a long-necked bottle and a large tumbler; and he would fill the latter more than once with a generous liquor which he called "Beyond compare."

The *common partridge* is very highly appreciated as a game-bird by those who look forward, not without good reason, to the 1st of September. He is a good bird to shoot at, pleasing to look at, and he makes excellent eating. He may with fairness be called a very good all-round bird for sporting purposes, existing in great numbers in all directions, and within comparatively easy reach so far as walking is concerned. Indeed, partridges may really be

called "home birds," as they can be found in the fields surrounding the farms, and also on all kinds of ground just outside them and in the covers.

Sometimes the bird frequents the edges, or, as they might be called, the outskirts of No-man's Land ; and then after one or two coveys have had the good luck, from their wildness and wariness, to escape death from shot or from their natural enemies, they alter in plumage and decrease in size. A continued state of activity takes off their plumpness and develops the muscle on their frames, and their plumage becomes quite dingy compared with that of the field-partridges. These wild rangers are locally called moor-partridges, and the difference between them and the field-birds is so great sometimes, that the natives will tell you that there are two sorts of partridges, and they know it. Of course this is a mistake on their part, but it must be owned a very natural one, especially as the partridge, even in his usual haunts and surroundings, is subject sometimes to variations in the tints and also the markings of his plumage.

Concerning the so-called moor-birds, I have a suggestion to offer. If by chance they come in the

way, pull trigger on them and do not attempt to follow, or even mark a covey of this sort, as that would only end in loss of time and probable vexation.

With the general public the partridge is a favourite, because when his cheery voice is heard as he runs over ridge and furrow, it is a sign that winter is past and brighter days are coming.

It would be difficult at any time, when walking in roads bordered on either side by fields, to miss seeing partridges, the fields and meadow-lands being in fact their abiding-places, where they feed by day and jug at night.

The bird lives in pleasant fields, wide and open, where the corn waves and bends, or where the large cool green leaves of mangels, swedes, and turnips give him shelter, while he finds his food-supply on or under their leaves, or about their roots.

The nest of the partridge is made on the ground. It consists of a slight hollow scraped out of the soil, and with a few grass straws or other vegetation placed in it. The eggs, of from ten to twelve, or perhaps even so many as fifteen in number, are of a pale greenish brown.

I have from my earliest years been in close touch with this bird, in days long before breech-loaders were invented or partridge-driving thought about, when they were shot over dogs, either Spanish pointers or rough-coated setters. That past time comes vividly before me as I now write. Those large fields, with the sportsmen dotted here and there, looking dwarfed by their wide surroundings, the puffs of smoke at each shot, and the faint report borne seawards, and finally a brace given to me to carry home.

I do not intend to give any details concerning sporting matters, as to the vast bags made in past times by men who shot with muzzle-loaders, as that is a matter of little moment; and such records only prove that the plump brown-grey birds were very abundant in those days, and that good shots were there to drop them right and left.

In the course of writing this sketch of the partridge, I have sauntered leisurely through his haunts to make sure that he has not, in these changeful days, developed any fresh traits.

I find that he remains unaltered. As I look

over a gate leading into a large field, beyond which other fields lie, until in the distance the spire of the village church shows through some trees, I can pick out quite a large covey feeding in the short stubble—the corn having been cut and carried very early this exceptionally hot season. There they are,—my glass brings them quite near enough for me to watch them; they are confidently feeding. Half opening the gate, I let it slam to; and then I see a repetition of the same old tactics they followed in my boyhood. That fine covey melts away as it were completely, a few shadows show here and there, and the birds have disappeared.

There is no occasion to hurry, and the view is very pleasing, so I remain, studying the distant hills, with the faint track of the Pilgrims' Way showing at the base of some of them. It is lost here and there, where copse and furze patches spread themselves. It shows faintly farther on, to fade away again in the distance. Much of that way can still be easily traced, and some of the fords over the river that the pilgrims passed over on their way to Becket's shrine at Canterbury are remaining to this day.

My musings on these matters of an ancient period have quite taken my thoughts from the coveys, but the birds have reappeared, they are only a very little way off where I first caught sight of them, and they are quietly feeding just as before. Suddenly there is a challenge from the old cock and a shriek or two from the hen, and the birds have rapidly vanished, squatting somewhere or other by the sides of stones, close to thistle clumps, or in hollows caused by horses' feet and the cart-wheels.

A long-tailed bird flashes over the field, crosses it in fact. Pouncing down midway in its flight, it misses its stroke and goes over the hedge that runs alongside the covers. The birds are much alarmed, they are calling loudly, and I catch a glimpse of some of them running at full speed to gain the shelter of the hedgerow. Once more the beautiful pursuer shows herself in the shape of a fine specimen of an old grey-brown hen sparrowhawk. She has just shot up over the hedge, to intercept if possible one at least of those partridges which are rushing into it. I can see her through my glass, as for one moment she hangs in the air, a perfect picture of bird life, her head turned

to the stubbles, her wings quivering, and her long closed tail on the rake. Swish she goes! and there is no mistake about it this time, as she trusses her quarry and carries it off to the opposite side of the field, away from where I have been standing. Ah, well! partridges are very numerous this season, and hawks are but few. That fine swoop was worth seeing.

That handsome bird the *red-legged partridge* is supposed to have been introduced into this country by that royal bird-fancier Charles II. This tradition can be received for what it is worth.

French partridge is the name by which this bird is more generally known, and his habits are of a wilder nature than those of our common partridge. He very much favours waste places bordering on cultivated lands, and great sandy patches, stone-littered, with spots of coarse turf and torey-grass bunches showing in all directions, the whole expanse being dotted with low scrub thorns and trailing brambles. These are haunts beloved by the viper and by the red-legged partridge.

The cock calls bravely in the pairing season,

perched on the low branch of some tree. He prefers it to be a dead branch, if such be handy; or perhaps it is upon some high stone that he may be seen, with eyes half-closed, head held well up, and wings half-trailed, calling loudly. At such times he is indeed a bird of note: his plumage being bluffed out, adds greatly to his advantage.

On the Continent a great number of these birds spend all their lives in cages as call-birds. The bird-shooter for the markets—he cannot possibly be called the sportsman—takes his tame bird in its small covered cage to some place that the partridges frequent, places his decoy-bird on the ground in some fairly open spot, uncovers him, and then conceals himself to await results. The decoy-birds know their work so well that directly they are placed on the ground they begin to call. If partridges are near, the cocks naturally suppose that some rival has dared to come on their particular feeding-ground, so they at once make for the spot whence the call proceeds, and are shot on the ground by the hidden shooter. The calling business is thus a very simple one.

In this country the partridge is not a favourite

as a game-bird, because it prefers running to flying, and unless forced to fly it will trust to its legs for long distances.

It has been accused, when any number exists of the more robust red-legs, of driving away our common partridge; but this charge requires confirmation. So very much indeed are they disliked in some southern counties that no chance, whenever it offers, is lost of killing the birds and destroying their eggs. I have known this done in a most ruthless manner.

I think the real reason why they are not liked is that they will not flush for the shot, and when they run other creatures are on the look-out—hares, rabbits, and our own partridges; in fact I have seen field after field upset by these birds rushing over them. This has occurred when rough shooting was going on, such being the term for picking up game that has located itself on waste grounds, away from covers. Then the red-legs would run before the dogs, out on the cultivated fields, for a bit.

I do not think that the common and the red-legged partridges come very often in contact, be-

cause their general habits and haunts are so different.

The nest of the red-legged partridge, which is but a slightly constructed affair, is made on the ground, under cover of grass, corn, or tangle; and her eggs, varying in number from ten to fifteen, are hard-shelled, their ground colouring being cream, thickly spotted with reddish brown.

I have seen it stated that this bird does not take long flights, and is not migratory. If this be true, how can the circumstance be explained of large coveys of these very birds arriving from seawards to drop down exhausted on lonely bits of foreshore, covered with sandhills and bents, some of the poor weary creatures actually falling, dead-beat, in the water? This took place on a portion of our coast, where the most direct line to the Continental shore coincides exactly with as much as had been seen of their flight-line. All who have noticed how partridges fly know that they go as direct as they can. Other game-birds have visited us from the Continent; why not therefore the red-legged partridge?

If the tiny golden-crested wren crosses the North

Sea, and the little chiffchaff comes to us from over the Channel, why should not such a strong-winged bird as this be able to do it, under peculiar circumstances known only to himself? And if he does not take extended flights, where did the birds come from whose weary arrival on our shore I have mentioned?

A bevy of quails is the term corresponding with a covey of partridges.

Shakespeare—as practical an out-of-doors naturalist as ever lived, although some students who pore over dried skins have had the effrontery to deny this—was well acquainted with the *common quail*, and I have seen this little bird in his haunts, in days before the present system of high farming came in vogue, in a district where great pastures, rough as those of the Elizabethan days, existed for grazing purposes. All kinds of weeds were dotted about them, but that there was also excellent pasture growing there was proved by the stock which fed in these places. In such pastures the nimble-footed, quick-winged little bird would in the season make his home for a time; and from the exceedingly

retiring nature which he shares with the corncrake, a bird frequenting the same pastures, his cry could be heard much more often than he could be seen, unless he was systematically searched for.

Morning and evening, in past years, I have in the same fields listened to the cry of both the corncrake and the quail—the “Crake, crake, crake! Crake, crake, crake!” of the one, and the plaintive piping “Bit by bit, bit by bit! Weet, weet, weet, wet! Whit my weet, whit whit wheet!” of the other. These various plaintive “weets” are the nearest illustration I can give my readers of the cry of the quail.

The nest of the common quail is only a slight depression in the ground, scratched out by the birds for nesting purposes, if a convenient one does not already exist which they can appropriate and line with a few dry blades of the special grass so often found in loose soils. The eggs are usually from sixteen to eighteen in number, but sometimes as many as twenty will be found, and they vary in their ground colour from reddish yellow to greenish yellow, being marked all over with brown blotches and spots.

This bird is as courageous a fighter as a game-cock or a robin; but surely it is poor pastime to train the brave little fellow for fighting matches. Yet in some countries he is regularly carried about for such a detestable purpose; and even in England his fighting capabilities have been unjustly turned to advantage.

I once very nearly established a pair of quails in my own house, but I did not accomplish this intention for a certain excellent reason. When I have pets they are generally with me in my own private room. Quails are the most active and restless little feathered creatures living, or at least the most so among the game-birds, and the last time I visited this particular pair they were piping incessantly and throwing the sand and gravel about most energetically, making such a rattle against the back of their long cage that the noise was like a lot of boys busily employed with pea-shooters.

I can put up with almost anything from wild creatures. I can even endure having a bird of prey stand on my shoulder, gently running one end of my moustache through his beak without nipping one hair from it. This does not affect my nerves;

but that ceaseless scrape and rattle, rattle and scrape, together with their piping, sounded far too much like a small tin canister with peas in it shaken at intervals by some small boy, to the accompaniment of a battered penny whistle, to appear at all attractive. Had I not seen them thus employed, I should certainly have bought them, and just as certainly have very soon granted them their liberty again.

All creatures, and especially man, endeavour to profit by the quail's migrations. Reaching us in England from foreign countries, they are fattened up for the table, in fact for the quail season; and they become exposed for sale in vast quantities. But it is not all of the smart little fellows which succeed in reaching the land. They drop on the water in thousands, as the sharks know who swallow them: these gorge themselves in fact, up to their gullets, on quails. So well is this known that when the smaller species of that fish are captured by fishermen, the shark-larders are opened very unceremoniously, in quest of the birds they are pretty sure to find there.

In spite of his many good points, the *capercailzie*

has increased and multiplied since his re-introduction into Scotland, in 1837 and 1838, too well to please or suit the opinions of some owners and renters of large estates. A few of the more recent of these would, if they could, exterminate him again, as they did after the year 1780. Yet this dislike of a truly noble and useful bird arises from ignorance of his habits. When gentlemen from the South take their gamekeepers with them into the North, these cannot, at first at any rate, be expected to have much practical knowledge of the habits of the Northern game-birds. My own belief is that the prejudice against the capercailzie is really an unjust one, and an attempt to thin off the birds to any great extent is but a poor return to those sportsmen who, having the matter at heart, spared neither trouble nor expense in order to reinstate the capercailzie in his ancient haunts, thereby benefiting both man and bird in the coming years.

The only crime with which the bird is charged is that of injuring and destroying the firs by breaking off the top shoots in perching on them, and by nipping off the lateral shoots. I would plead in defence that the capercailzie is quite innocent

of real harm in this: no wild creature is ever guilty of the destruction of his own food-supply. The wood-grouse only trims the tender fir-tops for part of his food, in the same way that his smaller relatives the black and the red grouse do; and even cultivated trees are all the better for an occasional trimming.

It is a well known fact that young firs will spring up self-sown in all directions. No injury is ever done to full-grown fir-trees by any game-bird. Probably if domestic fowls even were allowed to run among the firs, they might do the young trees a little temporary damage; but even if they did, the saplings would soon recover themselves. It is the squirrels that really do the mischief ascribed to the capercailzie, but they accomplish it with silence and cunning.

I have seen more than enough of the squirrel's mischievous work in the southern counties of England. Bushels of young succulent shoots, from five to eight inches in length, may be found littered round the stems of those trees where the squirrels have been engaged in the occupation of polishing the enamel of their little ivory chisels. So evident

and well known is the harm done by these animals, that close to my own home orders have been given for their destruction. The squirrel in his proper place is a beautiful ornament of the woodlands, but when he forsakes his rightful office to get into mischief he becomes worthy of his local name of "bushy-tailed varmint," and he finds himself treated as such. .

One instance may be mentioned, out of numbers, in which the squirrels have been punished for their depredations. Between the years 1862 and 1870, on one estate in Scotland, no fewer than 6572 squirrels were killed for tree-nibbling. In the course of my ramblings in Surrey woods I have pointed out their work to those who ought to have known better, but who were ignorant of the real reason that there was such a cruel waste of young shoots at the butts of the fir-trees. My information was not received with thanks; but that is a detail.

All who have studied wild creatures know that they are well fitted for the purposes to which they were created, and that, to a certain extent at any rate, they bear in their general appearance signs of the work they accomplish. The powerful form

and strong hooked bill were given to the capercaillie for other purposes than merely picking up ant-eggs, nipping off shoots, or gathering forest berries in their season. The lemming, that mouse-like little animal, swarms in the forests of Northern Europe, where the capercaillie is most at home, and there are other small creatures on which the wood-grouse uses at times that strong bill of his.

All game-birds, from the capercaillie to the little quail, are courageous to a degree. Their apparent shyness is only an instinctive habit of self-preservation. I have sometimes seen game-birds engaged in fatal duels which were fought out bravely by the vanquished to the final gasp, when he expired, game to the last.

There has been much minute examination on the subject, but even now there remains some slight doubt as to the exact date of the disappearance of the last capercaillie native of Scotland. But this is not very important, and does not alter the fact that the bird *was* killed off and was introduced again. J. A. Harvie - Brown, quoting Professor Newton and Mr H. Gurney, junior, states in reference to Denovan's sale catalogue for 1818, that

all the accounts of the wood-grouse should be received with extra caution, for there were tricks of the trade in those days.

The following passages may be taken for what they are worth :—

“Lot 651. Hybrid grouse shot in Scotland. The rarest of the grouse tribe.

“Lot 651. Wood-grouse from the Highlands of Scotland. Male and female. Truly rare birds in the finest possible condition.”

In a footnote the author states :—

“In answer to enquiries as to whether there was any specimen in the Edinburgh Museum of a hybrid grouse or capercaillie from Scotland, that could have been referred to in the above lot, Mr John Gibson assures me there is not.

“The latest capercaillie in the collection is a Norwegian one purchased in 1814 by Dr Jamieson for £4, 4s. Mr Gibson considers that had there been a British example in the collection at that time such a piece of extravagance would not have been perpetrated.”

This quotation of a statement supported by two authorities can be left to tell its own tale without any comment of mine. Hybrid grouse are not uncommon now. The reason for this is easily

explained. The birds are wanderers, the hen birds particularly so, and they precede the male birds in their explorations when wandering in search of fresh breeding-grounds. Meeting with the grey hens, the females of the black-grouse, they find friends who are not much larger nor in a general way so very different from themselves, and whose tastes in food coincide with their own. So they stay with the ladies of the black prince's seraglio, and very beautiful hybrids are the offspring of the black-grouse and the wood-grouse.

The female of the capercailzie or wood-grouse is much smaller than its mate. Both vary in size, but the hen birds to a remarkable extent, being in some instances no larger than a full-plumaged blackcock. The plumage of the capercailzie hen is variegated with brownish black, yellowish red, and pure white. Her nest is made on the ground, generally in the cover close to the stem of some tree. The eggs, from eight to ten in number, are light yellowish brown spotted with two shades of rich tawny brown.

The capercailzies have been accused of driving the black-grouse away from their haunts. But

other causes have been at work, diminishing the numbers of the latter in certain places where once they were plentiful. The wood-grouse has had nothing to do with the matter.

In the forests of his native Scandinavia the capercaillie is himself thinned in numbers by many enemies. Man is the most deadly of them. He shoots and traps the capercaillie to supply the foreign markets during their seasons, and nets him for acclimatising purposes, which is a simple but very effectual proceeding. The bird simply walks into a fine silk net, his very action of walking into it drawing the meshes close round the victim; and then he is helpless, ready to be picked up and placed in coops with others for exportation.

Besides that arch-enemy man, the bird has its own natural foes. There are the lynx, the wild and the marten cats, the fox, the eagle, and the eagle-owl, and the fierce and determined goshawk. But the capercaillie is wary and has all his wits about him, except at the hour when he is singing his love-song. His numbers in the north of Europe must be very great even now, although it is from

thence that he is brought in swift steamers to supply our game-markets.

Game from the north of Europe is brought to us now, like beef and mutton from our colonies, in a frozen state. There are more facilities than there used to be to enable all kinds of foreign game, and particularly the capercaillie, to be brought into the markets. When this bird is placed upon the table it is interesting to speculate as to how short a time has passed since he was alive in some wild region of his native Scandinavia, where fierce, gaunt, grey wolves are perhaps even more numerous than men.

The capercaillie is no exception to that general rule, the varying in size. In some parts of the country where he is to be found he will attain his full development, while in others he will to a certain extent be much smaller. Capercaillies vary in size as much as do our domestic turkeys. All to whom these native birds have been presented, know that their size differs very greatly according to the localities they come from.

Before leaving the subject let me give a slight sketch of this grand bird in his Scandian-

avian home. Stretching far back, until it is lost in the deep purple haze of the distance, lies a vast belt of mighty pine-trees. This is only the border of the great forest. What we call daytime has gone, but there is no darkness, for the midnight sun lights up the whole scene with the richest and softest rosy light, changing to a warm luminous grey above. Rough swamp-ground stretches from this belt of pines to the borders of a lake whose clear depths reflect the shadows of the huge rock-masses beyond. A call rings out from the top of a dead pine; and there, perched on a lateral snag, is the capercaillie with wings drooped and tail spread out like a fan, calling loudly. But he is soon interrupted.

A large broad-winged bird swoops just over him, and the wood-grouse stops calling, to dive with a rush into the undergrowth, for well he knows this is the eagle-owl, and it is on the hunt for himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN.

ALL classes of people who get their living by their work out of doors, notice carefully the rising and, more particularly, the setting of the sun, since under certain atmospheric aspects as it rises or sets, a very close judgment can be formed of what the day will be.

More importance is attached to the going down of the mighty life-giving luminary than to its rising. Folks are apt to think over matters a bit at night, as to what has passed and what may probably take place on the morrow, though for some this never comes.

The last rays of a glorious sunset lit up a dreary foreshore and a long reach of sands beyond; the

tide was out. It had been one of those Indian summer sort of days which we are at times favoured with before the leaves actually begin to fall. Fowls were about, hen-footed fowl, waders, telling that autumn had come. As the light flashed out from the masses of purple and gold clouds hanging low over the water, brilliant flashes of rainbow hues showed on the sea for a few moments, then faded away again into sober grey. The only signs of life were a couple of fowlers with their dog, coming over the sand-dunes to set their flight-nets on the sands. They belonged to a class almost passed away now—men who never said more than was necessary at any time, and what they did say could be relied on, their motto being “speak the truth and shame the devil.” Whether one of the two had ever shamed the Prince of Darkness or not, I am unable to say; but one thing I do know, he had by his manner of plain speaking shamed a certain class in his time, for when excited he was a bad nut to try and crack.

“’Tis a fine night for the nets, Spanker, ain’t it?”

“Ah, Reef, ye may well say so, but somehow,

lad, I mistrusts the look on it, I do; an' if you was to ask me why, I could no more tell ye than my spannel here at heel."

"Perhaps 'ye ain't quite yerself—craft gits out o' gear at times, as we all know. The wear and tear on it all does it; 'taint in reason but what it will come to be so. Here's the mixer, pull at it."

"No, Reef, 'taint that, and thank ye all the same, but I've got my own ager mixer. Let's git the nets set, fur no matter how you feels, jawin' niver got a job done yit; not as iver *you* waste words, old lad. You take the upper nets, Reef, me an' the spannel will git down to the lower end, an' work up to meet ye."

"All right, Spank; o' course you knows as bits o' them sands is shifty."

"Yes, I know all about 'em, sail on."

Oh, how little it takes for things to go wrong! When the sun dipped, a breeze sprang up that soon was whistling half a gale, and the tide was making in over the sands at mill-race speed. Reef hailed his mate, and was hailed back by him; but as Reef made his way to shore and waited for Spank to come, instead of his master, the dog rushed up

howling and whining to his feet, and dashed away again. Sick at heart, the fowler followed, until both man and dog were beaten back by the tide.

How it had occurred no one knew. Moving sands are horribly treacherous in the darkness, when certain marks are not visible. The sun had set on that unfortunate fowler for ever here. Three days afterwards were heard the mournful words "Come ashore." . . .

The sun has gone down, and the great bright harvest moon is well up in the sky,—the hunters' moon. The last load of corn has passed out of the field, and you can hear the click of the gate as it closes, and the creak of the wheels as the heavily laden waggon passes down the lane on its way to the farm. After a time, life of another kind comes to people that stubble-field. Bits of shadows move here and there that, if we were near enough to see, would prove to be hares and rabbits: there is a lot of choice nibbling for them in the tender green stuff that flourishes so luxuriantly between the rows of the corn-stalks. How much or how little harm is done by them to crops, that is, corn crops, we are not prepared to say; but though both hares and

rabbits shelter there when the corn is standing, yet you do not find the corn fed on, not when it is in the ear,—at least I have not seen this, although I have watched very closely for signs of mischief. No doubt just as it is out of the ground some of it is nibbled a bit, but not to any very great extent. Root crops I have seen worked very considerably; but the skylark is very frequently the cause of much harm, under certain circumstances, for the birds peck out the soft white stem of the wheat just as it is rising from the ground. There is not the least fear of the skylark being exterminated, for, more or less, these birds are migrants. Birds of many kinds visit corn-fields, but some of them do not eat a grain.

Where ducks come from is a puzzle; but come they do in the light of the harvest moon—wild ducks—to fill their crops and fly away to quiet waters, known to themselves, at break of day. And if the badger has his home under the hill, be very sure he will waddle out into the stubble where all kinds of small deer are about—mice, frogs, beetles, snails, and slugs, beside vegetable trifles. His appetite is very accommodating; he likes them all.

It will be bad for the hedgehog if the badger meets with him, in spite of his prickly jacket. Nothing comes amiss to him. It is a pity to kill him, a poor wandering grey friar whom our trains on the railway confuse so much at night, for if he is on the track he is almost sure to come to grief. While he listens and wonders what the noise is, the engine is on him, killing him instantly. I saw a couple that the guard-irons had caught and hurled on one side. Their hides are very tough, for they were not broken, and, so far as outward signs went, they might have died a natural death; but when they were skinned for preserving, their internal arrangements were found to be terribly upset. Why the badger runs on railway-tracks is this: lots of birds that fly by night come in contact with the telegraph wires and kill themselves, and these the creature hunts for and eats.

The badger is not the only wild thing that is fond of the line. I have known birds make their nest and bring out their young under the metals that the trains were rushing over by day and night. This I can vouch for.

All creatures, from game to vermin, frequent the

line from choice and not necessity. As to insect life, well, the railway embankments are alive with it. Some of our rare moths and butterflies can be found there—in fact it is very little use looking for them elsewhere: as to the beetles, their name is legion. Life of some kind is ever on the move, at all times and all hours, each creature knowing its own appointed time.

The heron, that grey fisher, is very busy when the harvest moon is in the sky, for she lights up his fishing quarters. So well is this known, that where trout are preserved, strict watch is kept for him,—not that he often comes to grief, for he is wary. The behaviour of some folks has made him so. He does not start his fishing early, for he only gets well on the wing when the sun goes down.

A storm of wind comes from the westward,—a real westerly gale is rushing over the moor hills. The firs sway, bend, and roar as the wind rushes through them, so that you could almost fancy you were listening to the breaking of the waves on a stony beach when the gale sets dead inshore. So strongly is the wind blowing, that where there is nothing to break its force the furze patches and heather

tracts are completely flattened, to spring up again when the force of the rush is over. It is, in fact, for the time, a waving grey-green sea of vegetation. Cloud masses, blown to rags and tatters, of a lurid tint, move in a slanting direction—for it is impossible for them to go in front of the gale—to mass themselves again when they have sailed into a calmer current of air. A few late rooks—for some of them do keep late hours—in trying to get to their rookery below the hills, are blown away like withered leaves.

“What do ye think on it all?” cries a rustic friend that I had not noticed, from a side track leading out of the firs. “Middlin’ lively, ain’t it? The young uns an’ the old gals wunt want to hook no dead boughs and limbs off fur fagits, seein’ as ’tis done fur ’em, an’ a lot o’ live stuff is down as well. ’Tis a werry ill wind as don’t do good fur sum critter or other. I knowed it was comin’, fur the hosses, ponies, cattle, and sheep made for the loo’ard hollers, long afore five o’clock this arternoon. Them ’ere hollies on the brow, them ’ere big uns, swishes and ristles most spitefully, I ken tell ye. An’ look here, there’s a couple o’ cocks under ’em

(woodcocks), an' if iver you see critters move quick, they did fur them clumps when the wind got loose. When I gits my week's paper an' looks it over, I'll warrant as there'll be sum shipwracks."

"Can you remember," I ask him, "at what time of the year the great gap was made in the woods by the blowing down of the great trees?"

"Why, our lot had been a-cuttin' the under stuff an' jist finished the job an' gone home; 'twas this time o' year, an' a gale got loose like this frum the same quarter. In some places it didn't blow off a hurt leaf, 'twas curious; for in t'others it cleared all afore it. It cleared that 'ere lot o' big trees."

Insects by their actions tell when a change is coming; that hum in the air, which you have heard for hours, suddenly ceases; they have come down to earth again and taken shelter beneath the leaves, the under side of them, to wait for a better time.

The birds flit in restless fashion from tree to tree, and from one bit of cover to another; for something tells them that in the coming change they will need more than their ordinary place of shelter for the night. Children who have been busy, as only

children can be, catch up their little toddlers of brothers and sisters, either in their arms or on their backs, and hasten home as fast as they can go. They know quite as well as the creatures around them that it will not be safe for them to be out of doors when the sun goes down.

A soft sky composed of two colours, golden below and grey above that, throws a charm over miles of uncultivated flats in all their primitive wildness, such as without this golden glamour no one would care to look at for any length of time. Yet in spite of the evil reputation the district has, even now there is a weird beauty over it all at this particular time; for the thick white mists that rise, the deadly exhalations from the decay and wash of who shall say how many years, are lit up with prismatic hues as the light airs from the water move them from the flats. Grey, rose, and indescribable gradations of yellow are seen, from old gold to light buff; but the changes are almost as rapid as the changing of lantern slides. All objects are, so far as colour goes, changed by the way that the light falls on them. That purple cloud rising and falling in the distance is a vast host of starlings that will, after

they have done wheeling about, go to roost in the reeds.

Dark streaks move through the pure grey that still keeps its tone against the glow below it: they are strings, or lines, of fowl of some kind or other—they are too far off to distinguish which—going out to feed.

The cattle, looking huge under this peculiar light, are one by one sinking down for their night's rest, looking like large mounds of various colours in the lush swamp herbage.

A line of fishing-boats are making for one of the numerous creeks, to make fast for the night; their dark sails, patched and weather-beaten, take at times the hues of velvet as they pass in and out of the after-glow, for the sun is going down.

CHAPTER IX.

DESERTED HOMES.

WE have to tramp far, and over rough roads, now, if we wish to see the nests of some birds that have become rare in our game-preserving districts. Head-money being paid for them, they are getting killed off rapidly. Besides this, many of their haunts and feeding-grounds have been broken up of late years, more is the pity. At the same time, I am of opinion that many of our rarer visitors might be induced to come regularly to us, were it not for ignorant popular prejudices which have been fostered and religiously handed down from father to son for many generations.

On the other hand, some gentlemen whom I know have procured, from the remote country dis-

tricts, birds which they have turned out round their house-grounds and coverts, in order to replace those which have been exterminated before they became owners of the places. They have been well rewarded; for the birds, knowing they were protected, have cast aside their natural shyness and nested close to the houses of those who befriended them. When these introduced creatures happened to be crows, magpies, and owls, it has created some bitter talk in certain quarters: useless opposition, I am happy to say, for their protectors are both naturalists and sportsmen,—men, too, whom it would not be safe to interfere or trifle with. Of course, if these birds stray from their places of refuge they have to take their chance, but otherwise they may rest in perfect security.

Magpies, for instance, are really most beautiful objects when seen on the lawn in front of a house: their tints of purple, green, velvety black and blue, flash and show lights, like those on the feathers of the Impeyan pheasant—these tints being brought out and relieved by the pure white of the rest of the bird's plumage. The bald terms of black and white, which are generally used in speaking of the

magpie, do not really give a correct idea of it. Quite independently of the flashing tones of colour I have mentioned, the white portions of the plumage show pearly greys as the bird, in its ever-active movements, causes the white edges to overlap the dark parts of the feathering. The special magpies which were in my mind's eye as I wrote the above are naturally precious creatures in the eyes of the children of those sportsmen who have so wisely and kindly provided for them a sanctuary, where the war of extermination could not reach them.

My readers can easily see, I fancy, that our wilder birds have been the chief objects of my own personal study; and this has been from choice. During half a century of close observation I have seen strange changes take place; and the rapidity of these, when once started, has been most astonishing. Money, backed by keen enterprise, will do wonders; and these have been the real factors in the extermination of a few, and the increase of some other species in certain districts. Some species favour cultivation; to others it is inimical.

Trees have been planted on bare hillsides where, in the days of my youth, only ragged stumpy thorns

grew. Fleece-catchers these were. Go where you might, you would be sure to see plenty of tufts of wool hanging. Fine healthy trees grow vigorously, and completely cover land which once only afforded a scanty pasture for sheep. The moorland, again, when brought under cultivation, produces a fresh herbage, as if by magic.

There have been changes such as affect a bird like the magpie terribly: his home and his occupation, so to speak, have gone from him. In past times I knew his haunts and the creatures that formed the principal portion of his food-supply. These having disappeared, you may look for him in vain in the spots where he ought to be. If I wish to see him without going a long and rough journey, I should visit the London parks or Kensington gardens. There, close to the roar and bustle of a great city, the birds are safe, whereas they know that death awaits them in the wilds. Indeed it is a long time since I have seen a single magpie in the district about which I write—about thirteen years, in fact. I have not seen a black grouse or a grey hen for twenty-two years; nor the hen-harrier, and his mate [the ring-tail, for an equally long time.

Very soon, from various causes, which bear more or less upon them, the nests of the wilder birds will be hard to find; one's journeys in quest of them become longer and longer, with small results to compensate for the trouble.

It is a glorious day; the last of the leaves have not yet fallen from the moorland trees, although the mountain-ashes have lost both berries and leaves—for the birds, without exception, eat these rich crimson clusters first of all. We are tramping up a stony hollow of the moor—call it a road if you like, out of courtesy—but rough bits of moor stone fall on it from the banks on either side and impede the progress. As we reach the highest part of the road, which is in point of fact the face of a worked-out stone-quarry where some of the great ledges left yet project, we very cautiously examine the place for hawk signs. In spite of persecution, which has to my certain knowledge been exercised for forty years here, hawks—principally sparrow-hawks—have used this spot as a resting-place. As no bird is perching there just now, we walk into the hollow of the quarry and look up, to see that some have been there, and quite recently too, for the grey lichen-

faced ledges are stained white by the mutings of the young and old hawks which have rested there in order to sleep and digest their food. We shall find their deserted home presently. My rustic friend "Tommy" gave us such minute instructions in his own woodland fashion, that, unless those two ragged Scotch firs he spoke of have been cut or blown down, we shall find the nest soon. From some quite fresh castings that we see under the ledges we know for a certainty that the hawks are near.

Twice only, during a course of thirty-two years' acquaintance with our woodlanders, have I received any written communication from a forester. Usually information reaches me in this fashion—"Be you goin' to D—— this 'ere week, Waggle?" "Well, yes, I think on't." "Then if you runs up agin *him*, just mention as he can come over. If ye don't run up agin him, find some one on the quiet-like as knows him, and can tell him to come." Many a message have I had in this roundabout way.

"I can't go with ye to look for that old sparrowhawk's nest," Tommy had said this time. "Me and that 'ere new keeper what's come on ain't much

o' folks: I gin him one on the snout fur jeerin' o' me t'other night. I told him I knowed a rare strong spar-hawk's nest: it waunt on his beat, but 'twas precious close to it, an' most likely they'd harry his ground a bit when they flighted. He said then as how he'd give me a brace o' drummers [rabbits] if I'd git that nest an' bring it to him. But I told him as how I'd see him d——d first, an' his rabbits too. When I wanted drummers I could git them for myself. When he jeered me t'other night about not lettin' him see me rabbitin', he got snouted. This 'ere nest is in the trees on common land, so 'tis all right." Tommy knew well that I was not given to trespassing.

Hawks, as a general rule, range wide from their nests for their quarry. I believe it is the usual form now to call the nests of all the *Raptors* by a different name; but nests they have been to me from my childhood, and they will remain at that, from the nest of the cowardly eagle—and he is cowardly in spite of his great reputation—to that of the gallant and spirited midget, the little merlin, the stone-falcon of the moors.

Two long miles from their resting-place in the old

stone-quarry I found the nest I was in search of, in one of two Scotch firs perched on a great heap of gravel and stone *débris* of the moor. The work of ages had worn and washed away all the softer parts that had once joined this mass. There was the detached mound or heap about the size of any ordinary house, with the two firs that stood out like landmarks upon it, for on the open side of the moor they could be seen seven miles away. A long tramp it had been to see the deserted nest of a sparrow-hawk, or we might say of a pair of hawks; but this is a sight not to be seen very often, especially a nest that has been used and repaired year after year as this had been.

When the young birds are well on the wing, and have been taught by their parents to forage for themselves, they are driven away by the old birds. This is the rule with all the *Raptors*. Sometimes a squirrel-drey or nest forms part of their foundation. Then, again, the squirrel will use the forsaken nest of the sparrow-hawk for the same purpose. Some nests get forsaken for good; others are only deserted for a time, until the nesting season comes round again.

It is practicable up to a certain limit to make a collection of birds' nests, but beyond that limit it is a very difficult matter.

The last magpie's nest I had the pleasure of examining at close quarters was in a wheelbarrow: it had been cut out bodily from the tree it was built in, by my sturdy musical friend Tommy. As I stood lost in admiration at the wonderful skill of the bird in lacing and interlacing all sorts of prickly twigs and trailing bits of branches over the opening that formed her nest, where she had just room to step in at one end and out at the other, Tommy remarked—"That a magpie could git in and out all right, but it would puzzle the devil to foller her. I've hed to put on hedgin'-gloves, an' cut about with a bill-hook, to get this 'ere fur ye to look at," he added.

The carrion-crow, Charles Waterton's warrior-bird, is in the eyes of many nothing less than a feathered power of evil. When will all these false ideas about our creatures be altered? The opinions about this special bird vary to a degree, and some woodland prejudices are really as strong now as they were when I was a boy. I do not now know

one spot in Surrey where the carrion-crow can be found breeding. I do not state as a fact that there are no breeding-places left, but I do not know of one. The wilds of Sussex and of Hampshire would be probably the most likely places in which to find a nest or two at the present time.

A forsaken nesting-place fronts a mansion in one of the great hollows of the Surrey hills. I had full particulars about that pair of birds and their nest from one of our woodland landlords, long before the house was built, or even thought about. The man was brimful of practical natural history, besides which he had a leaning to what he called the "wertues o' plants"; and he possessed a very old Herbal, which was much conned over in leisure hours. It treated of the relation of the plants to the planets, and was most firmly believed in by him. He certainly was clever in making simple household remedies for children, and some of his patients were of larger growth; but he never shot at those crows.

The fact was, a smuggler's track ran under the line of great firs; and as the place was, from the very nature of the locality, avoided when the sun got down below the hills, only those went there who

had a special object in so doing. Their business was kept most religiously to themselves, for very good and palpable reasons. The evil reputation that clung, tightly as their own feathers, to that pair of crows, helped no doubt to keep the coast clear at times, when it was essential that no obstruction should be in the way.

Our interesting friend was a liberal partaker of adulterated fluids—strong spirits and a little water with them—yet never have I seen him intoxicated or in the least muddled: he only became cheerfully communicative on the subject “o’ them ’ere crows,” and the topic was with him a lasting one. I ventured once to make a remark about his wonderful imbibing powers to his cheery old wife. “Wasn’t she afraid the drink would kill him?”

“Lor’ bless ye!” she replied, “not a bit on it; but I should be most mortal afraid he’d go off his head or die if he waunt able to git it.”

An old man was recently telling me about the herons that built in the trees like rooks, on each side of the carriage-drive; and how, when the crash of falling masonry and brickwork startled them when the house in question was pulled down, the birds

rose from their nesting-trees and shouted hoarsely as they flapped to and fro. The trees were cut down and the fine avenue converted into a green ride. Then the herons naturally departed for ever. I frequently stop to look at the line of brickwork left just above the ground, covered over with ivy and trailing brambles; and often speculate about the motive the owner that bought the property after the death of those who once lived there could have had in giving the order to pull the beautiful place down. This is only one case in many that come under one's notice, where the pride and glory of one man's lifetime has been ruthlessly destroyed by the next owner. It is a sign that one is fairly advanced in years when there is so much of the past to remember and ponder over.

The bustards we can never hope to see again. They have not died out, they have been exterminated; yet their homes remain, for the South Downs and plains exist, as they have done beyond all records, but the birds that once made their haunts in those localities are gone. Now and again one or two visit their old homes, but they get shot directly.

All rare stragglers that are shot do not get recorded

in ornithological publications ; for a bustard was shot in the South Downs in the winter of 1893 to 1894 which certainly was not recorded. Some birds moult heavily—that is, they lose nearly all their flight-feathers at one time—and the consequence is that the birds so moulting have only their legs to trust to. The bustard is one of the birds that moult in this way ; and so he comes to grief.

I have seen some quibbles raised in print about the impossibility of greyhounds or long-dogs capturing bustards ; although the statements of such captures have been made by men who have not only seen them, but done the same thing with their own dogs.

All nests are beautiful, taking into consideration the purposes that they are built for ; even the slovenly ones, as the boys call them, which fall to pieces under their rough handling, are perfect works, when in the spots where the birds have placed them. Some I have handled require as much care as a butterfly or moth to get them home in perfect condition.

Where the reeds have not been cut, you may see, late in the season, the deserted home of the reed-warbler—the “reed-sparrer” of the marshmen.

Sometimes in pike-fishing weather, when a few sharp frosts have followed each other—not enough to cover up the open water, but just enough to make firm the tangle where the reeds grow—you may see the nest sufficiently for all purposes of observation; and as a specimen, it looks still as perfect as when the clever little builder first finished it to lay her eggs and bring up her brood in.

Just one word of warning to those who wade through weed-beds, pike-fishing: keep your eyes open and your feet moving; for of all the unpleasant things I am acquainted with, the very worst is to have a lot of reeds and tangle give way with you and shoot you into ice-cold water, six, and it may be ten, feet in depth. Such accidents will occur at times, let you be as careful as you may. I have experienced this sort of thing more than once in mid-winter, and so speak feelingly.

I was deputed once, with another choice spirit of my boyhood's days, to ruin the happy home of some missel-thrushes that had young, in a choice pear-tree belonging to one of my relations; for we had persuaded him that we could do the job better than any one else in or about that large orchard. The owner

wanted them killed, the old birds especially, for the next tree was a choice amber-heart, and the birds were mauling the fine fruit terribly, eating at the cherries themselves, and feeding their young as well. The old birds were very wary, however. Our relative had tried to get them, on and off the nest, but had failed; so at last he let us try to do the job, at our particular and urgent request. We considered the subject over. The first thing was to put a rare good charge in the old single; then we waited till roosting-time—in fact it was almost dusk—before, taking off our shoes, we snaked up to the pear-tree, dodging from trunk to trunk. At last we stood beneath the nest, which looked like a great black lump above us. The gun was pointed fair at the bottom of the nest, the trigger was pulled, down tumbled the old ones and the young ones, at least all that remained of them, for the bottom of the nest was blown clean out.

Something else, though, was blown clean off—we could hear it snap—and down fell the top shoot of the fine young pear-tree. This was more than we had bargained for; but the thing was done, and there was no help for it. We gathered

the fragments of the nest and birds, and put them in our handkerchiefs. I put the gun under my arm, gave the fragments to my companion to carry, and marched down to give our relative the gun to put back inside the clock-case. He did look over the accident after a time, for he was a kindly man, but it was long before either of us ventured very close to him.

A fresh breeze covers the pure spring-waters of a mere with dancing ripples, just enough to make the broken and decayed sedge-blades, dotted here and there, tremble and sway a little. Large heaps show above the surface, looking like sheaves of decayed sedges that had grown there and withered down to their blade-stems. This is exactly what they look like; but they are the deserted homes of certain coots. I visit this mere at particular seasons, just to see how the fowl are getting on. The owner of the land has given strict orders that the fowl are not to be molested in any way, and no pinioned birds are here; the mere is simply tenanted by pure wild-fowl that come and go as they please. We have only missed them when the mere was covered with ice, and skating was

going on. Directly open water showed, they were back again to their sanctuary in perfect safety from danger in any shape or way, their foe the pike excepted—which security has made the fowl as confident as barnyard ducks.

As I may at some future time write the natural history of this large mere, filled with the purest water, I will confine myself here to the coots. The habits of these birds are most interesting ones to a wandering field-naturalist. Just before they actually begin to build their damp platforms of nests, they show off a great deal, sailing along with their wings raised, like little black swans; flirting the water up and over themselves in showers, squattering along just above the surface, half-paddling, half-flying, leaving a wake behind them as if a boat had passed. Clanking, clicking, and querulously twittering, a rare to-do there is, all at one time. They are handsome birds in pairing-time, velvety black and rich dark-grey, these tones set off by the bluish white of the frontal shield, and the colouring of the legs and feet, their scratching-machines. If any of my readers would like to know what a coot is like, just wing-tipped, let

them pick up a half-grown cat that has been chivied a bit by a naughty little beauty of a fox-terrier, and they will get a good idea of the thing.

I visit the coots when they show off—when their broods are out—and again when they pack just before winter sets in. So close have the old birds brought their clutches of young to me, as they were feeding, that I could have touched them with my ash staff. Coots do not pair all at one time: some of the young ones were not much larger than dabchicks; others were larger; some were nearly as large as their parents. The larger young ones had small frontal shields just developing; the little ones, grebe size, had not got these—they would come presently. Young coots, in their nesting plumage—that is, their first feathering after leaving the nest—look like crested grebes in winter plumage, as they stretch up to trim their breast-feathers.

The young and the old birds dived for food within a yard of me. They dive and swim with surprising quickness; and the water being crystal clear, I could see them darting through the beautiful weeds at the bottom, like rabbits through short cover,—in fact, the light under parts of the young

birds as they shot along looked exactly like the scuts of rabbits vanishing at full speed.

A most amusing incident occurred as I was once watching these coots. A dabchick had dived about ten yards away from me; when he rose he almost touched the toe of my boot, which was close to the floating weeds. This unexpected meeting began and ended very suddenly on the part of the bird; for in one second his quick eye caught my own, I heard a very faint blop, and the end part of the dabchick left me at express speed. If those who search for animals and birds would wear grey clothes, stand perfectly still even if they are on open places, leave their pipes and cigars at home, and their guns as well, carrying a good field-glass instead of it, they would see plenty of life. Let the creatures come near to you if they will. Directly any wild creature is followed, it becomes suspicious.

Natural history is, I very firmly believe, only yet in its infancy. Out-of-doors men and women—for the latter hold their own with the so-called sterner sex at the present time in the study of natural history—will be the means of spreading the truth, and nothing but the truth, in time.

When I am at rest beneath my daisy quilt, it will be for others to prove whether I have tried to walk in the right road or not.

To return to our subject of birds' homes. After the broods or clutches have left their nest, as a nest, they still use it as a resting-place by day and as a sleeping-platform at night. From the nature of the materials that the nest is constructed of, it gets sodden with water, and sinks lower and lower, until at last, in the shallower portions of the mere, it ultimately rests on the bottom. To remedy this, the old birds and their well-grown young ones build the structure up with the whole stems of that curious aquatic plant commonly called mare's-tails. This is done very neatly and expeditiously. The birds dive and nip the stems at the root: no exertion is required beyond that of diving, for the natural buoyancy of the coots' bodies causes them to rise to the surface like great corks—in fact the stem is, so to speak, levered out of the soft mud by the simple act of nipping the stem, and the birds rise with it. Naturally there is much to be seen in clear water at times, if you will but remember not to let your shadow

fall over it. If any of my readers who may carry field-glasses, when they come to some clear deep pool in the woodlands fringed with trailing weeds at the sides that look like waving ferny fronds, with a mass of the brightest emerald green weeds at the bottom, will cautiously get near—their shadows, of course, being behind them—and will examine that pool, looking right down into it with their glasses, they will see something to wonder at.

Another deserted home comes before me, far away from trees and heather and waving ferns; for we are standing on the edge of the tide where two rivers flow into the sea. The long grey stretches of marsh, cut up by countless dykes and creeks, are now as they have been for centuries; and it requires not the least stretch of imagination for you to imagine yourself in Holland—the hollow land. Well might the term be applied here; for if the sea-walls ever burst, they will be drowned lands.

Dutchmen and Huguenots settled here, and left their mark, as has been told in 'Annals of a Fishing Village.' Some old buildings and old wharves, now tottering to their fall, are as the Dutchmen that built them years ago left them; even the bluff-

bowed boats, half lugger half barge, nondescript certainly as to type, but rare sea-boats, are Dutch in every detail; and the people are still a race apart from all others in that remote nook and corner which is left in the damp grey marshlands.

The five miles stretch of marsh which we are standing on, only a little bit out of the lot that is lost in the mist miles away, was once a gulls' home. I have seen the birds in past years resting on the green grass like great flocks of geese, especially after they had been successful in their fishing operations; and the deafening noise, as the old gulls cackled and the young ones fretfully piped and skirled, simply because their stomachs were too full to be comfortable, was something to put up with.

Changes near their haunt of past days caused the gulls to flit for good, and it is now a forsaken haunt. The sharp smell of salt water reaches us as in past days, also the scent of the saltings and the slub ooze. As we turn to come away, Queenborough shows through the golden haze in the distance: I wonder if the grass grows in the main street there now.

It requires a very violent change to cause any

creature, furred or feathered, which has once made a settlement, to desert its home. The knowledge is certainly transmitted from generation to generation of wild creatures that certain districts are all that they could wish for as nesting-places, also for the purposes of food and shelter. Where large draining operations have been carried out, these have caused the birds to go somewhere else, to spots where draining has not yet taken place. As most of the birds that frequent swamps are more or less migratory, beyond their being missed from the district that has been drained, little harm is done. It is wanton extermination, carried on "under the rose,"—there is no need to explain this matter,—that one deplures. Vermin, properly so called, have become very troublesome in all cultivated parts of the southern counties, where the order to kill the true natural police of the woodlands has been given. I have heard much profanity uttered because of the mischief the vermin had done. And the men smiled complacently as they pocketed head-money for those very creatures that would have helped to kill the vermin they were grumbling about.

Certain people, who, to judge from their course of action, evidently consider the world—their own narrow world—was only made for them to move about in, might, in common courtesy to the general public, leave a few wild creatures unhurt, if only just as curiosities. If matters go on as they have been doing lately, some common objects of the country—at least they were such once—will have to be sought for only in public museums.

Even the brown brook-trout are giving way to hybrids—of the same species, larger certainly, and more predacious as feeders, but not equal to the natives they have hustled out. It is only the old story over and over again, of folks trying to put round creatures into square holes.

In concluding this chapter, I will simply state that I have seen tenanted birds' homes in far greater numbers than I have deserted ones; but I have not yet minutely entered into our British birds and their nests in the breeding season, because I hardly think I could do justice to the subject in the limits prescribed.

CHAPTER X.

A WET AUTUMN.

THE hooded crows have come to us, also the woodcock and snipe, followed by hosts of those shore-racers, the waders. They have come early, a sure sign that they have left rough weather behind them, only to meet rough weather here. It has been a dreary summer-time; in fact we can hardly be said to have had a summer, and all wild creatures have suffered. The face of nature looks very sad, whilst the leaves are falling and the woods are damp and cold; with the hills and moorlands sending water down to the low grounds in all directions, the brooks being bank high, and the rivers in flood. No wonder the robin mourns and cries from morning to night: he is one of the earliest to

rise and the latest to rest, so he has plenty of time for weeping—as he can weep most pitifully. When the winds sigh through the trees, bringing cold and damp, and blowing the leaves in all directions, so that they fall sodden at your feet, get away from a robin if you see one near you—and one will be sure to come if you are in the woods—for he will begin his dirge as though for your special benefit.

This is so well known to all who interest themselves in such small matters, that it has become with our rustics a common remark, “Hark at him weeping!” He is a good weather prophet; other creatures will let you know when things round about will be unpleasant, but they do not weep as robin-redbreast does.

Huge masses of clouds roll up from the southwest, just clearing the tops of the hills. Heavy mists rise from the valleys; they creep up the hillsides in billowy masses of thick fog, until the misty fog appears to meet the rain-clouds; and then down comes the rain, sheets of it so to speak. Then, too, comes the wind, with a roar like that of an express train, snapping the branches off trees, and blowing them down in all directions. We have crouched

under an old thick yew for shelter. Just above our head, sheltered like ourselves from the rushing storm, with his head on one side, looking at us, his feathers bunched up, sits robin on the weep. As soon as we can, we move and leave him to it.

The yaffle is silent; he has not the heart to shout. Even the pheasant gives only a kind of half-hearted crow when he tries to raise his voice. If there is a lull, he, as well as the partridges, will make for the highest ground they can find, near to their haunts. As to the blackbirds and the thrushes, they slip about the hedgerows in silence, evidently depressed.

The finches have gone somewhere—the green-finches as well as the yellow-hammers—away from the fields; even the sparrows are not numerous. Recently I walked sixteen miles through a woodland district without seeing a wood-pigeon. As this is the flighting season, no doubt they have moved to more congenial quarters for a time. Swallows and martins have suffered terribly. I have seen thick lines of them lately, sitting in a half-torpid state wherever there was some slight protection from the storms.

The sand-martins have been troubled by this whirligig weather. A woodland lane that I frequently walk in has a large hollow close to the road, overhung with trees; the banks of it are sandy. In one corner, quite close to the road, from which it is divided only by a rough fence, a colony of these birds have tunnelled their homes and nesting-places in the sandstone rock. Some atmospheric influence had apparently completely upset them, for they wobbled and fluttered about in a very weak state, quite unlike the alert butterfly flight of better times; and they kept within the circuit of the hollow, never going beyond it. They evidently felt that something must have gone wrong with everything.

The cuckoo, and the cuckoo's mate the wryneck, have also been affected by the weather. I have not heard the wryneck shout out his hearty, merry note of Peet, pee-peet pee-peet, peet, peet! once this season. It has only been a half-hearted performance, poor fellow; in fact, so weakly has he shouted out, or tried to shout, his cry, that the starlings on the roof of my house have positively mocked him. Starlings are our English mocking-birds; they will

imitate anything from the mewing of a cat to the creaking of a wheelbarrow.

The cuckoo made but a short stay with us this year; he also got completely out of tune, as though he had had enough of it: no doubt he and his mate the wryneck very soon made up their minds to re-visit Africa earlier than usual.

At this season I generally visit the hedgerows a great deal, for many beautiful things are to be found in or on hedgerows. But this year all is different. The bryony leaves and berries, the wild clematis—the old man's beard of the children—also the beautiful tasselled grasses that rear their heads in moist places,—all these have been blown and threshed and broken into a sodden mass of decaying vegetation. Pickets or sloes, bullaces, the hedgerow-plums, are, we all know, the most hardy of fruits; but this year I have seen them battered out of shape, killed, in fact, by the fierce hail-storms that have of late hurtled across the country.

After a course of observation, any one who studies bird life can tell very nearly what weather is coming. Some of the birds that visit us are

very delicately constituted, the insectivorous birds especially so; one such may be particularly mentioned — namely, the common spotted fly-catcher.

Swifts, swallows, martins, fly-catchers, nightingales, blackcaps, whitethroats, willow-wrens, reed-warblers, and the sedge-warblers, have all been sadly afflicted this season, at any rate in the district from which I write. If you roam about the woodlands, the look-out is in no way more cheerful. Even the jays have sought out retreats, the locality of which is best known to themselves. Besides this, it is not particularly safe to be in the woods just now; there is too much wreckage already, both above and below, and very soon there will be more. The truth of some lines of one of our great poets has been strikingly verified of late; the vividness of the description may be an excuse for quoting them:—

“ To-night the winds begin to rise
And roar, from yonder drooping day
The rooks are blown about the skies.”

That is exactly what the winds have been doing, and doing it with a vengeance. The rooks have

been literally blown all over the place. I had a rough time of it myself, being out in the storm to watch them. It is most amusing to see the birds come flapping along, croaking out their discontent, which is a very justifiable one; for, like the man who is watching them, they are coming home very wet and dirty, a most unpleasant state of affairs indeed. Here they come, canting first to one side and then to the other, some of them showing considerable gaps in their wings where flight-feathers have been knocked out, doing their best, poor things, to get to their roosting-trees. Just as they near their shelter, with a roar the gale comes on them, rain and hail with it, and they are blown away in a confused mass, like a lot of loose thistle-down. The diving, darting tactics they then employ to save themselves from coming in contact with the branches of the trees are worth looking at. Some of them, by making long tacking sweeps, only just escape being blown down on the park meadows, and then it is something wonderful to hear their gorbling grunts and grumbles. Do rooks also speak to one another unadvisedly at times, I wonder? If they do so

in this case, they surely ought to be forgiven. As to the jackdaws, they yelp out Jack, jackup, jake, jake, jack! and chatter in the most querulous manner possible.

The gale has passed over and the rooks have reached their roosting-trees. The branches are tossing about and creaking, for the wind is in full force although the rush of the storm is over. After much commotion, with endless caws, quawks, and guttural mutterings, interspersed by irritable Jacks, jacks, jacks! they settle down, but not for long. The "dims" are coming on; it is nearly dusk, and another hurricane of wind, rain, and sleet is coming up. In fact it has come already; with a roar like that of the first, it is upon us and the rookery as well. Crash goes a large limb from one of the trees, up go the rooks and jackdaws in a terrible uproar, to be blown away in the darkness of the storm-clouds.

Hérons have, up to the present season, regularly visited certain streams and pools which I know well; and some never left them again, being shot—not by me. This season they have not yet come to their usual haunts, but this circumstance is

easily accounted for. A great portion of the water-meadows—so called because brooks, streams, and rills run through them—has of late been, practically speaking, drowned land. When the running waters which intersect these meadows overflow, fish go with them—small fish, as a rule, the large ones usually managing to keep their places at such times. After a lull of about four or five hours—eight hours would be a considerable spell without wind or rain—the water drains a bit from the water-meadows. Then is the time for the heron; he fairly revels in good cheer. The plashes are just the right depth for wading; there are small fry galore, and if he is in the centre of the meadows where the hollows lie, he is out of the reach of any gun—a fact that he well knows. If it were possible for a heron to get fat, he would now do so. Certain large watercress-beds are particularly favoured by him, at least they have been up to the present time, and no doubt he will come again when the flood of rain ceases.

The cultivation of water-cresses for the market is carried on like any other branch of gardening. There is an idea that they are grown wild, any-

how, but this is far from being the case. They are cultivated on scientific principles,—nearly everything intended for the markets is so cultivated in these days. The purest running water is required to run through them and at times over them, and there must also be the cleanest arrangement at the bottom of the beds—no mud, not a bit of it. This is just the arrangement which trout appreciate, and as the beds are supplied from trout-streams it is only natural that trout should come and make their homes in the beds, and they do so. This is the time of year, when the season has been a favourable one, that trout grow restless, and explore places that at other times they would avoid. The heron knows all about this, and he comes to explore on his own account as well. Now, as the trout as well as the cress on these beds are the property of the owners of them, these owners naturally object to feeding herons on the beds, or it might be more correct to say, to the herons feeding themselves in such places without permission.

One of the young fellows who at one time walked in the beds told me that he'd "sin 'em come—in

broad daylight, mind ye—and he'd flop down a couple o' beds off, an' stan' there still as a stone, and then he'd have a trout,—sin 'em do it lots o' times. It's the ile in their legs and feet what does it, it draws the trout to 'em and other fish too. I only wishes I could get enough o' their legs and feet to make some, I'd hev some fish then, I can tell ye."

Heron-oil—that is, a certain mixture concocted by stewing the legs and feet—is still believed in, in spite of board schools. It will take yet a long course of training, extending over many years, before certain people will behold things in the same light in which other people wish them to be seen. These traditions and beliefs belong to the country; they are perfectly harmless, and after all has been said, there is some foundation of truth in them.

The beautiful legs and feet of the heron, when in the water, resemble the stems of aquatic plants, and the faintest ripple or flow heightens the illusion. Fish are continually exploring the stems of aquatic plants, the trout being particularly addicted to this practice. All fish will nibble at the stems of water-plants, and more especially

if air-bubbles are on them. I have studied trout considerably, and have seen them do this repeatedly. There is a peculiar attraction for a fish in a little air-bubble, and he is sure to go for it. Flies are off the water now so far as the trout is concerned. It is quite natural for the fish to mistake the shimmering glitter of the heron's legs for some water-stem on which air-bubbles are clustered, and to go and nibble it. He goes there right enough, but does not come back, for he goes down the heron's gullet. At certain seasons one may stand by the side of the water and watch the air-bubbles detach themselves from the stems of aquatic growth which are thickly beaded with them. As they rise to the surface, the small fish follow the glittering globes eagerly. The conduct of a man walking slowly by the side of rivers, streams, and ponds, peering in all directions for what he can see above and below, *may* bear, as some have said, a resemblance to the behaviour of one who intends committing suicide; but his frame of mind is far removed from any such tendency. There is, thank God, any amount of healthy honest enjoyment to be found in this beautiful land of ours, whatever

may be the weather, in spots where dirty money-grubbing has no place.

To go back to our wet season—partridges have in some districts left the stubbles, in fact they have not been able to remain there. There was too much water in the furrows, and there were too many branches littered about, blown from the woods, which in some instances surround the fields. These birds have taken a hint or two from their more gaily-dressed relatives the red-legs, for they have come here, seeking the rough broken ground on the hillsides.

One morning recently I met a man well known to me, who has, taking it all together, led a nomadic life, to say the least of it; he was making for a certain house. As he has been a great observer of birds, and has done it in the most practical manner—the powers that be having made him pay for this knowledge of his—I hailed him with the remark that he was up early, like myself.

“Yes,” he replied; “I’m going partridge-shooting; I’m marker for them; I’m going now to rouse one of them up, and I have got some distance to go.”

“What!” I exclaimed, “on such a morning as this?”

“Yes,” he said. “Nice, ain’t it, for tramping? But there, never mind, I know where they’ll get as high up as they can in the tuffets of torey [rank] grass, and they’ll lay like stones till we waits on ’em.”

That has exactly been the case: the birds have not developed fully this season, either in body or plumage; circumstances have been against them. If the winter should be a bad one, things will be still worse for them. There is a general growling and complaining all about, and there is no help for it, as all is due to the weather; but we must hope for the best.

Passing through a field of mangels the other day, I remarked to one of the farmer’s men engaged in the field that there was a particularly fine show in the root crops; to which he replied, “Yes, the wuzzles be big enough, so fur es that goes, but I doan’t think es they’ll keep much—ther’s bin too much wet. An’ the flies has bin on the turmutts. As to fruit, well, what’s the good on it? The crap is a good un, but it wun’t keep; an’ nobody wun’t

buy it. When we ken git rid o' things at a middlin' figger, we ain't got it to sell. When we has a lot on it, nobody wants it. 'Tis this 'ere wet, you knows——"

This is more than one can stand. I pull out my watch, recollect that I have urgent business, bid him good-morning, and walk out of that particular field with the fine "crap of wuzzles" at the rate of five miles an hour.

Ships as well as leaves are being blown about as I write. The grey crows, the hooded crows, will have strange gear, warped, torn, and tangled, to examine with their peering eyes; and they will flap over something that they dare not at first touch. They will not settle, but will come back to the wind-swept shore, and drop down there, pacing the shingle, if the wind permit them. Then, after walking with their heads down, as only hoodies can walk, they will go out to that heap of flotsam and jetsam left there by the ebb-tide. I know those birds, and have seen such heaps of wreck-tangle before. Women, married and single also, are gathered on shore, weeping bitterly. Charles Kingsley's sad wailing ballad, "The Three Fishers," has been wept, if not

sung, round our shores lately. Those whose occupations permit them to live in comparative security inland cannot form the least idea of what it is on our coast when the petrels and the gulls are blown inland like autumn leaves.

CHAPTER XI.

FRIENDS OR FOES?

THE moon shines brightly on the sides of the steep chalk-hill, which is covered in places by thick undergrowth. Masses of great trees, many of them in the last state of decay, throw their shadows on them also, the giant limbs looking weird in the fitful gleams of moonlight that flicker and play, now here, now there, on the trunks and branches. These have grown and reached perfection,—gone to decay and mouldered into touchwood for centuries. The rich leaf-mould, many feet in depth, beneath them, is all that remains to tell of a past race of forest giants. At the bottom, where the trees have been hurled to the ground by the fierce winds that tear at times through the long valleys which run from the

coast-line, the badger has his home; and a fitting one it is for him, suiting him admirably in all its surroundings. Like himself, it has an ancient look. The great blocks of chalk upheaved by the fall of the trees are cracked and seamed by the frost and rain, laced and interlaced by great limbs and roots, held together by the creeping fibres of woodland vegetation.

One opening, under a chalk block some tons in weight, is the entrance to his home and fortress. At the edge of wild disorder a strip of the most velvety green turf runs, dented here and there into little chalky hollows. There, in the season, the tall foxgloves rear their beautiful heads, and the moth-mullein raises its spike of yellow flowers, which are said to relieve sufferers from hay-fever when in their vicinity. Now, however, the spot is bare, and looks lonesome, for a sprinkling of snow has fallen. Lonely and weird though it is, there is something on the move, for a twig snaps under some foot, and we hear the faint sound of feet. Very faint it is; in fact we can only detect it by placing our ear on the ground. Presently a gleam of light shows; it comes from a lantern. It is the keeper and his

assistants coming to get the old grey friar out ; but they will have their trouble in vain, for the old fellow has moved his quarters to the opposite hill, which faces south.

So much the better. I only wish we could see his quaint, bear-like form, and his waddling trot or shamble oftener than we do. He is a persecuted creature now. The time, however, we trust, is not far distant when our native animals will receive protection—those at least which are, comparatively speaking, harmless.

His fur is used for various purposes. Artists are indebted to him for their “softeners”; also artistic decorators for their most valuable softening tools, especially when they are imitating the marks and graining of woods and marbles.

In the Highlands of Scotland, where his hold has been for ages, and where game-preservers have not improved him off the earth, and he is still to be found in numbers, the country-folks value him highly. The philabegs or pouches worn in front of the kilts are made from the skin of the brock. It may not be generally known that badger-hams are delicious eating, but it is so. Bear-hams I know from experience

to be good, and the bear and the badger are alike in the matter of feeding; in a great degree also in their habits.

I know him best in his home at the foot of one of the South Down hills. There is a long strip of coarse grass and moss, a quarter of a mile wide and more than a mile in length, a valley between two hills that are heavily timbered with oak and ash. Over this belt of mossy grass the purple emperor, prince of British butterflies, floats and dashes as he crosses from the topmost twigs of one belt of oaks to another. Here, too, the emperor moth is found, and here the badger has his abiding-place.

When the harvest moon floods the valley with light, he will leave his home and wander over this green strip which had once been broken up by the plough, but to no purpose, and so had become wild again. Here wild-flowers cover the surface as their time comes round. It is a perfect paradise for wild creatures. The humble-bees and moss-bees make their homes in the mossy surface—a rare treat for our old friend in his grey, black and white coat, who scratches them out with his digging-claws, or roots them up with his nose like a pig. No matter

whether it be honey, grubs, or comb, all goes down; and when the bees swarm round him his thick fur protects him: he takes no more notice of them than if they were so many flies.

Wild-fruit, roots, any small deer that comes in his way, all good things he enjoys. The consequence is, he grows enormously fat; he is a creature of contented mind, and in no small degree a philosopher, never hurrying when there is no occasion for it. Peaceable, too, and willing at all times to act up to the principle of "Let be for let be;" but once rouse him, let him think that danger is near, and a transformation takes place. No more waddling; he is off with a rush. If any foe obstruct his path, he will find that a more determined antagonist, taking his size into consideration, does not exist. Once, and only once, I had the pleasure of seeing mother badger and her young family of hopefuls at their gambols, rolling and tumbling about. Gravely the old animal sat in the midst of them, and I thought it was one of the quaintest sights I had ever seen.

The marten, pine marten, sweet marten, or marten cat, as he is variously called, according

to the locality in which he is found, is now a very rare animal in England. In point of fact he has been almost exterminated. Not so very many years ago he was to be found in the forests that spread over the greater part of Sussex. A marten was killed there to my knowledge some time back.

So common was he in the olden time that his skin furnished the principal fur worn by ladies of rank; a very beautiful one it is too, when properly prepared. Nearly all that is in use now comes from the Continent, where the marten holds his own, and is likely to do, in spite of traps and trappers. He thrives there, like the wolf, because the vast tracts of forest are still, comparatively speaking, thinly populated; food is there in plenty, and he makes it his special study to exact toll from all small deer. Hares, rabbits, squirrels contribute to the furnishing of his larder, and for game-birds he has a violent affection. Capercailzie, black-grouse, hazel-hen, and willow-grouse, all in turn come into his death-grip. On the ground, or in the trees, it is all the same to him. Lady marten frequently rears her beautiful kittens in the nest of some large bird of

prey that has left it of its own accord, or has had notice to quit.

The general appearance of the marten is that of a small, low-legged fox, and the fur is of a rich warm brown hue. He is remarkably active and very strong. When he has his home near gardens he will eat and enjoy fruit. If let alone he would still increase and do well with us in England, but, being such a foe to game, he gets little quarter given him. When he makes his home on the ground it is under rocks or cairns of stone. In the Highlands of Scotland he is still to be found, in larger or smaller numbers, according to the district and the population. In the so-called deer-forests he holds his own well. In some cases he has been very wisely protected, for he kills the Alpine hares, or blue hares, as they are generally called, which turn white in winter, and which have increased to such an extent, since orders were given for the destruction of all animals and birds of prey, as to become a perfect nuisance in the deer-forests.

The marten is wise, and confines himself chiefly to blue hares, grouse, and ptarmigan. That wary bird, the blackcock or black-grouse, gets

into his clutches sometimes, through the bird's own vanity.

Destroyer of the feathered race though he is, there is one of them that even he must hold in dread. Keepers of the deer-forest and Highland foresters have stated, and also proved their statement, that the golden eagle will pounce on and kill the marten; in fact, that it is his favourite prey whenever he can get it. In captivity the golden eagle will also kill and eat any cat that comes within reach of his chain when he is on perch.

The marten in a captive state is a very pleasant-looking creature. I remember a fine pair for whom some large limbs of trees were placed in their house, over which they frisked and bounded with the ease and gracefulness of squirrels.

The skin of the marten has one very good quality, independently of its beauty, and that is sweetness—hence its name of sweet marten. Other members of the same family have a most abominable odour, which prevents their fur from being used. The smell can be got rid of, but the process is a long one.

To the small farmer in some lonely Scottish glen or mountain strath, the marten is a plague, and a

very destructive one to boot. He will enter the shieling, and murder the small but valuable stock of poultry, with all the ferociousness of his tribe. Still they have been tamed, the whole of the tribe, but they are not to be depended on. Ladies have brought up weasels from the nest—weasel kittens—and sometimes all has gone well; but I have known accidents happen of a very unpleasant nature. At times their natural thirst for blood will come back without any warning.

The love for living creatures as pets has increased of late to a great extent, and more is known now about the animals and birds of our native land than has ever been known before. What was often said to me in my childhood rings in my ears still: "A place for everything, and everything in its place." It is an old saw, but a wise one. From the marten downwards, his whole tribe in their own place act as natural police, and keep within due bounds other creatures that otherwise would seriously inconvenience man himself. The very creatures he protects—game of all kinds, for instance—would, if not killed, become a pest to those who cultivate the land. I can remember vast tracts of land, at one

time uncultivated, where the whole tribe we allude to—the marten alone excepted—had free range, and no harm was done by them there. Since these tracts have been cultivated the animals have been cleared out, the order of things has changed, and the natural police of that once wild country have passed away.

The polecat, fitchet, or fougart is next to the marten as regards size and strength; but there is this great difference between them—whilst the marten is all life and activity, the polecat is, comparatively speaking, slow, although he manages to make sure work of it when he is in pursuit of any creature he is capable of killing. In all cultivated spots—that is, where woods, copse growth, fields, and moorlands are under the supervision of foresters or keepers—he has become extinct; but he was common enough when I was a boy, and a great enemy of the small farmers about our marshlands of North Kent. He kills game and poultry of all kinds and ages; not even geese and turkeys are safe from him. Soon after sunset he sets forth on his deadly errands; where a fox will kill one animal, the polecat will kill ten, carrying off the bodies of his victims to his

haunt in some adjoining copse or wood. Frogs, mice, rats, birds, and fish may all be found in his larder, when his home is in the wilds; but he preys on finer and more valuable creatures when he has his home near man and his belongings.

A dark-coloured ferret, commonly called a polecat ferret, is so much like him that if the two were placed side by side you would scarcely be able to tell the difference between them. The name fougart is evidently a corruption of foul marten, given him on account of his offensive odour, which proceeds from a fatty substance secreted by a gland beneath the tail. The fur is mostly dark brown, nearly black in colour; it is of little value, and is sold under the name of fitch. He often makes his nest in an old rabbit-burrow. To both rabbits and hares he is a more ferocious enemy than the stoat.

The stoat, or ermine, is a bright, active creature, handsome, too. He is smaller than the polecat, the body being scarcely ten inches long, apart from the tail, which is about four and a half inches long, and bushy at the tip. His upper part is brownish red, the under part creamy white. If he crosses your path, he is not put out in the least, but will even

stop for a second and look at you with his bright eyes, and then go on with his hunting. His victims are hares, rabbits, rats, mice, and birds; but his favourite prey is the common wild rabbit, which he hunts with the dash of a fox-hound, killing quickly and neatly.

I never weary of watching that Puck of the hedge-row, the weasel, for he surpasses the whole of his tribe in agility; he is bloodthirsty and destructive, too, like the whole of his tribe. His colour is the same as the stoat's, excepting that his tail always matches his upper parts. The smallest of his tribe, his body only measures about eight and a quarter inches in length, his tail two inches. At times weasels are very scarce. During the last year, 1889, I saw more of them than I had done for twenty years; and mice I know were less common, for I had actual difficulty in procuring enough—though I paid for them—to feed my pet owl. The weasel ought to be fostered as a friend to man, especially about rickyards and barns. The harm he might do would be more than compensated for by his good services, for he is a most determined mouse-killer. It is a fine sight to see the diminutive creature carrying a

mouse almost as large as itself, retriever fashion, with all the confidence imaginable. Small as he is, he is very strong, and continually on the move. As he runs along the hedge-side or by some old fence, so light is his step that the dead leaves are not turned over. Lately one came and deliberately inspected me as I stood perfectly still, watching some beautiful Admiral butterflies which were sunning their wings on the bramble-sprays.

Three times he left his mouse-hunting, and came up so close to me that I could have touched him with my stick; but I had no wish to frighten the small creature: it gave me pleasure to watch him. After he had seen enough of me he ran away again, as quietly as he had come up.

The weasel is a very careful and affectionate parent. If there is danger near, the mother will take her young in her mouth, just as a cat does, and place them in the first shelter that offers. She has often lost her life through her great affection for her young; but this occurs now only through accident or want of knowledge, for the weasel is being protected, and grace of sanctuary is given to a weasel mother.

Chalk-hills or sandy heaths, hedgerows or copse tangle, alike suit the rabbit when he has been allowed to rest for a few years. On a large estate, small farms have been ruined, or rather the farmers have, from the crops being eaten up by them: this took place before the rabbits were in such demand as a food-supply.

The skins are quite an article of value, and yet some years ago you might have had a cartload of rabbits at the rate of three for a shilling—from some estates at least. But that is a thing of the past, when people did not care to eat them; they are now eagerly sought for.

The most deadly of all the rabbit's foes is the stoat, which will hunt him like a dog; no matter how he turns and winds about, his pursuer is sure to come on him and kill him at last.

As pets, wild rabbits are most amusing. One that I owned before he could see plainly—for they are born with their eyes closed—was brought up on new milk till his teeth came. He quite made one of the family, and would jump on our knees, if we were sitting down, and play all manner of tricks to attract notice. No matter where one went, he would follow,

unless measures were taken to prevent him. It was his affectionate disposition that caused me at last to part with him; for not wanting his company, one day when I was going out I left him in one of our rooms with food and other comforts. On my return, after having been absent for about three hours, I found he had nearly gnawed through the bottom part of a door: in a very short time he would have been able to get out, to go and see where his friend had gone to.

On and about the wealds of Surrey and Sussex, fourteen to sixteen years ago, on some estates rabbits were bred in the warrens for their skins alone. They were wild ones; the rustics said that they were called silver-grey rabbits, and that cloaks were made from their skins for the ladies.

The wild rabbit can be found in all localities suitable to him—any wild spot that can give enough nourishment for a furze-bush will keep a rabbit. He is a playful creature, now here, now there; suddenly coming to a dead stop, sitting up and listening, and looking round, then just as suddenly starting off to play again. The same conditions that affect the hare affect the rabbit—locality and food.

In some places they are not much better than vermin, not worth the shooting or trapping for food ; in other more favoured parts they are eagerly sought for, and fetch a good price in the market ; in fact, from some estates the rabbits alone bring large sums of money to the owners. There are large links and warrens on or close to the sea-shore, where the rabbits dot along and eat the seaweed to such an extent as to spoil them as marketable commodities.

On the edge of the wood and on the bleak hillside the hare has his seat or form. In the fields of standing corn, or when the last load has been carried, on the fallows, or crouched in the stubbles, you will find the merry-hearted brown hare ;—on the wild marshes, too, separated from the lonely beach, where the curlews wail and the ring-dotterels pipe. By the sea-wall of our North Kent marshlands he thrives and multiplies, growing large there.

“Timid as any hare” is a term of reproach which he does not merit, for in his own way he is a most courageous creature. His speed is proverbial ; add to this his swimming and his boxing, to say nothing of his feats as a jumper, and few could say with truth and justice that he was behind other creatures

in gifts and gallantry. If a couple of hares fall out, they settle the matter by sitting up and boxing each other in the most scientific manner imaginable. The poet Cowper, as most of us are aware, kept some hares as pets, and they defended themselves or showed their displeasure in that way.

As an article of food he is, of course, in great request, sought for by those who are without a licence to hunt him, as well as by those who have one, so he need be wary and watchful.

He varies in size and weight, according to local surroundings. The marshland hares and those found in southern park-lands, where the herbage is rich, are much larger than those that have their living to get in less favourable localities. His wild enemies are the fox and the stoat, but they do not catch him very often. Sometimes the fox will chase him in the open, but he must be sharp-set to do it. Man is his chief foe, and in one form or another all manner of devices are employed for his destruction. Hares are certainly not so numerous as they once were, even in the most favourable places. Farmers complain of the damage done to the crops by them: there is some reason in their grumblings; but that

is only when the creatures have been preserved by artificial means for coursing purposes.

The cry of the hare when caught is very startling, almost human. The keepers make for the spot at once if they hear it at night, for they are quite certain poaching is going on.

There are three varieties of hares, the difference being the result of food or climate—our common hare, the Irish hare, and the Scotch or Alpine hare, which turns white, like the ptarmigan, in winter.

Like most game animals, the hare has been the innocent cause of much trouble; on that subject we will not touch. One thing is certain, if laws had not been made for the protection of our native wild creatures, they would have been exterminated long ago. The hare is one of our most interesting sylvan creatures; he has his wits about him, and, as I said before, he needs them all. The young come into the world with their eyes open, and begin to dot about after their parents very quickly.

The wild cat was common enough in England when vast tracts of forest, moor, and fen existed. Its name was used as a term of reproach and insult, and formed a peg on which to hang some of our

trite sayings, such as—"What can you get from a cat but the skin?" "No more to be trusted than a wild cat;" "Fierce as a wild cat," and other expressions of the like sort.

When he was captured, the principal use his fur was put to was to trim the garments of the ladies in the various nunneries at that time scattered over our land.

As population increased these great tracts of wild land got cleared, and to some extent cultivated; the numbers of creatures became diminished, but still their various furs formed a great part of the clothing of the rustics. Even now in out-of-the-way districts you will see many a fine vest and cap of beautiful velvety moleskin.

The wild cat was a cruel foe to those who first attempted to bring the forest under cultivation. He has well been named the British tiger, and he would come in the night-time and kill the poultry and lambs of those who had invaded his domain.

Picture to yourselves a creature twice the size of any domestic cat, brindled grey in colour with dark stripes, and a short bushy tail something like a fox's, but marked with dark rings.

Forty years bring great changes. I can remember spots which were shunned by all who were not compelled to go to them; places that had evil names given to them, and with good reason—long belts of thick woods that sloped down to dreary marshes and the sea-shore, which could only be traversed in those days by very few.

A grey old church stood on the edge of those great woods, and once on each Sunday a small congregation might be seen coming from different directions to worship there. Sometimes I have made one of it, and a quaint affair that service was: the feathered songsters in the trees outside far surpassed the singers who led the psalms and the chants within.

Although this was not a game-preserving district, there were plenty of hares, rabbits, and wild-fowl to furnish food for the many cats that had run wild in the woods for years, and had so nearly gone back to the original type of wild cat that only competent judges could tell them apart. They had the same colour, markings, thick fur, and short, bushy tails, and had become as unlike the common domestic cat as the true leopard is unlike the snow-leopard of Thibet.

The unearthly yells of those fierce cats as they answered each other from their dark places of refuge, or from the topmost limb of some tree; the flitting jack-o'-lanterns or will-o'-the-wisp — spontaneous combustion of the foul gas in the rotten swamps; the cry of heron or bittern, coming over, carried on the breeze, mingled with the wild clang of the fowl,—all had at times terrors and messages of ill omen peculiar to themselves.

One of my old friends, a born naturalist, captured one of the wild, fierce cats without injuring it. With gentleness and patient perseverance he succeeded in taming it at last, so that it purred on one's knee as contentedly as the tamest of animals. A true British tiger it was at first: three months passed before he dared give the creature liberty.

The wild cat has now been driven up to the rocks and hillsides of Scotland. There he was until lately in danger of extirpation; happily a new class of naturalists has arisen, such as prefer to watch the wild creatures and their habits without killing them. Even the wild cat may become fairly numerous again in its native haunts.

An old Surrey mole-catcher gave me his opinions

one day concerning that velvet-coated little animal who suffers so much at the hands of the agriculturist whom he befriends so much in various ways, even if he does spoil the appearance of a garden lawn here and there. The genial old soul allowed me to draw him out freely, and this is what he said:—

“Yes, I ketches ’em right enough; I has orders for to do it; but I ain’t bin at this ’ere sort o’ work all my days. ’Tis the way o’ the world; when your hair’s grey they say the steel’s gone out o’ ye, and only the iron is left.” (This is a common saying in our county.) “But I knows better; there’s many an old axe cuts better than a new un. I bin head-keeper, bless ye, in th’ old squire’s time, afore these ’ere changes cum. They ain’t got rid o’ me; I bides here; I might do wuss. But it do seem a most mortal let down, arter shootin’ an’ trappin’ all sort o’ things, fur a chap to cum down to mole-catchin’.”

“I should just like to have your opinion on this very subject; no one can have had better opportunities for seeing the matter all round. I should say you can speak as certainly as most as to the good and the harm they do.”

“ Ah, that’s just it, mister ; you’ve hit the nail on the head. There’s the good *and* the harm on ’em. They don’t kill game, that I knows ; but I tell ’ee what, them hills as they turns up in rough medders, just outside o’ covers, is the very best place fur the birds to peck and scratch about in—them an’ the emmet-hills. There’s lots o’ things gets killed that ain’t no harm to nothing. But you has orders to kill ’em, an’ if you don’t do it you gits the sack. That’s the head an’ the tail o’ my business, as I sees it. One time the farmers killed all the sparrers. They knows better now, most on ’em. As to moles, there was a pretty cry out if a molehill showed in a medder ; an’ on’y some of ’em understands what them little creaturs does for the land yet. Fur when there’s a bit o’ cold, low-lying medder-ground—most o’ that sort o’ land is damp-like—an’ the moles works it, their runs is like so many pipes laid down. Then they knocks them hills what the moles throws up over the medder ; an’ ’tis the very best top-dressing a bit o’ that sort o’ land can have, is that what the moles has brought up on top o’ the ground. There ain’t no sheep-feed like that what they gits off old molehills. An’ then see here, they

feeds desprit sharp when they goes at it. They eats all sorts o' things that bides both under an' above the ground. They ain't in one place, neither, all their lives. So 'pears to me that if they was to level the hills in a medder when the moles had left it, things would be all right like. There's lots o' things kills moles, beside us as ketches them, both above and below. I've set fur a mole, an' I've ketched a weasel, many a time. An' what a many different colours I've ketched: white uns, sandy an' white, black an' white, an' tortoise-shell, same as our old tabby at home.

“When they heaves, things watches for 'em; crows fetches 'em out on it. You ken see their flick like, when they moles gits on the top o' their hills, a-working. I've seen they buzzard-hawks grip 'em like lightning when I was keeping. Not o' late years I ain't, scarce nothin' don't dare to show itself now; if it do, it has to be killed somehow or other. Moles ain't the right things to get in gardens, that's sure; more, they ain't to get on a gentleman's lawn: these ain't the proper places for them. The fields an' medders is, you may depend on it, else what would they be there

for? No, I never knowed bad feed where moles worked; but I got my livin' to get, an' they moles has to be killed, so I does it. It makes it a bit awk'ard when they gets in they big grass-medders where they uses these here new mowin'-machines; but moles was about long afore they was. If you asks my 'pinion on it, mister, I says they does a lot more good than they does harm. Massy, oh! it does make thet mowin'-machine bump when there's many on 'em. But that's about all the harm they do; they don't thin the grass crop; where they has their hills the grass is oncommon thick.

“But you an' me knows that these 'ere ideas about things don't help a poor man to get his livin', an' if moles wasn't killed the mole-catching trade would go to ruin. There ain't such a heap on 'em arter all; one family on 'em—four, five, or even three—will chuck up a rare lot o' hills. They works like 'osses, and is as hungry as wolves, though they be but such little uns. I've seen 'em running about like rats in the daylight, lots o' times. They'll fight most 'desprit; some on 'em gets so artful there's no trappin' on 'em. Then you has to let 'em bide a bit. An' that's just about all as can be

said of the good an' the harm o' moles. But I say, mister, 'tis a rare drop down fur a chap, from a double barrel to a mole-spud an' they traps, an' I be gettin' in years now."

As a rule the mole takes the side of the road; but I have seen him sometimes, when he has taken it into his head to explore in the hedgerow, poking and twisting his nose about in all directions, now and again holding up his head to sniff, then running on as before.

If a nest of young robins but newly hatched should lie in his way, I would not give much for their little lives, or for those of the young of the willow-wrens. All small birds which build on the ground run the risk of losing their young by their becoming a prey to the mole.

I have picked him up at times cautiously by the back, for he bites in a most fierce manner, and wriggles about desperately in his attempts to escape.

Any one that is familiar, through much observation, with the mole's method of working, can tell from his movements when the weather is about to change.

He has feathered enemies amongst birds of prey that watch the hills as he throws them up, and grip him when they can. His coat is always beautiful; no matter when or where he may have been working, not a speck of dirt ever shows on it; although I have captured him in the act of heaving up wet clay soil, I have never seen him look anything but clean.

The general public know little about him beyond the fact that he lives underground and does damage—so they say—to the farmers, who have him caught in traps.

The hedgehog, urchin, or hedgepig, as he is variously called, has also had a bad name given to him without deserving it. Two accusations against him I will mention: sucking milk from cows and robbing orchards. Our poor little English porcupine is not reduced to such straits as were the Roman twins, and he is a less dangerous foe to orchards than the schoolboy is—though, like his great namesake, the pig, he will eat almost anything that comes in his way. I often renew my acquaintance with him, both in his waking and in his sleeping hours. All through the long winter months he sleeps, rolled up

in a ball, in dead leaves and grass, under some hedge-bank, or in the shelter of an old wall. A good time for watching his little "tricks and manners" is on warm nights in spring and summer. Many a time have I noted him, as he feeds by night, running hither and thither, poking about, scratching, and gently whining to himself; he has even come and examined my shoes, sniffing and whining as he did so, whilst I stood perfectly still, so as not to alarm the little fellow, in order that I might watch him the better. When I did move, he did not roll himself up in a ball; he simply jogged on his way.

The hedgehog must do a great amount of good, for this reason: insects and small reptiles form a part of his diet, so he grubs up a great many wild plants, some of which he eats; others he disturbs, that he may get at those insects which shelter at their roots. Sometimes, it is true, he visits a garden, where he will eat a few beans or nibble the tops of other things, but the harm done is very small. Fallen fruit he will eat, when he can get it—and why not? It would probably otherwise lie and rot. Yet for these little crimes he is cruelly trapped. When this happens he justifies his name, and the poor little

creature squeaks most pitifully. He is on the black list of the gamekeeper, who shows him no mercy at all. For my part I am very favourably disposed towards him; he is, on the whole, a benefactor to man, if a prickly one. A quaint-looking little animal he is, too, and one that never puts himself in the way if he can help it.

It is a well-known fact that those insects which are most injurious to man's labours in the garden and the field do their work at night, including grubs, larvæ, and the rest. Now small reptiles feed on insects, as a rule, so that the hedgehog through their means does double duty, for he lives on both. It is small wonder if he is caught in a trap when it is set with some dainty morsel. If dog or cat wandered where he does in search of food, they would get caught too with the same bait. However, it is only when he wanders near houses and gardens that he gets into trouble; away from them he can live unmolested, and bring up his family in the snugest home he can make for them.

When the little urchins make their first appearance in the world, they are very different from their parents in appearance; their spines resemble hair,

but these very soon harden, and they begin to look like their elders. There is not the least danger of the hedgehogs being exterminated at present, in spite of traditional superstition which has handed down his name in connection with the bat, the toad, and the owl, all which inoffensive creatures are still in ill odour, although the spread of literature and better education has done much to set the public right as to the true use and position of these. All the creatures that come out by night, though they do man good services by their destruction of his worst enemies, are looked upon by the rustic population as uncanny.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN THE NIGHT FALLS.

“A SAFE passage over the bar for all craft coming home!” was my outspoken prayer as I stood on the beach within half a mile of the lighthouse, which was flashing its lights over the waters.

The latter part of the day had closed in dirty, to use the words of the old sea-dogs who were pacing the shingle. A sea-fog had been partly broken up by a breeze. This had died away, gone somewhere else, they reckoned, and great banks of fog had settled about the bar. The currents were most dangerous ones, and when they meet from opposite directions, the boil-up and whirl of the waters is terribly bad under ordinary circumstances, but far worse when the weather is foul.

A confused piping, wailing, screaming, and howling can be heard at times, faint, certainly, yet quite distinguishable. These are the voices of the fowl on the sand-bar, complaining, for they know that before long they will have to leave their resting-place. One solitary black-backed gull shows for a minute or so, his wings slanted, for there is a capful of wind up where he floats along. He has gone again to show himself elsewhere overhead, just to let the world know that Neptune's white sea-horses will leap the bar before long.

Those who have from sheer necessity studied the ways of the birds that live on the waters round the coast and on the shores, never question the signs the birds give them, and they at once make preparations, so far as it may be in their power, to avert coming disaster.

The fog masses again, and floats in towards the shore. The lighthouse looms through it for a time, then we only see the lights. A muttering growl comes over the sea and dies down as it passes over the beach and sea-wall, to lose itself in the flats beyond.

Then comes a rush of wind, and all is still. The

fog rolls away from the lighthouse, is swept from the sand-bar, and we see far out and away a long low streak, not of light, but of a lighter colour than the clouds above it. This widens, the darker parts being broken up.

There are one or two fierce sweeps of wind that seem to smite you, and again to bounce away, and then it blows inshore.

All the fog has gone, blown into rags and tatters by the wind. Night is not over us yet, but darkness is coming on apace, and the tide coming in,—a fierce high wintry tide. We may stay on the rocks by the lighthouse, for some old salts are gathered there discussing the chances of a fishing-smack that they have made out with their long glasses, and which is making port all right. She is the largest craft of that kind in the place; more than that, she has been out deep-sea fishing, and is now homeward bound with her catch. Better seaman never grasped tiller than the Saucy Jane's owner; but things go all askew at times in the most unexpected manner, and with startling rapidity.

Some that have not had these things brought home to them are very apt to prose about the way

in which such disasters could have been averted. If they had been placed in the same fix, they would certainly never have come back at all.

The white horses are taking their preparatory canters before they leap; soon indeed they leap in real earnest. They are coming now, a fierce white line of them; they leap and clear, for a boiling mass of foam rushes over the bar. A dark cloud rises, backs, and vanishes. In this dim light we can make out that it is the fowl rising, because they can stay there no longer.

High water is over the bar, and a gale blowing,—not a storm, but quite enough to make things lively for those outside the bar. If the Saucy Jane is going to make the passage she must do it soon, before darkness falls. She is going to try it: we know within a little where the passage runs that she will take, for deep cuts and channels run through there. Now she makes for it; but something is not quite right, for she swings round and out again. She means it next time. At it she comes, her bows smothered in foam. She is over the bar in safety; but the old sea-dogs ashore say, as they close their glasses, that her first attempt was a very close shave.

Hearing them say that the big flat must be covered this tide, also that the moon will show out between ten and eleven, we go home for a rest. Several miles of heavy walking over shingle will cause you to think a rest necessary. But I was well repaid for turning out at the time mentioned, when the moon was up, with one of the shore-shooters as a guide. It was not indeed safe when the large flat was under water to go alone, even if you knew the locality fairly well.

It was not a bright moonlight night, for huge clouds passed swiftly over the moon, leaving a bright light for a time, to be obscured again by the clouds that followed on.

Hundreds of places can be found now where, from some very natural causes, the tide works in its own fashion. Salt-water safety-valves these are when the sea is in a state of high pressure.

My companion told me that the tide only forced its way up and over these bitter slimy saltings, for it was not used even for grazing purposes very often. Fowl could be found there in the season; but even in the best of times it was dangerous to go in pursuit of them, for cuts, drains, dykes, and main

channels ran all through it. It was not the least use as punting water, but yet excellent water for fowl.

I am not likely to forget that sight: more than once I had seen it partly covered, great splashes showing in all directions as the rise or fall in the surface came. Now it was a vast lake of salt water, half a mile wide, and a mile and a half in length; and when the moon was clear it showed like a plain of silver, bounded on one side by the sea-wall, on the other by the higher grounds. One or two scattered hamlets close to the edge of the flat rose just out of highest tide-mark, such as this was. As I looked at the lights from their windows, which were reflected in the water, they appeared to rise directly from it.

So great was the force of water at the mouth of this flat inlet that you could see it all alive with waves in the centre: even at the edge, if you placed your hand in it, you could feel the throb of the water. Dark masses showed in the centre when the moon rays fell direct: they rose up and down, showing plainly as dark objects, and then were lost again. These were bunches of fowl, quite out of

gunshot, bobbing about, heads to wind, in the lap of the tide.

It would not be of the least use for punts to drift up with the tide here, even if punts could be brought to launch; and to attempt it from open water would be a suicidal movement, for no punt could live. So there the birds are in thousands for the time being, floating in perfect security, out of gunshot.

“Will they drift out with the ebb?” I ask my companion.

“Drift out!—devil a bit of it! I only wish they would. Was you on the beech when they raised from the sand-bar?”

“Yes. Did the fowl come here straight?”

“No; they had sheered off somewhere, and only dropped down when the flats got well under water.

“You’ll see the lot leave directly; at least you’ll hear ’em, for the tide is just on the ebb turn. It’s no use going to the mouth of the ma’sh,—the tide goes out like a mill-sluice to meet the water on the bar. Just you come along of me and hear the roar and the hiss-hiss of it all.”

There is nothing more to see here; they will rise presently and fly in two or three lots out to the bar. It will be a row then, the water and the fowl together. We could shoot one or two, but what use would it be? only powder and shot wasted; for if they dropped dead they would only spin away like corks.

“Hear they come—hark to ’em! This lot’s geese: we can’t see ’em all, but we can hear; they cry like a lot of beagles. Just listen! Ain’t them yelpers goin’ it? Here comes a worse lot, shrieking and hollering ready to split their throats. Hear ’em swish on; curlews all that lot. Here come the wigeon, there go the ducks. Now listen to the roar and swish of the tide goin’ out. Where would a man, or twenty men be, if they got in that with a boat?”

Only tattered wrecks of humanity, drifting out into the night.

Here is a hollow under the hill—only one of hollows innumerable to be found there—where farms and cottages nestle in the trees at the foot of the slope. Rain has fallen in gentle April showers, just as we look for it to fall when April

is closely nearing May. The rain has ceased for some time, and the sun, now getting low, has dried the drops from the trees and herbage. From one orchard, well stocked with fine old fruit-trees, the wryneck shouts out his cry of peet, peet; he puts on full power now, as he hunts for his supper on the moss-covered trunks and branches of the fruit-trees. From some of the elms near the house a couple of blackbirds flute out their evening song. Light vapours rise from the hollow and creep up the hill-side. A few tinkles from the sheep-bells fall on the ear; the click and clank of the handle of the well-winch as the bucket—the moss-covered bucket—goes down, getting slower and slower, as the palm of the hand is pressed under the uncoiling well-rope. The final splash of the bucket, and the rattle of the chain as it sinks and fills; then the slow cle-unk, cle-unk, clunk! as the bucket is wound up, the landing of it on the well-curb, the rattle of the chain once more, and the dull splash from some of the tossing water in the well again. The scraping of the heavy boots on the rustic scraper, and the final touches in wiping them on the huge broom without a handle, close to the door. All these sounds tell what is

going on just as well as if you saw the various actions performed, so very quiet is the place and its surroundings.

Quiet as the place is, we must not linger here—we must travel before night falls; so we leave the farm behind us, and a few plovers spring up and settle again as we pass by. One figure stealing along in the gloaming does not alarm them much.

Presently a low stile, leading from the fields to the uplands, offers a very inviting seat for a time. So little is this path used that by the hedge-growth on either side—young oak-shoots from where trees have been felled—it is completely bowered over, making a capital place for observation. We do not smoke, so that not the least taint is in the air, and we sit quite still. No shuffling or changing about; we can keep still for any length of time when on the hunt, although we make up for it by restless activity at all other times. I wish to see how the hares are conducting themselves this spring-time. “As mad as a March hare,” or “As mad as a hatter,” are very well-known sayings. I know little about the saneness of the hatter, but I can state this, that the supposed aberration of mind that the hare is

credited with at certain seasons has not the least foundation; in fact, he is a very wide-awake individual, as he well needs to be. As we sit on the bough of a tree that does duty for top-rail, two hares slip by on one side of us: they have come down from the uplands to feed in the fields. Those white dots moving so rapidly are the scuts of rabbits showing, as they chase each other close to the hedge-side; for the rabbit never ventures far from his burrows to feed: he is very quick for a short run, and makes the most of it to reach his home. With the hare it is different: speed serves his turn, enduring speed, and it serves him well. In sporting terms we ought to have said serves her; for no matter what the sex may be, Puss is the comprehensive name for the hare.

There they are in front of us, four of them feeding; in the twilight, glasses serve as at any other time. We can see all their movements at this short distance. Their long mobile ears are playing and working in all directions,—sometimes erect, at others held apart, then brought forward as if feeling for some sound or other, then laid down close. If the hare wishes to look round or to give its

attention to any sound it may have noticed particularly, it half raises itself, the forefeet being off the ground and half bent to the breast: then is the time to see the play of the ears.

Other creatures watch the movements of the hares' ears when feeding in the same field with them; partridges in particular do, and also the pheasants. One covey, I remember, early one autumn, regulated their movements to a very great extent by these furred signal-posts—the ears of the hares—when feeding: if they saw these up, all was right; if not, well, they slipped forward towards where the creatures were squatted.

As they are in couples now, they do not notice their long-legged neighbours so much; they are simply calling to each other.

We have only to show ourselves, then four shadows flit over the field and we are alone. Up the hill we go, out on the downs; here it is open. Rabbits rush from grass-clumps as we pass, to stop again only a few yards away. Then we hear something give a short sharp cry; it would have been longer, only the creature that stopped the cry knew how to do it quickly. The fox bites hard and

sharp. Some rabbit has got in Reynard's way, and has suffered for it. A few badgers are close by, but there is not the least chance of falling in with them; for if they get our wind or hear our footfall, they will rush to their cave-dwellings at once. One guardian of game destroyed a colony of them, but he kept very quiet over the affair, for fear his employer might not have been of the same mind as himself in the matter. That lot would have put a considerable amount of money in his pocket, if he had sold them for taxidermical purposes; but this he could hardly venture to do, so he buried the lot. I failed to see where the profit came in, with all his trouble of capturing at different times; and all the reason he could give, when it was safe for him to speak about it, was this: "He did not know that they did any harm, only they rooted about a bit."

"So do pigs when they range the woods for mast," was my rejoinder; "but no one kills 'snorks'—there would be heavy damages to pay if they did."

The fox, far more destructive than his neighbour, must be saved at any risk or cost. Why not extend

grace of sanctuary to that Friar of Orders Grey, the badger?

Hoarse cries over our head cause us to look up. They proceed from a couple of herons, low down, that have suddenly sighted us: they are passing on direct for some large ponds on common lands, three miles away. Often have I seen them going and coming home from fishing over the hills.

It is night, a clear, dark, still night,—one of those when you can see things; for various degrees of darkness exist. On some nights that are yet by no means dark, you are unable to see much before your face. This may seem a little strange, but many will know what I mean.

The owls hoot: if they could be seen, no doubt it would be sitting on the top of some larch, and with their throats puffed out like pouter pigeons.

What a number of creatures begin to move about when the night falls! The sound of their movements over the dead leaves so plentifully scattered under the trees and bushes betray some of them. That trotting rustle like a tiny pig, with frequent pauses, comes from the hedgehog; so does that faint whine. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick! comes

from some mice, then you hear a scramble; after that short sharp bounds, and a short eager cry. It is the weasel in full pursuit of Oberon's long-tailed cattle, the wood-mice. They will climb up the stem and out on the branches to get out of the way of their determined little enemy; but it will not be much use, for the weasel and the stoat are as much at home in the trees as cats are.

The hooting has ceased, and from the larches two birds sail out over the open space. It will be a bad job for young rabbit, mouse, or frog if that pair get sight of it, for one or other will be sure to have it. In this way one creature keeps within due limits the inordinate increase of another. If I had my wish, the beautiful and most useful birds should not be killed at all, formed as they are to act the part of rural police when the night falls.

Midsummer eve finds us by the side of a large mere or lake,—either name would be applicable to it. The evening is a glorious one; the sun has gone down, leaving an after-glow of the richest saffron and purple. From the water's edge to the chapel-crowned hill, dedicated in past times to a patron saint, all is in the richest grey shadow—

the whole mirrored in the lake below. Flags and giant reed-mace, or bulrushes, fringe it round, in some instances spreading out for some distance from the shore into the water: there is not now a breath of air to move the tip of a reed-tassel. Swallows dip and make large circles of light, and large trout rise, causing smaller circles. All is quiet, except for the chattering of sedge-warblers. Other birds are about, aquatic fowl, but they have left the water to feed in some distant water-meadows, where their food will be of a more solid nature. In the daytime they use the mere for safety; at night they leave it to feed elsewhere.

The feeding-stream discharges a vast quantity of water into it, passing out at the other end of the lake, to finally empty itself into the river, four miles away. A grand trout-stream this is, running in no small volume, and at a rapid rate, through some of the finest woodland meadows in England; and best of all, there are plenty of fine trout in that stream—genuine, lusty, brown brook-trout, with crimson spots.

We follow the track under the hill, go through some fir-woods, and rise again. It matters not

where we go, for we are out for the night,—if this can be called night, when really there is but a short interval of darkness, just before the dawn. How quiet it all is! Where some sweet-scented wild tangle is blooming, more than once we have caught the hum of hawk-moths' wings. Those who have heard this sound in their earlier years never forget it: first impressions are generally lasting ones. Up we go!—now we are on a sandy road; after a time we reach the heath, or we might say two large heaths, separated only in their names. The white tracks of silver sand show out like lines among the short heather. At one time when I visited it the heather was breast-high; recent fires have destroyed that ancient growth. It is thick enough, however, to suit our purpose, so we stretch ourselves on it, and as we rest we think of the past, when Roman legions had a camp there, a stationary one; also of a lost friend who explored there, much to his own satisfaction, if not to that of other people. The night-hawks, fern-owls, or heave-jars sweep over us, and the bats almost touch us with their leathery wings; yet this we heed but little, for we are busy thinking about other things in the

past and the present. History repeats itself. A dark mound on the hill we have left behind, with its lake sleeping at the foot of it, is a chapel still used for the worship of God. As I raise myself on my elbow, not two stones' throw away, looms up another large building, all around it quiet as the grave. It has been built of late years for God's worship, and to His glory, by those of the same faith as the men who centuries ago built that chapel on the hill-top. As I ponder, the short darkness of a midsummer's night falls over all.

This silence of the fields when night falls is peculiar to wooded southern counties,—for this reason, the fields and grazing-grounds have been won from the woods and moors in past times. The fields are surrounded by them now; pathways run over the moors, heaths, and through the woodlands, all of them leading to large areas of cultivation. From there they go branching off in all directions to wild tracts and more cultivated grounds. I can assure my readers that I could take them from one county into another without having to cross main roads very often. This is the reason why we are able to see so much without going far

from home; and that is ever best that lies nearest to one's dwelling-place.

I have at times pointed out things to people vastly interested—at least they said they were so—in all matters concerning rural life. I have even lent them my glasses to examine what I had pointed out with the naked eye; but no, they could not see anything special. And yet some of them passed as naturalists!

Shelter-grounds and feeding-grounds are two very different matters: any creature furred or feathered may have its haunt in a certain place, but it may go a mile or miles away to feed. Some of the raptores drop their quarry, if it is large, in the nesting season when their young clamour so, out of sheer weariness, returning to it afterwards to break it up and feed their young with it piecemeal.

The fox carries his prey off by instalments. For instance, he will kill four or five fowls or ducks; he is not particular—first come, first killed. One at a time he carries them off and conceals them; as a rule, they are buried—it is certainly only a slight burial at times. Then he takes the last

bird, if he has time and he is not detected, in his mouth, and trots off with it, just as a retriever would carry a pheasant, clear off the ground and in front of him.

If the fox carried his prey as we have seen him represented — with a duck, for instance, gripped just below the head, a part of the duck's neck being twisted round his own, and the body hanging over on the other side of his foreleg — how long would he go before he was choked? If not choked, how long would he loup along before that duck flew off at an angle of some degree — we will not be particular on that point — and hit him on the side of the head? I fancy he would use unparliamentary language — fox language of the most reprehensible nature — when he dropped that duck before his vixen lady. But he does not do anything of the kind, although imaginative painters have represented him in that attitude.

When the pheasant trees for the night, and the blackbird has settled like a dark ball in the hedgerows, there is little to be seen or heard in the fields. In the grass-meadows you may, as you pass through, listen to the munch, munch, munch

of the cows chewing their cud as they rest on the grass, or the snort and blow of the horses feeding; but these are the only sounds likely to be heard. If any one passes through meadows in the dark, let him avoid, if possible, stumbling over horned cattle. One is apt to rise in a very wild manner, and then the others take alarm and come pounding and cavoorting round in an ungainly but at the same time demonstrative fashion. One night, after a slight mishap of this kind, I had to clear out as quickly as possible.

It will be the turn of the night shortly. Nothing but the starlit sky above, and the woods and fields around the farms, showing darker than the trees, because no light can pass through them. This is considered the most critical time by all woodland watchers of the sick: they say—I have heard them say it often in past days—that if they can “wrestle with the powers o’ night an’ mornin’, they will go another turn, to pass away when the next night falls.”

We are back once more to within hearing of the rush of the tide,—we are surrounded by it, and it is dead winter, the whole island covered

with deep snow, frozen hard on the surface. That is a mercy, for it can be walked over. It is a glittering plain in the daytime, a grey ghost-like sheet at night covering all.

For six weeks has this lasted; and it looks, so far as sky and bird signs go, as if it would last for as many more. If ever there was a case of "between the devil and the deep sea," as they phrase it, this is one. Snowed-up completely on the marsh-flats, waist-deep, five miles from the nearest place where the folks could get a loaf of bread, no one but those who have experienced such matters can tell what this means,—being simply cut off for a time from the most common necessities of life and from the outside world.

If those calm-faced grey-eyed women—the wives of the marsh-dwellers I used to know—had not already had to wrestle with and overcome many of the serious exigencies of daily life, more than one mother and her new-born child would have perished; for at that time no medical aid could reach them.

Broad dykes, and still wider lagoons, in some instances far deeper in mud than they were in

water, lay hidden under that white pall. Some we know forced the passage at the ferry, a good half mile in width, encumbered with masses of floating grinding ice. The people from the nearest fishing hamlet, six miles away, managed to get half-way down and meet those that had crossed in the skiffs. "Give us this day our daily bread" was a supplication then of the most earnest significance.

I have seen the heron stand by a warm spring in the marsh, not larger than a small circular table-top, looking the very picture of hopeless famished misery,—his eyes nearly closed, his bill buried in the breast-feathers, and his shoulders humped up, looking as if the next blast of biting wind would blow him over, dead.

The great hares limped to the cattle-sheds and fed on the fodder for the cattle; many a time have the lookers seen them crouched, with ears along their shoulders, almost under the cattle's feet.

Hungry wild geese cried out their wild notes as they passed over; and at night those who were forced to go out to tend the stock in their reed-thatched shelters saw and heard the swans as they

passed overhead—lines of large grey forms, trumpeting and calling loudly, and the rushing swish, swish of their mighty wings. These sights and sounds for the dwellers in the snow-covered and ice-bound marshes had deep meanings. They had been sorely tried, but their cup, it might be, was not filled yet, they said. Later on there were men, women, and children down with ague and fever, battling against these foes with stout hearts, as best they could, without medical aid. All this I know is a thing of the past, but it is not yet far removed from us. Many a one that I knew well there passed away, before his time, to the better land, at nightfall.

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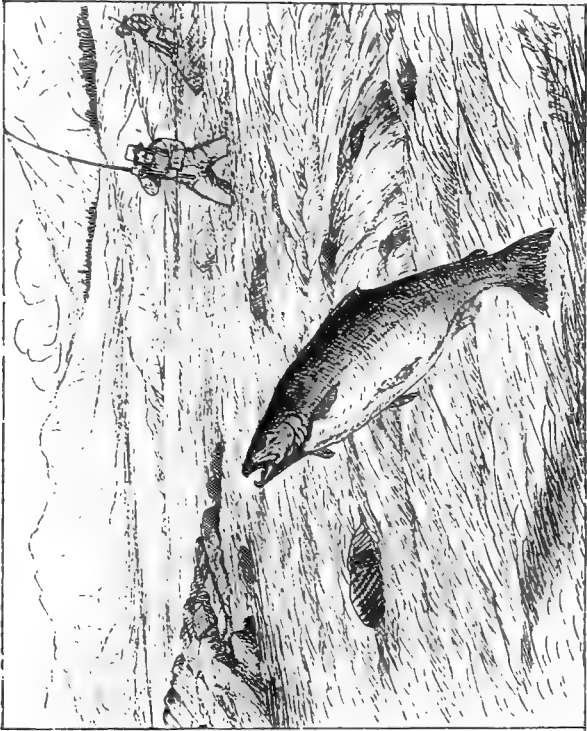
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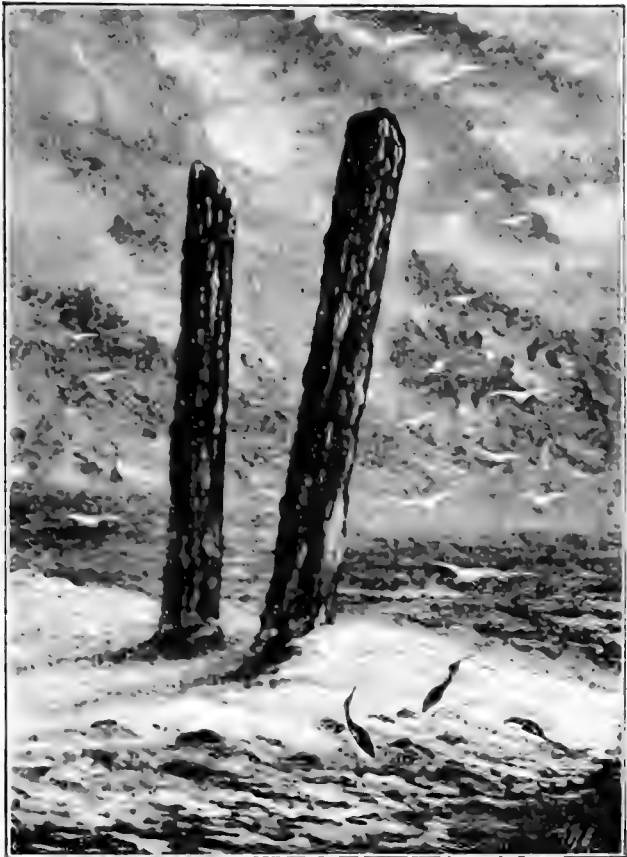
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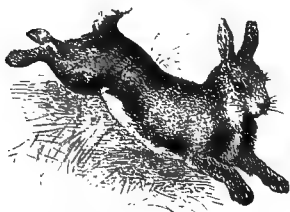
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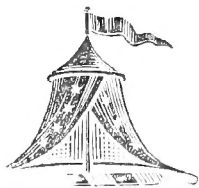
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