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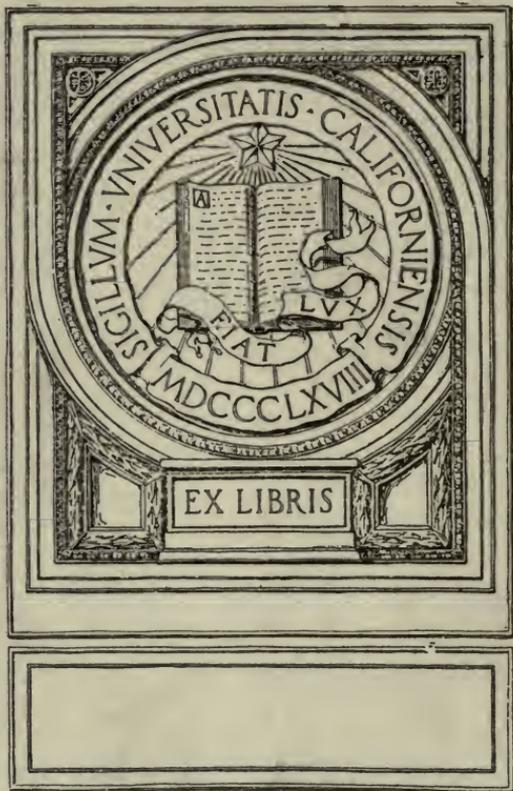
MELTON AND HOMESP



M. M. B. DURHAM (Marshall)
AND
R. J. RICHARDSON

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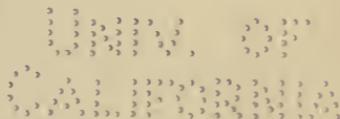
THE HUNTER'S MOON

MELTON AND HOMESPUN

*NATURE AND SPORT IN PROSE
AND VERSE*

BY
J. M. M. B. DURHAM ("MARSHMAN")
AND
R. J. RICHARDSON

ILLUSTRATED BY R. J. RICHARDSON



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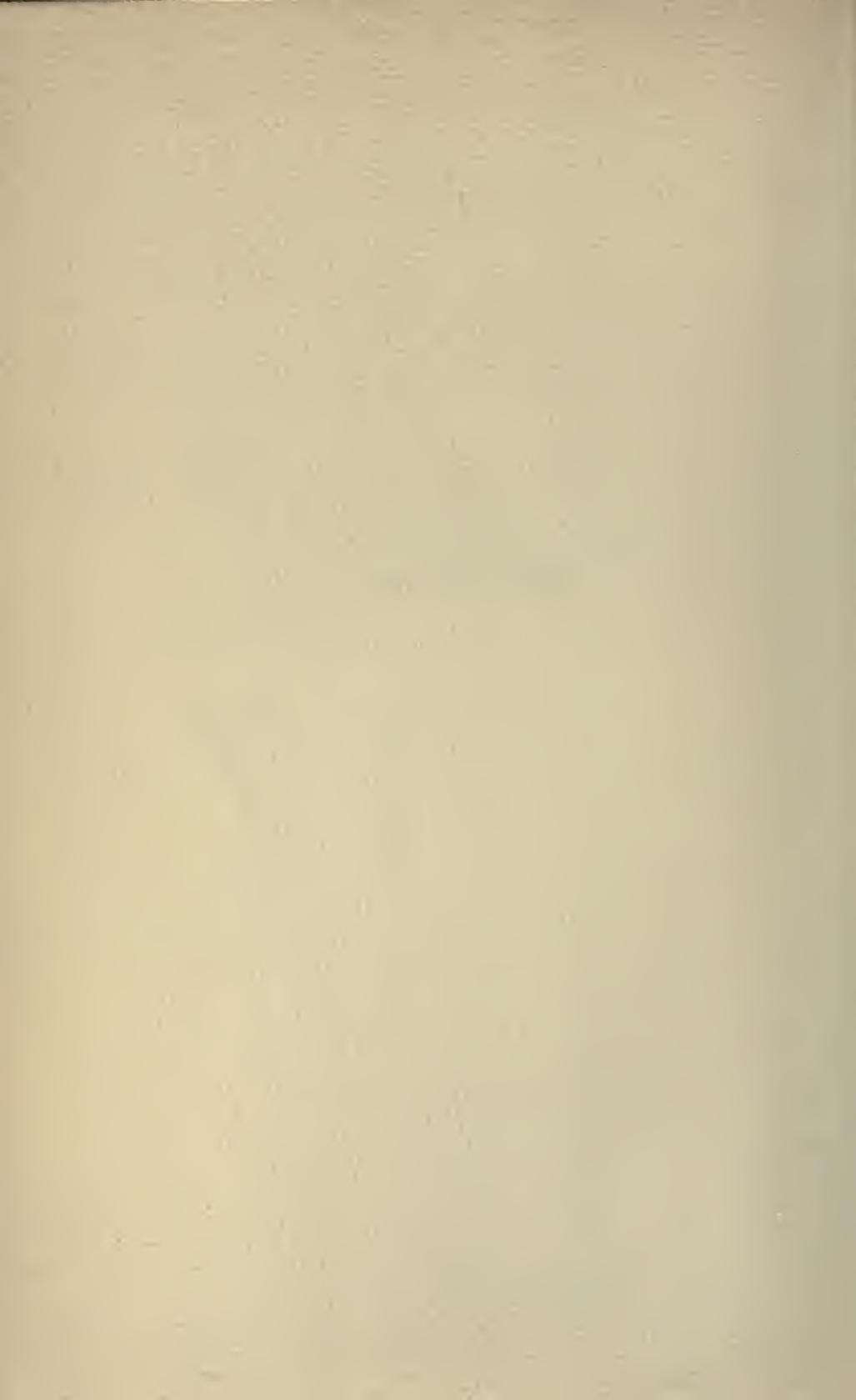
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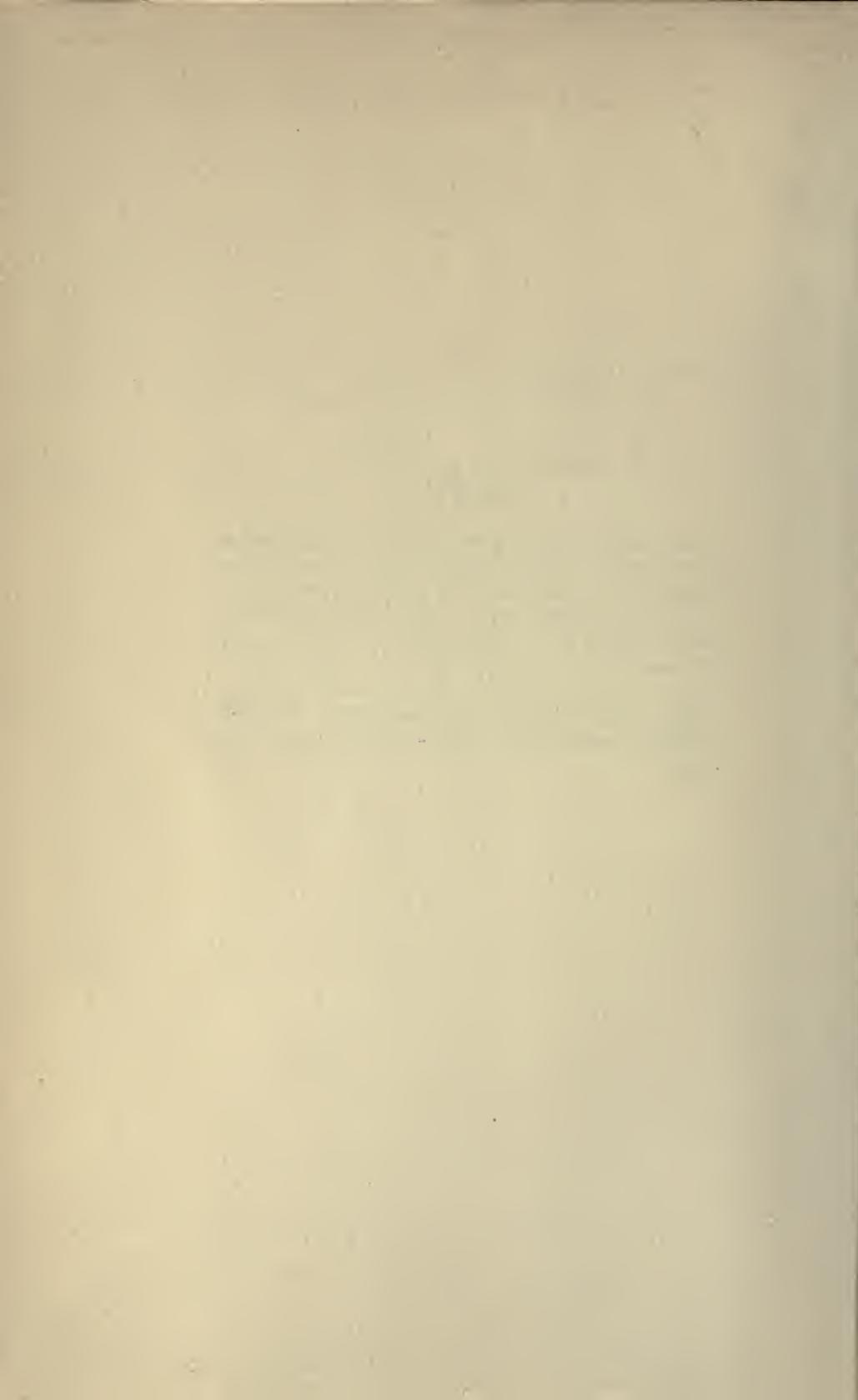
TO
EDITH DURHAM

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NOTE

THE joint authors of this book beg to acknowledge the courtesy of the proprietors of the undermentioned publications for permission to reprint many of the sketches and verses contained herein :—*The Field, Punch, Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, Baily's Sporting Magazine, Fores's Sporting Notes and Sketches, Badminton Magazine, Country Life, The Shooting Times, Fishing Gazette, Scottish Field, South Africa, The Globe, Evening Standard, Daily Mail, The Tatler, and Town Topics.*



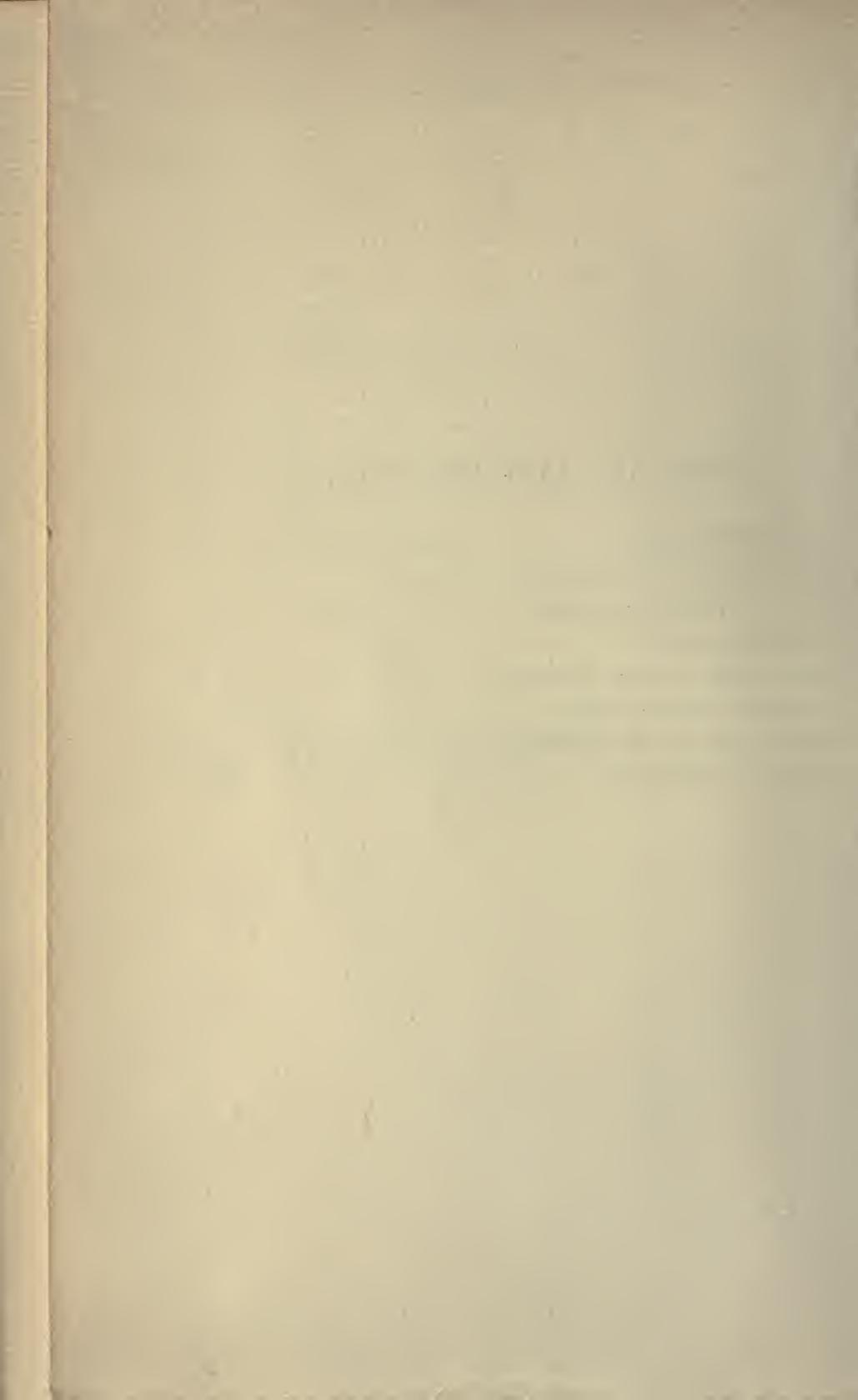
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MELTON AND HOMESPUN

THE HAUNTED HUNT

THE smoking-room of the Haycester and County Club looked cheerful enough in the firelight which was slowly getting the better of the dreary winter's day, and the white-haired man lay back in his chair, and, stretching out his slight, neatly-gaitered legs to the blaze, pulled thoughtfully at his cigar.

"As you all probably know," he said at length, "Anthony Nunn took the hounds close on fifty years ago, and hunted them himself for eleven seasons until his death."

He paused with a grim, short laugh.

"'Until,' did I say? Well, be that as it may, it is thirty-nine years since Anthony Nunn met with his death, and the Haycester lost the keenest huntsman that ever cheered a hound. The man was born to hunt hounds, he lived to hunt hounds, he died hunting hounds—and then came that ghastly day which I can never recall without a shudder.

"He was too keen; he thought of nothing but the hounds from year's end to year's end. In fact, whether he was always so, or whether it grew upon him, there is not a shadow of doubt that at the last he was a monomaniac on the subject of fox-hunting.

“ He always killed a May fox ; and there were strange tales about his having been seen cub-hunting by himself with a few couple of hounds in out-of-the-way parts of the country before the end of June. Of course he always denied it, and said that he was merely exercising the hounds ; but, knowing the man, I can well believe that rumour, for once, was no liar. It was just the sort of thing he would do. Indeed, as he himself said, only lack of sufficient means prevented him from hunting seven days a week.

“ He was very far from being an ideal Master of Hounds. He never considered the field in the least ; and time and time again he slipped out of cover without so much as a touch on the horn, leaving the entire field, and sometimes even the whips, too, behind. It was not selfishness ; only that in the hunting field he was practically a hound himself.

“ Many considered him bloodthirsty ; and certainly he would go to extraordinary lengths to kill his fox, often digging him out of what had seemed the most impregnable places at all hours of the night. The more trouble a fox gave him, the more bent on killing him he became ; and if he and his hounds were baffled he used to get beside himself with rage. With him, hunting was not a sport, it was an obsession.

“ Fortunately the fox supply in the Haycester country has always been exceptionally good, and fortunately they take a good deal of killing ; he would have well-nigh exhausted most countries in a very short time. As it was the show of foxes in some of the more open parts was not what it should have been for several years after Nunn's *régime*.

“ He was no society man. He cut an awkward little figure on foot, with his bandy legs and wizened, scowling face like a monkey’s. He was a bachelor, and lived by himself in the huntsman’s cottage at the kennels, acting as his own kennel-huntsman. He never entertained, and rarely went out anywhere. Away from the hounds he was impossible, curt and morose almost to rudeness; but the Haycester people forgave him all his faults for the sake of the sport he showed.

“ The way Anthony Nunn hunted hounds was Fine Art: to watch and listen to him was the most exquisite pleasure I have ever enjoyed. He had a voice like a bell, and the cleverness of the fox himself. I verily believe that people preferred the bad-scenting days to the good in his time, it was such a delight to watch him help hounds. The sheer inspiration of some of his casts was enough to take away one’s breath.

“ With the hounds he was on the best of terms, and going to cover or returning home used to talk to them as if they were human beings, keeping up a continual prattle, after this style: ‘ Shall we find a fox in Coney Rough, my lads, think ye? Old Challenger there thinks not. Didn’t find there last time, says Challenger.—And which of you boys is going to cut out old Marksman to-day? You, Primate? Primate thinks he’ll have a try.—Well, Sympathy, are you going to let us hear your voice to-day, Sympathy? You and I will have to part if you don’t find your voice, you know, Sympathy;’—and so on, addressing not a word to any of the field; and even in answer to a question only growling a monosyllable over his shoulder. To ride over hounds would have been as much as any one’s life was worth. I once saw him

thrash a man, whose horse had kicked a hound, till he had to be dragged off him. Although he looked such a shrivelled up little fellow, Nunn could box like Nat Langham and hit like a kicking horse.

“ There was one hound in particular that was the apple of his eye ; an ugly hare-pied brute called Marksman, in his eighth season and still running to head when Nunn’s death took place. This hound was so savage that none of the men at the kennels dared handle him, but with Nunn he was as gentle as a lamb. He was a wonderful working hound with a curious deep voice, and a marvel at holding a cold line. We used to say that Nunn’s ‘ For-ard to Marksman ! ’ was as good as a view-hallo, and that the two were sufficient to account for any fox. Anthony Nunn and the Haycester Marksman were renowned all over England.

“ I have dwelt somewhat on Nunn’s peculiarities because, to my mind, when it is realised what manner of man he was, the experiences which I am about to relate become so much more credible. Looking back with a calm mind, the whole thing seems to me in perfect accord.

“ I have told you how the killing of his fox was the be-all and end-all with him, how he looked upon the hunted fox as his natural and most deadly enemy, and how he would rage if Reynard managed to save his brush. To lose a fox affected him like a mortal insult, and he would brood over it until he was satisfied that he had brought the offender to book.

“ That last fox was a typical instance. Twelve days before Nunn’s death the hounds met at Yewbarrow Mill, then as now in the Monday country. We found a fox

in Canonby Whin, and he broke close to where I was standing. He was good to know, that fox, and I could have sworn to him again among hundreds: a great raking, grey dog-fox, with most of his brush missing. Details of the run are immaterial; it is enough to tell you that after a clinker of eighty minutes we lost him the other side of Hareham, and, try as he might, Anthony Nunn with all his craft was beaten. Of course it upset him as usual, and he took hounds home there and then.

“No one acquainted with Nunn’s idiosyncrasies was surprised when the following Monday’s meet was changed from Wingley to Yewbarrow Mill. Again we found the big grey fox in Canonby Whin; and he gave us an even better run than before: by Hareham, Owland Banks, and Buckfield; over Priestland Park and Shepley Down; past Hindholt to Windleby, where, after two hours and thirty minutes, we lost him again. This time Nunn’s fury was a sight to behold. He raved and cursed, and screamed out, ‘*I’ll kill that — bobtail if I have to jump the gates of Hell to do it!*’ He tried forward and back, round and round, every place that could possibly hold a fox. Long after the last remnant of the field had gone home he was at it, until pitch darkness forced him to give it up.

“Eccentric as we thought him, no one was prepared for his next move. The next day messengers and telegrams were flying about the country to say that Wednesday’s meet was abandoned, and that hounds would meet next on Friday at Yewbarrow Mill *at 9 a.m.* The telegrams bore the cryptic addition, ‘*Cub-hunting.*’

“Naturally the people, especially those on the Wednesday and Friday sides, were furious, and the weight of

their wrath fell on the Secretary, a mild person, very much in awe of Nunn, who could throw no light on the enigma. Many indignation meetings were held, and feeling ran so high that the Mastership of the Haycester Hounds would certainly have become vacant at the end of the season, even had the event not been precipitated as it was.

“ Under the circumstances a very small field turned out at Yewbarrow Mill on the Friday. There were not half a dozen of us, besides the remarkable cavalcade that arrived with hounds. Nunn had with him not only the whippers-in and second horseman, but every man and boy in any way connected with the kennels; all his own and the hunt servants’ horses were out, ridden by stablemen, feeders, and what not; and he had brought every hound that had a leg to stand on: dogs and bitches, forty-seven couple in all.

“ Nunn himself looked as if he had been out of bed for a week; and we heard afterwards that, having spent all the preceding days in destroying every earth and stopping every place where the fox could get in between Canonby Whin and Ridgeweather Hill, he had been out with the earthstopper the night before the meet, had gone carefully over all his work again to make sure that it was intact, and had then returned to Canonby Whin, watched the grey fox out, and made all safe behind him.

“ He never even stopped his horse at the meet, ignored our salutations, and went straight on to cover.

“ When we got to the Whin he turned round and addressed us; and then we understood the meaning of the strange telegram and of his miscellaneous following.



TO VIEW
AT THE
COURT HOUSE

[To face p. 7]
"THE HORSE TURNED A COMPLETE SOMERSAULT"

'Get all round it,' he said, 'and hold him up like a cub.' I think it had dawned upon all of us by this time that the man was insane, so, thinking it best to humour him, we spread ourselves out round the Whin.

"However, you know what a wild, stragglng place it is, even now; and we were not nearly numerous enough to invest every corner of it, especially with a bold, enterprising customer like the grey fox inside. And sure enough, hounds were barely in when he broke at the far end and went away like a greyhound.

"Nunn came tearing out to the hallo, black in the face with passion, and blowing the gone-away note as if he would burst his lips. The forty-seven couple swept out like a great breaking wave and opened on the line with a crash of music that I have never heard the like of. I could hear old Marksman throwing his tongue like an organ above them all, and Nunn's beautiful voice blaspheming and cheering them on.

"I can shut my eyes and think I see him now, with his eyes glaring out of his ape face with madness. Driving his horse along and 'fording' to the hounds, he never seemed to realise that there was a bank just in front of him, and was within two strides of it when he awoke to his danger. He tried to collect his horse, but the impetus was too great; the horse went into it like a shot from a gun, turned a complete somersault, and came down on the other side with a thud that could have been heard fields away. When we got over, there were two things to be done at once: to send for a gun to finish the horse, and the whips after the hounds to stop them if possible. One look at Nunn as we turned him over was enough. The full weight of the horse must have come on his head

with tremendous force, smashing his skull and driving his face into the ground.

“ It was the middle of January when Nunn was killed ; and a fortnight after the funeral we hunted again, the first whip carrying the horn, under a temporary committee, for a couple of months.

“ Next season Furlong, from the Burstover, took the mastership, bringing his own whips and engaging a professional huntsman. This huntsman was one of the slow, ‘ try-back,’ family-coachman sort, and although, thanks to a succession of good-scenting days in the early part of the season, we had fair sport, the proceedings seemed very dull after Nunn’s brilliance.

“ Furlong brought a few hounds of his own, but took over the greater part of Nunn’s pack, and even these seemed affected by the changed spirit of things. Old Marksman in particular was not like the same animal ; from being the oracle of the pack he became a mute, listless shirker ; so markedly so that Furlong talked of putting him down, and the huntsman remarked with a grin, ‘ So this is the famous Marksman ! ’

“ The hounds had not been in Canonby Whin at all that season until one day late in December, nearly a year after Nunn’s death, when they met at the ‘ Black Bull,’ which, as you know, is a very few miles from there. There was no scent in the morning, and we had done nothing but potter about until we came to the Whin in the afternoon. There I got on to my second horse, a brown, five-year-old thoroughbred called Pride of Tyrone, which I had bought out of Ireland for a longer price than I could really afford, but which I confidently expected him to recover with interest as a steeplechaser : I even cherished golden

dreams of future Grand Nationals. My young horse was rather a handful in a crowd, so I went on to the whip at the far end of the cover.

“ We had not long to wait before there was a whimper ; and half a minute later, there, stealing away, was my old acquaintance the big, grey, bobtailed fox. Away he went on his familiar line ; and I, with the thoughtlessness of youth, and in the excitement of getting well away with hounds, never recked that I was riding at the very part of the bank which had been fatal to Anthony Nunn. I was coming nicely at it, when suddenly Pride of Tyrone swerved, crossed his legs, and fell, shooting me out of the saddle. Quite unhurt, I picked myself up at once. Pride of Tyrone was already on his feet some yards away, drenched with sweat and plunging back towards the Whin. As I started to go after him, he circled round at a canter and went at the bank exactly as if he had been ridden at it. I was too late to intercept him, and he popped on and off like a bird, and strode away over the rise of the next field.

“ I remember noticing as he went past me that the reins had somehow got caught on the saddle. .

“ By this time the field were galloping by me, some going over the bank as the shortest way, others following the huntsman through a gap a hundred yards or more to the right.

“ Running across the next field and climbing on to the next bank for a better view, I could see the hounds fairly racing, and close up with them, served by his great speed, was the runaway Pride of Tyrone ; a widening space between him and the rapidly tailing field.

“ Pursuit on foot and in riding boots was out of the

question, and as there was no probability of any one stopping him my anxiety was great lest he should manage to injure himself.

“ I was at my wits’ end what to do until it occurred to me that my first horse might still be within hail. I ran back as fast as I could across the two fields and on to the road at the top of the Whin, where I came upon a group of second horsemen just turning away from watching the disappearing hounds, and among them was my man. Fortunately we had done nothing to speak of before I changed on to Pride of Tyrone, so the horse was quite fresh, and I galloped down the line in pursuit of the fugitive.

“ Hounds and Pride of Tyrone and all were out of sight and earshot by this time, but the tracks of the horses led straight away over the line the grey fox knew so well. It was not long before I began to meet people coming back, thrown out by falling or beaten by the pace, among them the first whip with his horse badly staked. But of Pride of Tyrone there was not a sign, and the tale of casualties did not tend to lessen my uneasiness on his account.

“ The tracks became fewer and fewer, and at length between Humbleby Farm and Buckfield I encountered a man leading his horse back. From him I learnt that the pace, terrific for the first few miles, had slackened to a slow hunting run, when he, alone of all the field anywhere within sight of the hounds, had come to grief. He said that when he last saw the hounds they were running straight ahead, more slowly now, but in full cry ; and right up alongside them, moving like a machine, as though he revelled in the game, was my embryo racehorse.

“ Wasting no time, I followed Pride of Tyrone’s trail. For the greater part of the way it was plain enough, and I was able to travel at a good pace; but in places, especially on the Downs and higher-lying grass lands, it was only with the greatest difficulty that I could find anything to guide me at all.

“ The tracks went straight over Priestland Park and Shepley Down to just below Hindholt, where the fox had evidently been headed and had swung left-handed along Kelton Bottom. I saw the tracks of the hounds in the soft ground there, and knew that Pride of Tyrone was still with them.

“ Coming up by Checkley on to the high land again the line lay to the right over Anyman’s Down to Cockover Wood, where the hoof-prints were a puzzle that took me some time to unravel. From what I could make of it, Pride of Tyrone had galloped into the wood, had turned back half-way down the ride, had walked and trotted back, standing still more than once, and had broken into a gallop again before leaving the wood by the way he had entered it, going away in the direction of Swingstone.

“ In another hour or so it would be too dark to see any tracks at all, and as I seemed to be no nearer to Pride of Tyrone than when I started, my chance of catching him before nightfall appeared remote in the extreme; but I was determined to persevere while I could, and kept plodding along on the trail.

“ From Swingstone it led right on by High Firs and Kyte Common, as straight as a die past Ridgeweather Hill, and on to the Teal Valley. Sinking the valley, I followed it on through Frogbere plantations and across the water-meadows straight to the Teal.

“ ‘ Surely,’ I thought, ‘ the water would stop him.’ But no; I saw the marks where he had taken off. ‘ What a horse!’ I thought, ‘ what a horse!’ The Teal at that point was thirty feet across.

“ I knew the horse I was riding could not jump it, so going round by the bridge, quarter of a mile higher up towards the village, I came along the opposite bank till I found the tracks again. As the valley was already in twilight this was no easy matter, but I struck them at length and discovered that Pride of Tyrone had landed with a yard to spare, and gone straight on without hesitating.

“ By this time my mount had had quite enough of it, and as I had more and more difficulty every minute in tracking my way along, I came to the conclusion that further pursuit was hopeless, and was just turning my horse’s head in the direction of home when the sound of a hoof on a road caught my ear.

“ I rode quickly towards the sound, and, sitting on his horse in the lane which leads up out of the valley by the edge of Baron’s Wood, came upon the new huntsman listening intently with his hand behind his ear. Though how he, who never jumped a stick if he could help it, and almost a stranger in the country, had managed to get so far, I could not imagine. Certainly he had a marvellous knack of picking his way about by lanes and gates, and this was the only direction in which I ever knew him to exhibit the least intelligence.

“ ‘ Hark!’ he said, when he caught sight of me, ‘ Hark! they’re in there,’ and pointed up to where Baron’s Wood, lying along the top of the valley side, loomed against the sunset sky. I stopped my horse and listened,

but the bellringers were practising in Frogbere Church, and the sound, echoing from both sides of the valley, lent itself to any construction the imagination liked to put upon it.

“ ‘They’re in there,’ said the huntsman, ‘I heard them before the bells began. And there’s some one hunting them!’

“Some one hunting them! At this piece of information the notion flashed across me that I had come all this way on a wild-goose chase. What more likely than that some one had nicked in with them, probably when the fox had swung out to Checkley and back to Cockover Wood? And had I read aright the riddle of the returning tracks in Cockover Wood? I was convinced that I had been following a single line of tracks and that those belonged to Pride of Tyrone. ‘But,’ I said to myself, ‘I am not a Red Indian, and it is quite possible that I have made a mistake somewhere in spite of all my care.’ After all, was it probable that any horse, least of all a young one who had that season seen hounds for the first time, would, of his own free will and riderless, stick to them all through a run like that, jumping everything as it came and the Teal as well? The more I reasoned the more absurd did the idea seem.

“As we sat there straining our ears, a labourer came down the lane from the direction of the wood. ‘The Hounds?’ he said in answer to our questions. ‘Yes, they’ve been up there hunting about in the big wood this half-hour. Yes, there’s some one with them, I heard him. No, I didn’t see him; I saw some of the dogs; and there’s a horse that’s lost his master.’

“We rode up the lane and turned into the wood.

' Now,' said the huntsman, ' we shall see who is meddling with my hounds.'

" We had gone some way along the main ride before we heard the hounds running towards us from the left. They came nearer and nearer, and presently burst out of the undergrowth about eighty yards ahead of us, turned sharp left-handed, and went straight up the ride in full cry. Just as they passed a branch ride leading from the left, an object dashed out of it and followed in their wake. It was Pride of Tyrone in full career.

" Both our horses were dead beat, so, bucket along as we might, we could not keep the hounds in view, and the cry was getting fainter and fainter when the huntsman's horse behind me came down with a squelch and a clatter. I never even stopped—I am afraid I set more value on Pride of Tyrone—but sent my horse along for all he was worth to the end of the wood. There I found that the hounds had crossed the road into Oxlow Wood, Pride of Tyrone with them.

" As you know, Oxlow Wood is an irregular crescent in shape, with only one ride through it lengthways, and a horse can therefore only get in or out at the ends, or horns, of the crescent. It was just the same in those days; so, having made sure that Pride of Tyrone had entered, I cut across to the far end, thinking to intercept him. There were no tracks leading out of the wood, and the chances were against his turning back, so I awaited developments.

" The sun was just setting blood-red. The sky in the west was like a sheet of flame. Not a breath of wind stirred the woods, and behind them the mist was creeping

out of the Teal Valley. The bells of Frogbere Church were still faintly audible, mingling with the intermittent cry of hounds, which, now on one side of the wood, now on the other, was gradually coming towards me.

“ At length the cry ceased altogether, and then from the wood came a sound that made my spine crawl.

“ It was a voice. A voice that never had a like : the voice of *Anthony Nunn* !

“ ‘ *Yeu-eup!* ’ it went, ‘ *Try for-ard!* ’

“ With the cold sweat dripping off me I sat there paralysed ; and the beautiful voice came on :

“ ‘ *Eu, Marksman!*—*Yooi, my lads!*—*Yooi, wind him!* ’ Nearer and nearer it came, ringing and echoing through the wood like a bell. And still I sat there. My limbs were lead and my brain was numb, and I sat there waiting, for what unspeakable apparition I had no conception.

“ Louder and louder it grew : ‘ *Yeu-eup!*—*Push him up!*—*Yooi, my lads!*—*Yeu, try in there!* ’

“ Then from the wood there crept the dim form of the grey bobtailed fox. With one foot raised he stood listening a moment, and stole away towards the sunset.

“ In cover a hound spoke, then another : a deep note like an otter-hound.

“ The voice cheered him till the air throbbled, ‘ *Huic!*—*Huic!*—*Huic!* to *Marksman!*—*Ho-o-o-o-ick!* ’

“ The old hound crashed through the brushwood, alert and eager—the Marksman of yore. Throwing that sonorous tongue of his, with his nose on the line he drove along. Scoring to cry the hounds poured out. And then, every muscle on my body literally twitching, I heard the voice close at hand, and an approaching horse.

“ It seemed hours that I stared with aching eyes that I dared not blink at the end of the ride where the Thing must appear.

“ What I saw burnt into my brain.

“ Out of the wood came—*Pride of Tyrone!*

“ Pride of Tyrone, white with lather, eyes wild and nostrils distended. The bit was pressing on his mouth; the reins extended stiffly back from the bit to empty air above the withers. They were held in a grasp, and they were held by—*nothing!*

“ And from the empty air above the saddle, from on a level with my own head, pealed and cheered that clarion voice.

“ Pride of Tyrone passed close by me: I could have touched him. And as he passed a sense of unutterable, nameless horror and doom swept over me. And the voice blared like a trumpet right in my ear: ‘*For-ard. Awa-ay!*’

“ Blind with terror, I drove the spurs into my horse and rode for my life.

“ My recollection of the journey home is a blurred jumble of furious galloping and weary leading of a foundered horse.

“ Next morning I went to the kennels. I found the huntsman, scared and shaken, big with news. After the fall his horse was dead lame, and as he could not hear a sound of the hounds he went home. It was after nine o’clock when he got to the kennels; the whips were already there, having collected four and a half couple of lost hounds—all new hounds of Furlong’s. Of the rest of the eighteen couple taken out in the morning there was not a trace.

“ He got his supper and went to bed ; and had been asleep some time when he was aroused by a violent knocking at the door, which continued until his hand was on the latch to open it. He looked out. In the yard, which was as light as day with brilliant moonlight, stood six couple of hounds. Not a sign of anything else. He was about to call out, when such a feeling of utter horror came over him as he had no words to describe. Something was hurled past his head into the house. And out of nothing, right in his face rang yells and shrieks of unearthly laughter.

“ How he even managed to bang the door to, and how long he crouched there sick with fright, he had no idea. He left the six couple outside to shift for themselves till daylight.

“ He showed me the object thrown through the door. Still lying where it had fallen was the mangled, wolfish mask of a great dog-fox, and crammed into the mouth were the four pads and a grey fragment of a brush.

“ During the next few days tidings came in.

“ Pride of Tyrone was found, stiff and dead, in a lonely by-road within five miles of the kennels.

“ Singly and in twos and threes the rest of the hounds came back, led, in carts, and limping home alone on weary bleeding feet.

“ By the end of the week there was only one hound unaccounted for. Then we had the story of the doctor at Stoatswold, in the heart of the Oaklands country.

“ Driving home late on the night of the run, he heard hounds killing a fox on the moor above the village, and some one whooping and whooping till the whole countryside resounded.

“The doctor said it was gruesome and turned him cold. The villagers heard it, broad awake, and shivered in their beds.

“Next day on the moor, surrounded by the remains and fragments of a fox, they found a hound, dead. It was old Marksman. They must have run nearly forty miles.

“Nothing of a like nature ever occurred again,” said the white-haired man, after a pause. “For years there were rumours among the country people of a deep-voiced hound being heard at night, particularly in one part, and of a man’s voice cheering him. But the evidence was never at first hand.”

The white-haired man lit a fresh cigar.

“Yes,” he said, “it is strange that we never find a fox in Canonby Whin.”

THE OLD BLUE-PYE

I'm a lean old, mean old sight in a street
With a foolish, ghoulish glare at a man,
And my kennel-mates look grand at a meet,
With a bloom on the Belvoir tan;
And they sneer who gape on my colour and shape
And my veteran, villainous, bloodshot eye,
For the crowds that swarm round fashion and form
Pass over the old blue-pye.
But the Huntsman knows what a hound can do,
And he knows that I know that he knows it, too :
He knows my voice on a fox is true,
And the blood of a fox my joy ;
So I clear my way thro' the thick of the pack
To where he sits on the bay mare's back
With his, " Poor old Vagabond—Vagabond—Vaga-
bond !
Poor old Vagabond, boy ! "

I'm a hard old, scarred old, quarrelsome brute,
I'm a peevish, thievish bundle of bone,
But I'll sing to a fox when the rest are mute
On a line as cold as a stone.
Oh, the Belvoir blood is gallant and good
On a scent you could eat, when it hangs breast high,
But the casting vote on a doubtful note.
Is left to the old blue-pye.

And the Huntsman knows what a hound can do,
 And he knows that I know that he knows it, too :
 He knows my voice on a fox is true,

 And the blood of a fox my joy ;
 So clear the way for the pick of the pack,
 When he waves us in from the bay mare's back
 With his " 'Leu-'leu, Vagabond—Vagabond—Vaga-
 bond !

 'Leu-'leu, Vagabond, boy ! "

I'm a slinking, blinking beast on a bench,
 I'm a sulking, hulking bully at home,
 But I'm king of the sport of kings as I wrench
 Thro' the woods where the red rogues roam ;
 And my fine sleek mates must bury their hates
 And gather and gallop to get to the cry
 When the brushwood rocks and the word is, " *Fox!*—
 On the faith of the old blue-pye."

For the Huntsman knows what a hound can do,
 And he knows that I know that he knows it, too :
 He knows my voice on a fox is true,

 And the blood of a fox my joy ;
 So cleave your way to the pick of the pack,
 When he wakes the woods from the bay mare's back
 With his " Huic, to Vagabond !—Huic, to Vagabond !
 Yoo-ick, Vagabond, boy ! "

I'm a creepy, sleepy slug in the straw,
 But endure as sure as fate on a line,
 And a fox must make the most of his law
 When the set of his mask is mine ;

And the riders troop to the shrill *who-hoop*
On staggering horses and steeds that sigh
As the word goes round that the fox was found
And killed by the old blue-pye.
For the Huntsman knows what a hound can do,
And he knows that I know that he knows it, too :
He knows my voice on a fox is true,
And the blood of a fox my joy,
As he fights his way to the thick of the pack,
Where my jaws are crushing a wet red back,
With his " Leave him, Vagabond !—Vagabond !—
Vagabond !
Leave him, Vagabond, boy ! ”

A CALL TO THE MARSHES

LET us board farmer Mole's "one-hoss" chaise that awaits to convey our baggage and ourselves to Dunlin Island, which lies six miles from the nearest station, the greater portion of the way traversing a wide expanse of treacherous sands and ooze flats, the track being marked out by a long line of beacons. This weird and solitary highway across the sands is passable during low tide only, and woe to any unfortunate traveller who attempts to use it at half-flood even, or when overtaken by fog or darkness. The chances are he would meet with a watery grave. Far out in the estuary a pile lighthouse stands upon the fringe of a sand bar dreaded by mariners. Beyond a colony of noisy gulls and a number of herons which stand like so many grey-clad sentinels along the serrated margin of the sands there are but few signs of life. But out on the main a rusty-hulled, squat-masted tramp steamer churns her way "down along," and the rich tan sails of a fleet of bawley boats trawling in the fairway, lend their bit of colour to the grey seascape. Nor is the view shoreward of much more enlivening aspect. It consists of one long line of high stone-faced escarpments broken here and there by a small tidal creek. Beyond the sea-walls lie thousands of acres of fertile but treeless, dyke-intersected marshes. Dreary and desolate-looking enough they are, but it is here that wildfowl love to

congregate. To-morrow at dawn of day we are to take tithe of the broods of young mallard bred thereon.

A wrack-festooned beacon surmounted by an iron triangle indicates the but-little-used cart track that leads to Dunlin Island. An old ruddy-complexioned farmer comes out of the reed-thatched homestead as the rattle-trap chaise draws up before the door. While discussing a mug of powerful beer of local brew the farmer informs us that a masterful lot of young mallard with "scarce a real flapper among 'em" are awaiting our attention on the reedy fleets and dykes.

"Up with the lark" should be the duck-shooter's motto, and the first tokens of dawn had scarcely broken when we four "guns" set out accompanied by as many marshmen and a team of old-fashioned water spaniels such as our ancestors were wont to shoot over, and quite a different type from the short-legged long-barrelled spaniels which one sees benched at the principal dog shows nowadays. Nine out of ten of the latter would prove utterly useless in the field. Our aim is to work along the main dykes first and so drive any duck that may be harbouring therein to the big fleet lying on the further side of the island. In most cases these dykes or drains are fringed with belts of tall sedges, which afford splendid cover for duck, coot, snipe, and other birds. In no case are the dykes of greater width than twenty feet, and one gun with a dog to hunt the sedge belts is therefore sufficient to shoot them. Each of the big drains runs parallel with the next, and smaller dykes run at right angles to these. At a given signal off we all start, the spaniels threading in and out of the dense beds of reeds.

A little whimper, hardly audible above the rustle of the

sedges, is given by old Rap, who has been told off to work for me. The whimper is immediately followed by a great rousting amidst the reeds, for the dog has sprung a brood of seven remarkably well-grown young duck, together with the female parent bird—at this season of the year the old mallards are in full moult and skulk away by themselves until their change of plumage is completed. A couple of fat “flappers” drop to the contents of the first barrel, while another hard hit, after “carrying on” bravely in the wake of his more fortunate brethren, suddenly drops like a stone. The remainder of the bunch is marked down into the fleet, and further toll may be taken of them later perhaps.

The other guns are also hard at it; indeed, if the burning of powder has anything to do with it, our friends’ dykes would seem to hold a far better head of fowl than does our own, for the firing is well-nigh incessant right along the line, whereas for some little time after the passing of the brood of flappers nothing comes within range of our gun. Suddenly, however, an excited little challenge from old Rap puts us on the *qui vive*, and out flashes a single gadwall duck from a clump of black bog rushes within very easy shot. How we managed to miss the duck with the first barrel will ever remain a mystery, for it afforded a shot which the veriest tyro should not have muffed. The second attempt, however, crumples up the duck like an old rag. We are not a little pleased at bagging the gadwall, for the beautiful species, although breeding sparingly in some parts of Norfolk since its introduction there, may be regarded as quite a *rara avis* on Dunlin Island.

“Hinter comes a bunch o’ teal! Look out, maister!”

cries our henchman, pointing towards a number of tiny specks twisting and fleeting over the marsh like a flight of erratic rockets. The teal head straight towards us, and crouching amongst a bed of dry rushes we await their coming. Ye gods, how a teal can travel! A snipe is an easy bird to shoot in comparison. On and on come the beautiful little duck, falling and rising, twisting and screwing, in their flight. Now or never. Singling out the leading bird we pull, and he continues on his way as though he rather enjoyed the salute. With the left, however, we manage to stop the tail bird, which drops into a pond hole with a splash. The teal proves to be a young male in immature plumage, and the brood must have been hatched very early, for they appear to be quite as useful with their wings as the old birds. Two or three pairs of these charming little ducks breed annually on Dunlin Island, there being splendid nesting sites for all kinds of fowl. Partridges nest mostly amongst the rank herbage growing on the inner face of the sea-walls, and snipe, redshanks, and lapwings in considerable numbers build on the enclosed marshes.

Not another feather is moved from the dyke until the big fleet is reached, when a nice lot of young mallard get up just out of gunshot. A council of war amongst the guns now takes place at the head of the fleet, and a coin of the realm is tossed to decide who shall shoot the left and who the right shore of the long lagoon-like piece of water. This knotty point settled, the dogs are sent into the dense reed cover that fringes either side of the fleet, while the marshmen beat the sedges with their leaping-poles. Brood after brood of duck with here and there a coot or moorhen rise from the aquatic jungle, and

full toll is taken of them. But to describe how this duck was shot, how that one missed, would afford but monotonous reading we fear, for after all one day's flapper-shooting is very like another. Suffice it to say that when a halt was called for lunch and the bunches of fowl laid on the shady side of the sea-wall they were found to run well into three figures.

A MORNING'S OTTER-HUNTING

SEEING that the ancient and grand sport of otter-hunting comes when every other branch of the chase is at a standstill, added to which it is, like beagling, a healthful recreation that may be indulged in by any man or woman of very moderate means and "sound in wind and limb," it is passing strange that the majority of those good sportsmen whose hounds hunt many of the inland waters of the British Islands should receive such scanty support in the form of subscriptions. Apart from the fact that a pack of well-entered, well-handled otterhounds will show some of the most clever hound work possible, the "trail" of their quarry often leads the "field" through some of the most picturesque river scenery imaginable.

Formerly the big, handsome, bell-throated, rough-coated otterhounds were almost exclusively used for hunting otters in this country, but to-day, unless we are mistaken, the splendid packs of the Dumfriesshire and Bucks O.H. are the only ones which consist entirely of the old-fashioned pure-bred otterhounds.

Several couples of the Dumfriesshire pack were shown at the last Cruft's Show held at the Agricultural Hall, and the heart of many a veteran otter-hunter of the old school was gladdened by the sight of those magnificent-looking hounds, which, although bred solely for the

field and not for the show-bench—as was the case with the majority of the entries in so-called sporting classes in the show—carried off practically everything in the shape of awards in their particular class. Grand hunters are these old-fashioned otterhounds, with noses keen as razors to puzzle out a cold or patchy “trail,” while their “music” is simply superb. They lack something, perhaps, of the drive and dash of the foxhound, which is so very generally used for otter-hunting nowadays, and by which many a M.O.H. swears; nevertheless, to some of us who are old-fashioned enough in our sporting ideas to think that otters should be hunted by otterhounds, and foxes by foxhounds, a stolen day—alas! how few and far between those days have become—with a pack of pure-bred otterhounds is very delightful. On the other hand, however, some of our longest and best otter hunts have been with mixed packs consisting chiefly of foxhounds with a few couple of rough otterhounds. We have also seen a small pack of Welsh harriers acquit themselves remarkably well after being entered to otters.

But enough of this “babbling.” Let us push on to G——d Bridge, where the local pack is to meet this morning. We are late already; there are otters in the River C——, and if hounds “strike and trail” before we get up, they may run clean away.

The pack ranged on the quaint, old-time bridge; the M.O.H. and his staff clad in serviceable blue flannel jackets, breeches and stockings, and wearing each a gold-mounted otter pad in their caps, while their studded boots are perforated with holes to let the superfluous water out as well as in; and the little knots of keen-looking sportsmen and sportswomen eagerly discussing

the prospects of a good drag, form as sporting and picturesque a scene as it is possible to imagine.

But we have but little time to admire the picture, for the Master, ever anxious to show his followers sport, moves off along the banks of the river, and very shortly after being "put to water," hounds strike a trail under the shelving-bank of a strip of osier beds. A volume of music now gladdens the ears of the field, and helter-skelter go men, women, and youngsters as hard as they can foot it, their numbers being pretty equally distributed along either bank.

Ere long a willow-fringed feeder has to be negotiated, and, the banks of the same being rather wide apart for "shank's pony" to jump, those of us who have come out unarmed with leaping poles (those useful but harmless weapons which the extreme order of humanitarians and a certain class of Fleet-street journalists are wont to call "the murderous, death-dealing spears of the cruel otter-hunters"), must either walk half a mile or so upstream to the nearest foot-bridge or scramble over as best we may. A good many of the followers—not by any means are they all of the fair sex—choose the former evil, and are never seen or heard of again that day. One jolly little, rosy-gilled, rotund man from a neighbouring town rushes gallantly at the obstacle, and lands clean in the middle of some four feet of turbid water and particularly unsavoury mud. Nothing daunted, the little sportsman bobs up smiling, and with head and shoulders decorated with duck-weed and other aquatic vegetation he scrambles up the further bank like an amiable Pater Thamesis.

The music by this time is growing very much fainter,

for hounds are meadows ahead of the field, and it gradually dies away. Hell for leather we go, and, having gained our "second wind," we very soon pick up ground and draw up with the van.

"The otter's 'watched' (gone to ground), for a pony!" ejaculates the long-limbed, clean-built M.O.H., as a sudden bend of the river reveals the pack feathering under an over-shoot.

Pell-mell goes the "field," led by the lengthy and athletic Master, while several fair Dianas hold their own with the best of us.

While search is being made for the "holt," one of the game little broken-haired terriers who has wandered on a voyage of discovery above the weir on his own account approaches too near the fall, and the next moment he is washed like a cork into the boiling torrent below. Striking a boulder at the foot of the fall, and apparently half-stunned, he is borne helplessly down-stream.

Now, these game terriers are the joy and pride of the hunt, and in less time than it takes to record the fact the Master's brother, who acts the part of whipper-in, has dragged off his boots and is swimming through the broken water to rescue the half-drowned "little otterer." With powerful strokes the plucky whip very soon reaches the terrier, and a cheer goes up as he regains the bank, dripping like a huge retriever, but with his prize safely gathered.

A dose of whisky is administered to the still half-dazed and well-nigh-drowned terrier, the hero of the moment runs up to a neighbouring farm-house to obtain a change of clothing, and then the second terrier is sent into the "holt" to try and bolt the otter.

Meanwhile a number of the "field," captained by a veteran otter-hunter who boasts that he has never had a twinge of rheumatism in his life, are sent down to "stickle" (chain) a shallow part of the river. Beyond the shallows is a long and deep reach, in which it would be difficult for hounds to hunt their game if it once succeeded in making it. For some little time not a sound or signal is given by the terrier underground, and the other dog, having apparently quite recovered from his recent immersion, is sent to see what is going on.

"Hieu gaze! hieu gaze!" goes up from one of the field who has been watching by the side of a deep dyke running some two hundred yards distant from the main river, and joining the same some little way below the over-shoot, rings out above the roar of the waterfall. That hollow has solved the subterranean mystery. The "holt" leads into an old culvert through which, with the plucky little terriers—the first of which is subsequently found to be badly mauled about the muzzle—close on his heels, or rather pads, the otter has escaped to the dyke. But while we are "babbling" in this manner hounds strike the trail again and commence to drive their quarry like the deuce up the dyke and into the river. Now ensues one of the best hunts it was ever my good luck to take a part in, and for eleven miles that game otter leads us a merry dance through lovely river scenery, while the music is glorious and well-nigh incessant.

More than once hounds run clean away from the field, but, thanks to the checks which so frequently occur, in otter-hunting, especially in deep and sluggish streams like the water we are hunting to-day, those of the followers who are keen, amongst them a baker's dozen of

sporting undergraduates—Oxford lies but a few miles distant—manage to see a good deal of hound work done.

At length an unearthly shriek—a kind of cross between a view-hallo and an Indian war-whoop—from a shepherd whose flock of matronly-looking Southdown ewes scamper aimlessly hither and thither across the lush, emerald-green water-meadows.

“T’ owd hotter jumped out o’ the water jest loike a gert rot, and runned acrost meadows to the brook, very nigh scaring the loife out o’ me and t’ owd ships,” exclaims the yokel in a breathless and disjointed manner to the Master.

The flow of oratory of the worthy guardian of mutttons is drowned by a volume of music which suddenly escapes from the bell-like throats of the pack, and at a pace which proclaims a burning hot trail, hounds stream over the grass.

Now commences the most dashing and exciting part of the hunt. For the greater part of a mile the trail leads up a sedgy, willow-fringed brook, and more than once the quarry is “gazed” running along the bank at no great distance ahead of hounds, which drive him at a great racket. Despite the efforts of the field to keep on terms with the flying pack, the latter is ever well ahead, while the sinuosities of the stream, intervening clumps of sallows and other obstructions to the perspective, often veil the movements of hounds completely.

Suddenly the distant music ceases abruptly, and when heard again a few minutes later the gladsome melody seems to proceed from well out in the meadows lying to the right. *Lutra* has discovered his mistake in leaving the main stream, and is now racing for his life across

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“CARRYING THE OTTER ASHORE”

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the strip of green pasture-land which lies sandwiched between the brook and the river.

Those of the followers who possess sufficient stamina to stay the "burst" take a diagonal line across-country and arrive on the bank of the river just in time to see the otter pulled down on the edge of a tiny osier-grown islet standing in the middle of the stream.

Half-wading and half-swimming through the breast-high water, a whipper-in bears the otter ashore, the hounds swimming all round him. The last obsequies are performed over our gallant quarry, but there are some of us, I trow, who wish that game otter had lived to run another day.

FULL CRY

YONDER he goes !
Like a withered brown leaf that a hurricane blows :
Yarn-der 'e goes !
And we speed him, who viewed him, with shrill *tally-hos*.
 A scarlet flash and a twangling horn,
 The branches crash in the thick-set thorn,
And opens before us the swell of the chorus
 Like bells for a festival rung :
Hounds—hounds—hounds—hounds—
 Galloping, galloping shoulder for shoulder, and tongue
 giving answer to tongue.

Yonder he goes !
Up the ploughland beyond where the yellow stream
 flows :
Yarn-der 'e goes !
Or a shadow ran under the rooks as they rose.
 The ridges whirl with the wild black wings,
 The waters swirl as the blood mare springs,
Nor falters before us the chime of the chorus
 Like bells in the valley well rung :
Hounds—hounds—hounds—hounds—
 Galloping, galloping shoulder for shoulder, and tongue
 giving answer to tongue.



“YONDER HE GOES !”

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
PRESS

Yarn-der 'e goes !

And he's crawling and far from an earth that he knows :

Yarn-der 'e goes !

He's a mile from the moors and a field from his foes.

They race to view from a failing scent,

With the riders few and the horses spent,

And frantic before us the cheer and the chorus

Like bells for a carnival swung :

Hounds—hounds—hounds—hounds—

Galloping, galloping shoulder for shoulder, and tongue
giving answer to tongue.

BLIND HOOKEY

OUR introduction to Blind Hookey—that is not the name under which he ran—took place on the Johannesburg Market Square. He had just been purchased at auction by a couple of greasy Hebrew horse-dealers from among a string of sorry-looking ponies, mules, and donkeys which had been sent in for sale from different parts of the Rand, Cape Colony, and the Orange Free State.

Blind Hookey was a clean-legged, well bred, well groomed and fed Basuto pony, standing a trifle over fourteen hands high. In short, he looked as though he had just stepped out of a racing or polo stable. He stood as quiet as a lamb before the auctioneer's portable rostrum while he was being "put up," but we noticed an amused kind of smile passed over the sun-tanned visage of the worthy knight of the hammer as he knocked down the galloway for the comparatively small sum of £22—guinea bids do not obtain at South African horse sales—to the "Peruvians," who, delighted with their bargain, led Blind Hookey over to a rattle-trap four-wheel "spider," which stood a little apart from the noisy crowd assembled round the place of sale.

Feeling somewhat sore that we ourselves had not bought the pony, we determined to see how he went in harness and to that end followed the jubilant horse-dealers across the dusty square to watch the operation of inspanning. Blind Hookey, with ears laid back a little, remained

dangerously quiet while the heavy "green" harness was laid upon his quivering barrel. But no sooner did the point of the driver's sjambok touch his satin-like flank than, with a great plunge, as though he were charging a yawning water-jump, he literally flew through the air with the "spider," and upon descending to *terra firma* again he kicked the body of the offending vehicle to smithereens. Scared half out of their lives, but otherwise little the worse for their brief aerial flight and somewhat abrupt and sudden descent, the unfortunate speculators in equine "securities" picked themselves up from the dust and malodorous refuse of the cattle market, and standing at a respectful distance ruefully watched the final and complete destruction of the ancient "spider," of which, by-the-bye, but the axle-trees, wheels, and one shaft remained intact.

Thinking perhaps that he had sufficiently avenged himself the indignity of having been put between the shafts of a "one hoss shay," Blind Hookey was in the act of quietly retiring from the scene, with the wreckage trailing behind him, when we took hold of his bridle and stopped him. It was then that we noticed that the galloway was blind of an eye, that he was past "mark of mouth," and that he had slightly cut himself about the hocks during his acrobatic performance.

Emboldened by the knowledge that their latest purchase could do them no further bodily harm provided they kept far enough away from his heels, while we remained at his head, the "Peruvians" approached a little nearer, and the following collocation took place between the elder of the twain (A) and ourselves (B).

A: "Ach! it vas not right to put such a beautiful

paard—such a shentleman's 'orse—into zee old buggy; zee rattle and jingle did drive him mad.”

B: “ New buggy or old, it would have been just the same, my friend, for the pony has never been in harness until now since he was foaled.”

A: “ Ach! but there is not such a saddle'orse in all Johannesburg; it is beautiful to ze him with a man on his back; (wheedlingly) vill zee shentleman get up and try him across zee square.”

B: “ No, thankee, we've already had the pleasure of seeing you *drive* him, and that is sufficient for one day. How much will you take for the brute?”

A: “ Ach! We are not anxious to part with the beautiful paard, but if you do vant him very bad you shall 'ave him for twenty-vive pond.”

B: “ Twenty-five pounds be hanged! Why, man, he's blind of an eye, long in the tooth, and his hocks are cut all to pieces. Tell you what, you throw in a halter and we'll give you a fiver for him.” A, stamps and dances round for some ten minutes, but finally consents, with a very ill grace, to accept £8 10s. for Blind Hookey and 1s. for a halter. The money is paid over, and a Cape boy leads the pony out to B's modest establishment, which lies some eight miles outside the Golden City.

In spite of having been told, many a time and oft, that a younger son should take less care of his own neck than that of a borrowed mount, having purchased and paid for Blind Hookey in hard cash, and having seen him in a playful mood the preceding day, we felt quite justified in putting a monkey-like Cape boy on his back before venturing to get up ourselves. We, however, watched very carefully the saddling and biting of the galloway,

choosing a rather long-cheeked "Pelham" for "steering and stopping gear," as there was a good deal of barbed-wire fencing about. Now, although Jacob, like most Cape boys, could stick on almost anything in the shape of a horse, he, in common with his ebon brethren, possessed "hands of lead." We therefore tried to drum into the thick, woolly pate of the stable lad the fact that he was not to ride Blind Hookey hard, nor to make use of the curb unless he found the animal too great a handful to manage. With a broad grin of enjoyment at the prospect of riding a "rough 'un," Jacob sprang into the saddle with the agility of a monkey, but scarcely had he touched the bridle-reins than Blind Hookey indulged in a series of plunges, and then set off across the veld at a wild gallop, heading straight for a wire-enclosed plantation of blue gums, and with Jacob yelling and hauling on the curb like a madman.

"That's a dead nigger for a hundred," is our muttered ejaculation as we follow on the heels of the flying pair of mad things as fast as poor old Bushman, a superannuated chaser, can lay hoofs to ground.

On and on gallops Blind Hookey, swerving neither to right nor left, but approaching every moment nearer to the treacherous, nay, deadly, wire fencing.

"Can it be possible that Jacob does not realise the danger that lies immediately before him? or has he lost his head or nerve that he does not attempt to turn the brute he is riding from its mad course?"

Ah! at last the Cape boy appears to be doing all he can to stop his headlong speed of the galloway, for the working of his dusky arms tells us that he is both sawing and pulling at the brute's mouth as only a Kafir

knows how to saw and pull. He has left it too late, however, and we instinctively hold our breath and shudder as the maddened bolter rushes blindly into the maiming tightly-stretched wire fence, and next moment both man and horse crash into a growth of eucalyptus saplings in a confused heap.

Five weeks later Blind Hookey looked as fit as the proverbial fiddle, and had it not been for a long narrow scar which seared his chest from shoulder to shoulder, and the painful manner in which his stable attendant, Jacob, limped as he walked him up and down a level strip of veld for the inspection of Mac—the well-known Transvaal trainer of racehorses and galloways—one might have forgotten that Blind Hookey had ever tested the strength of a barbed-wire fence.

“What do you think of him?” we asked of the trainer, who appeared to be favourably impressed with the pony.

“Eh, mon, he’s guid enou’ looking to win races. I ha’e an idea I’ve seen him before doon at the Cape, but canna say for sure,” replied the canny Scot, who, although a poor horseman himself, was an excellent judge of a horse and jockeyship, and enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most careful and successful trainers in South Africa.

“Get up, mon, and canter him round the dam. Bolt or no bolt, he’ll find nae wire to run into nearer than three miles,” went on Mac, with a grin overspreading his bony, freckled countenance.

Were we to say that it was with a feeling of unalloyed pleasure or safety that we mounted Blind Hookey on the shore of Wemmerdam we should scarcely tell the truth; for, although we do not so much mind being “put down” by a buckler or kicker—providing always it is soft falling

and there are no spectators—we have a deeply-rooted objection to being bolted with. Greatly to our surprise—and we might add joy—however, after a preliminary “prop” or two, Blind Hookey carried us round the dam as quietly as a park hack, and such an excellent turn of speed did he show that Mac agreed there and then to train and run him on half shares with us.

The secret of success was a plain snaffle and light hands.

We learned subsequently that Blind Hookey had, after nearly killing a Basuto stable lad, been sold out of a small racing stud in Cape Colony as incorrigible and useless, and had been sent up to Johannesburg with a string of ponies and horses of sorts. Then came a blank in his history, but, judging by the condition in which we first found the galloway, he must have been well cared for during his sojourn in Johannesburg.

But to bring a long story to a close, Blind Hookey, under the careful training of old Mac, became a very useful “plater”; and, although it was never our pleasure to see him first past the winning post, reports came to us in England of his many successes at Turffontein and other pony and galloway meetings in the Transvaal, Natal, and Cape Colony.

SHOOTING OVER DECOYS

DURING a short visit to the pleasant town of Verulam I learned that decent sport with yellow fish was obtainable in a small neighbouring river. I made some very fair catches of these fish, which, although they ran to no great size, afforded good fun on a light rod and the finest of drawn-gut, while every now and again I experienced a diversion in the sport by landing a hideous bearded mud-fish or barbel.

Yellow fish and barbel fishing is not bad in its way, but after a time I began to feel that sport of a more exciting nature would not be amiss. I therefore made inquiries regarding the shooting obtainable on some small lagoons lying a few miles outside Verulam, and was advised to pay a visit to a certain young Englishman, who held the post of Resident Engineer on the Zululand Government Railway, and whose bungalow was situated near the shore of one of the larger lagoons.

I took an early opportunity of riding over to call upon Mr. B——, the engineer, whom I found to be a remarkably fine specimen of humanity, for he stood 6 ft. 2 in. in his stockings and was splendidly proportioned. He was moreover an excellent all-round sportsman, a genial companion, and spoke the Zulu tongue almost as fluently as a native.

My new friend promised that, upon a favourable day

presenting itself, he would send a messenger to my hotel bidding me come and wage war with him against the fowl. In the course of a few days I received a note from B—— asking me to call at his bungalow the following evening at six o'clock, as he purposed going on a duck-shooting expedition and would have a boat and decoys ready for me.

The shores of the lagoons were fringed with very high reeds and rushes. Leading from one piece of water to another there is usually a weak place in the rushes through which a small boat or dug-out may be navigated, and although such places are well known to the initiated they are quite invisible to a stranger. The refuse from the cow-byres of a neighbouring farm where a big herd of oxen was kept had induced the most luxuriant sub-aquatic growth I had ever seen, so luxuriant, indeed, that—as I subsequently discovered to my cost—it was only at the expense of a deal of labour one was able to force one's boat through it. During dinner B—— informed me that he had been down to the further lagoon, at the head of which he had erected a couple of "blinds," behind which we were to "lay up" for the duck. He had also hired two dug-outs from a native.

Nine o'clock p.m. was just striking when we shoved off from the lake-shore in brilliant starlight weather, my companion in one boat and myself in the other, each of us taking a double 12-bore gun and home-made, but very artistically fashioned and coloured, wooden decoys. As instructed, I, to the best of my ability, followed close in the wake of the brawny engineer's boat. It proved terribly hard work to keep in touch with him, however, for the water-plants formed a dense mat from the bed to the

surface of the lagoon, and it was therefore impossible to propel the heavy, clumsy craft a greater distance than the length of a stroke. After much hard paddling we arrived at the head of the further lagoon. By this time I was simply bathed in perspiration, and moreover I had omitted to take a greatcoat with me; and, it being the cool season and decidedly chilly, I was somewhat afraid of contracting ague or at least a severe cold.

B—— now showed me my "blind," put out the decoys by wading to within about twenty yards of the shore, and, telling me to "kill time" until the first of the dawn, he moved off to his own "blind," and I lay down on the floor of the boat and endeavoured to snatch a little sleep.

Chilly though it was, I must have slept for some hours, for the first grey streaks of morning were beginning to brighten the eastern skyline when, stiff as the proverbial poker, I awoke with a start from the bottom of the dug-out. Peering through the uncertain light, I noticed something moving in and out among my decoys, and, slipping a couple of No. 3 shot cartridges in the chambers of my 12-bore, I fired; and the "something" turned paddles up. To my disgust it was only an old grey coot.

Next, a couple of pink-bill teal came straight for my "blind." I managed to stop one of the little duck, and how it happened that I did not kill both has to this day remained a mystery to me, for they were flying almost wing to wing.

No sooner had the report of my first barrel rang out than fowl seemed to rise from every part of the lagoon; comparatively few, however, came within shot of my "blind," and at the end of the first half-hour of the flight I had only scored four mallard, two pochards, and a teal

to my credit. I noticed, however, another gunner—he afterwards proved to be B——'s Scotch ganger—who was lying up in a belt of reeds about 200 yards distant from my "blind" drop duck after duck; indeed, the general line of flight appeared to be over his stand rather than over my own, and he must have made a goodly bag.

When the sun had risen well above the horizon I, under the impression that the flight was over, got up from a kneeling position, when I saw a big bunch of pochard heading straight for me, and, deeming it probable that they would settle among my decoys, I dropped behind the screen of sedges again. Not until I heard the "whistling" of the ducks' pinions very distinctly did I venture to look up, and then I had the satisfaction of seeing them close up together preparatory to alighting among the decoys and within twenty-five yards of my "blind."

A couple of the duck dropped dead to the contents of my first barrel, and a third, hard hit, fluttered out to the reeds, but I succeeded in gathering him a few minutes later. B—— now joined me, and he, like myself, had not enjoyed very good sport—indeed, our aggregate bag only amounted to seventeen duck (various) and a coot.

During the laborious paddle home my companion managed by some means to get separated from me, and I had to navigate my dug-out through the lagoons and dense aquatic-growth unpiloted. For a long while I tried unsuccessfully to find the weak spots in the reeds which lead from one lagoon to the next, and even when I drew clear of them and gained more open water I somehow got out of the proper course and found myself hard and fast aground on the shore of a little bay in the lagoon.

Here I found some coolies working a long seine-net which, upon being hauled up on shore, was found to contain a number of enormous barbel. The ebon fishermen assisted me in dragging my craft through the holding mud and dense mass of water-plants, and I then had a comparatively easy paddle to the place of disembarkation, where I found B—— and breakfast awaiting my advent.

A BOBBERY PACK

"LOOK! if that's not the 'spur' of an otter, I'm a Dutchman."

I was out of my saddle in a moment and examining the patch of grey, greasy-looking mud which my friend Mervin had pointed out to me while making the above ejaculation. Yes; there could be no doubt about it, the pad-prints on the ooze were those of *Lutra capensis*, and upon searching the banks of the stream a little lower down we discovered the half-eaten remains of a yellow fish which had probably afforded him a breakfast that very morning, for the fish had not been out of the water many hours.

"Tell you what, D——," went on Mervin, as he puffed out great clouds of rank Boer tobacco smoke until the pure morning air simply reeked of "burned rags," "we'll get together a bobbery pack and hunt that otter; I'm simply dying to see a bit of hound-work of some sort."

I agreed that the suggestion was an excellent one, but wondered where the material for the pack was to come from. Jack Mervin cast all objections to the winds, however. "Oh, don't worry your noble head over details," said he, as we cantered across a wide stretch of veld that lay between the river and his bungalow. "We'll go into town this evening, and if we

can't borrow dogs we'll steal 'em [he spoke quite seriously], and if we can't get together a pack by dint of borrowing or stealing, hanged if we won't buy up the Dogs' Home. I saw the catchers net some varmint-looking curs in the Market Square yesterday, and you may bet there will be no end of dogs awaiting admittance to the lethal-chamber—poor devils," rattled on my mercurial companion, whom I verily believe would have spent the last shilling he possessed to acquire the projected pack of mongrels.

The same evening Mervin and myself rode into town, and having dined at the Rand Club, my friend proceeded to try and borrow a dog from every man with whom he had a "nodding" acquaintance. "Well, I've got a pointer," or, "You may have my setters," were the kind of replies made to Mervin's cool requests. But in most cases the owners of the dogs would, after consenting to lend their setter, pointer, or retriever, as the case might be, ask, "What do you want the dog for, korhaan or quail?"

"No; otters," was the calm reply.

"Otters, be d——d, you can't have my dog for that kind of game," and away would go the canine owner in a huff. We—or rather Jack—managed to "bag" two and a half couple from different members of the Club—namely, a bull terrier (blind of an eye), one Irish and two fox-terriers, an ancient spaniel (he went on three legs by choice) and a powerful skewbald animal of many and doubtful breeds, who was promptly "christened" Window Shutter. Upon leaving the Club we paid a visit to the stables of the principal horse-dealer in the place, who promised to bring as many dogs as he could commandeer to the

"meet," which important fixture, by-the-bye, was to take place at a certain small hostelry standing near the banks of the river a couple of mornings later at the early hour of five o'clock a.m.

Bidding the worthy merchant in horse-flesh "Good-evening," we started off for the Dogs' Home. It was past ten o'clock when we arrived there. Ten minutes later we were being towed up the principal streets of the town in the wake of a spotted-weasel-bodied Kafir hund and a powerful half-bred Airedale terrier, which subsequently proved himself to be the best of the pack. "We'll call this a night's work, D——, for I'm about tired of dog catching for one evening," said Jack, as we discussed a long schooner of iced laager before setting out homewards. The idea of calling it a night's work appealed to me amazingly, for I had become heartily sick of the very sight of a dog ever since the Kafir cur began to take me in tow.

On the evening preceding the all-important fixture, men of all sorts and sizes, accompanied by dogs of many breeds and colours, from stately mastiffs down to weedy mongrel terriers (pointers, setters, and sporting dogs generally were conspicuous by their absence), began to turn up at Jack's modest four-roomed bungalow, until we were at our wits' end how and where to accommodate them for the night, while the "pack," which was kennelled *pro tem.* in the stable behind, set up a perfect pandemonium, howling and fighting like so many devils incarnate. It is a poor heart that never rejoices, however, and having dispatched a couple of natives with a lorry to bring in all the available "furniture" (empty barrels, boxes, etc.) from a neighbouring store, old Peter, Jack's Zulu

cook-butler, was set to work to prepare a huge iron-pot of venison stew from a fine blesbok.

Our thirteen guests sat on the stoep smoking their after-dinner pipes and "Bostanjoglös" and discussing the prospects of sport on the morrow over a glass of Scotch whisky, and Mervin and myself were placing "shake-downs" in all sorts of nooks and corners, when Tom P——, the jovial huntsman of the then recently imported pack of English foxhounds, which was kennelled a few miles distant, rode up to the bungalow with a couple of hounds. "Good-evening, gentlemen; the master's compliments, and he's sent old Amazon and Guardsman for you to try. I doubt neither of 'em has ever seen an otter since they were whelped, but they entered kindly enough to both jackal and buck," said Tom before burying his nose in a long "sleever" of "Bass." "I hope you will lend us a hand to-morrow, Tom," said Jack, as he gave the couple of hounds into the charge of the Basuto stable lad with strict injunctions to kennel them in a loose box away from the rest of the pack.

"Well, sir, I've only been out with otterhounds once in my life, and that was many years ago, but as it's an idle day with me to-morrow, I shall be glad to hunt with you," was Tom's reply, who, the night being warm and dry, elected to make his couch on the stoep.

At dawn every man was out of the blankets, and a general rush was made for the little bathing-place which Mervin had created by deepening a small willow-fringed spruit or brook that ran at no great distance from the bungalow, and which formed Jack's matutinal place of ablution in fair weather and in foul.

It was well that the larder of the bungalow was well

stocked, as no fewer than twenty-two hungry souls turned up to breakfast, nearly half of whom had either hacked or driven out of town long before sunrise, amongst them a keen little Irish sportswoman, who declared in the richest of brogue that, "sure if she had a five-pound note for ivery drag she'd seen run with the King's otterhounds, it's a warm woman she'd be to-day, indade."

The expression of Tom's weather-beaten face when we took him round to inspect the "pack" which was playing merry Hades in the stables would have been worth a "Jew's eye" to a "Leech"; and no fond mother ever hugged her offspring closer while passing through a mob than did honest Tom his couple of aristocratic English foxhounds when the canine rabble tried to strike up an acquaintance with them.

"Ware cur-dog, Amazon! Hold up, Guardsman—get out ye ugly, yallow varmint" (with a flying kick at one of the Kafir dogs which had evidently fallen violently in love with old Amazon). "Dear me, I never set eyes on such a lot o' rag-tailed divils in all my born days," cried Tom in dismay as he whipped off the nondescript pack from his beloved hounds. Gad, they were a lot of rag-tailed devils in very truth, as Jack Mervin, M.O.H., was bound to confess.

No sooner had the "noble" animals been released from durance vile than two and a half of the twelve and a half couples started off on a bee-line across the veld for town and home, while the Kafir mongrel and his late companion in distress—the half-bred Airedale—commenced a battle royal to decide which of them should retain possession of a shoulder of blesbok that had been commandeered by the former from the breakfast-table. With much rating and

cracking of thongs two men galloped off to try and turn the fleeting deserters back. They (the deserters) divided forces, however, and the gallant whippers-in only succeeded in capturing the ancient spaniel which, as before mentioned, carried a hind-leg up by choice, and was therefore not among the speediest of his kind. There was nothing to be gained in crying over spilt milk, or rather sped curs, however, and having coupled what remained of the "pack" with pieces of old rope and reims, off we went in a body to Dick Sullivan's hotel, where we found some twenty fresh recruits waiting to be initiated into the art of otter hunting.

It was now a good half-hour beyond the appointed time, and away we all started for the river, with the exception of a few thirsty souls, who remained to partake of a second or third "nerve-binder," fearful, perhaps, that the sport would prove too exciting for them.

Just before the bank of the stream was reached a hare sprang from her form in a patch of rank grass, and away across the veld she sped with the still coupled curs yapping and scrapping and falling over one another like so many boys in a sack race in their anxiety to get on terms with Mistress Lepus, who, with one lug laid low and the other pricked, loped quietly over the arid plain as though she rather enjoyed the fun. Suddenly the air was rent with loud and angry "'Ware hare! ware riot! Dang your blood; ye ought to know better, ye old fools, after all the leatherings you've had in the old country."

The staid old couple of foxhounds, seized with the rioting fever of the canine rabble, had—probably for the

first time since puppyhood—broken away from their astonished and outraged huntsman, and across the veld they carried the line of the hare, their deep, bell-like voices almost drowning the yapping of the struggling tangle of cur dogs. Still rating and cursing, Tom jumped on the pony of one of the field—who, owing to a great breadth of beam, had been given permission to ride to “hounds”—and off he galloped in pursuit of Amazon and Guardsman as though his Satanic Majesty was behind him, while the field laid into the other rioters indiscriminately and with hearty goodwill. At length we had them in hand again, and five minutes later the banks of the river were being drawn, one half of the pack, piloted by the Airedale, working the right-hand and the other half the left-hand side.

For perhaps an hour nothing wearing fur or feather was moved, and then one of the Kafir dogs made a sudden rush into a patch of scrub that grew down to the water's edge, and out bolted a meerkat, which led the pack a merry burst across the veld of quite a minute and a half's duration. Then, with a flirt of the “brush,” as though to wish his pursuers “a very good day!” he disappeared down his burrow, which ran for many feet below the surface of the sun-baked earth. Some little time was wasted in getting the pack back to the water again; but when they were whipped back to try for the legitimate quarry, the Airedale, after feathering round a growth of dry rushes for a few moments, gave a whimper, and along the bank he drove with the whole pack—barring the foxhounds, which, probably mindful of the trouble they had already experienced through running the hare, refused to work out a yard of the trail, but kept close to their huntsman's

heels—yowling and yapping for all, and more than, they were worth.

The fun was fast and furious while it lasted, and the manner in which the man of weight rode to the “flying pack” and wheezily cheered it on, in spite of ant-bear earths and other horse-traps with which in parts the veld was honeycombed, was refreshing to witness. At length “hounds” came to a check at the junction of a narrow but steep spruit with the river. Thinking it not improbable that the otter—I knew the quarry to be an otter from the way in which the mongrels worked—had taken to the smaller stream, I took the Airedale and half-a-dozen of the most likely “hounds,” among them the Kafirs, which, although wild as hawks, possessed wonderful noses, a short distance along the spruit, while Mervin tried forrard with the remainder.

The old Airedale once more proved a rattling good worker, and under the shelving bank he hunted until, with a whimper, he hit off the trail again, and then “hell for leather” forward, with the others close in his wake. With a “halloa” to Jack and the rest of the followers, only three of whom accompanied me, I “footed it” for all I knew to keep on terms with the “flying pack,” which ran eagerly enough, and at a pace that proclaimed a breast-high scent.

Suddenly a loud “Hieu gaze!” from a youngster, whose long legs enabled him to outstrip every one in the field, caused me to put on a spurt, and, looking forward, I saw a fine otter running under the far bank of the stream, about 300 yards ahead of the leading “hound.” In spite of the pitiable pack of mongrels which I was hunting, every nerve in my system quivered with excitement,

and how I longed for a few couples of good English otter-hounds at that moment. On and on ran the gallant animal, now on the level veld and now under the steep bank of the narrow waterway, and those weasel-barrelled Kafir hounds begin to press him, and the old Airedale holds his own with the best of them. The spruit begins to widen out and the quarry takes to the water, while "hounds," puzzled by the sudden disappearance of their game, come to a check, allowing Mervin and a few of the field to come up with the remainder of the yapping pack.

"Stickle the stream below! There he blows!" cried the leggy youngster, who came rushing towards Jack and me, pointing to a volume of bubbles rising to the surface from the depths of the turbid stream. The leggy youth, a West Countryman and no novice at the sport in hand, is right. The otter finds he has made a mistake in leaving the main stream, and tries to double back to it under cover of water. In a moment half-a-dozen of us are up to our breasts in water, hand in hand, and with our feet moving from side to side to stop the otter's passage.

The bobbery pack is now yapping all round us, some on the bank and some in the water, amongst the latter the three-legged spaniel.

"Hieu gaze!" holloas some one from the bank, as a lot of bubbles rise to the surface not a dozen yards away. "Begad! he touched my leg," cries the "centre link" of the stickle in a half-scared sort of manner.

A great swirl of the churned-up water as the otter—frightened by the moving array of legs—turns, tells us that "centre link" does not err in his statement.

“Hieu gaze! Begad, old three-legs has him.” But alas! the ancient spaniel has collared him too far astern, and the otter, turning, fastens on to his canine antagonist. The pair disappear from view into the muddy depths of the stream.

“For Heaven’s sake save my dog,” cries the “man of weight,” as he rolls out of the saddle and commences to run up and down the bank as though debating within himself as to whether he should dive into the spruit and rescue gallant old “three-legs.”

Suddenly the leggy youngster jumps into the stream, and, as the tip of the otter’s “rudder” appears above the surface of the water, he grasps the same, and the next moment, with a great swing, he flings both dog and otter on to the veld. Neither has relaxed its hold, but both are too done to show further fight.

It was not without a feeling of repugnance that I watched my bobbery pack worry the last spark of life out of their game quarry; but were I to say that I did not enjoy my first—and probably last—otter hunt on a South African river, I should scarcely speak the truth.

TIM O'LEARY'S HARE

THE little village of Longbally was gay with bunting, and a huge bonfire blazed on Raven's Hill, for the young Squire had returned to the home of his fathers that day after completing his education on the Continent. A brisk trade was being done at the "Egan Arms," where the members of the local pack of trencher-fed beagles had met to arrange the opening meet of the season, which was to take place on the following Saturday.

"An' is it thrué what ye tell us, Tim, that the young Squire has put his hand in his pocket and given five goulden sovereigns to the dogs?"

"An' why shouldn't it be thrué?" answered Timothy O'Leary, a veteran hare hunter of some fifty-five winters. "An' why shouldn't it be thrué, Mickey? Sure, an' you're dhrinkin' his honour's health out of that same five pounds this very minute as is; an' isn't it the illigant green coat wid the gilt buttons I've just been afther ordherin' wid Tim Daly, to lade the pack in for the Squire this saison?"

"An' did the Squire ordher you breeches to match?" asked one of the company.

"Did ye iver see a respectable huntsman in green breeches, ye gossoon?" replied Timothy scornfully, "One would think that ye grudged me the trifle for the coat, afther me tachin' ye all ye know about hare-huntin'."

“ Whisht, ye divils ! ” shouted Pat Lynch, Tim’s right-hand man in the field. “ Sure, we’ve got to fix the meet for next Saturday; let O’Leary look afther his colours himself.”

In the Longbally district hares were few and far between, as the estates were divided chiefly into small holdings, and hares, therefore, very naturally fell a prey to the guns of the tenants. Timothy consequently proposed that the opening meet should be held at Black Bog, a wide tract of sparsely populated moorland and swamp, which lay some six miles from the village of Longbally. This proposal met with the warm approval of the rustic sportsmen, as a good day’s hunting was assured by the fixture.

On the appointed day, Tim O’Leary, in all the glory of his new uniform, and surrounded by some seven or eight couples of nondescript hounds, from twenty-inch harriers down to the smallest of rabbit-beagles, started out of the village, pursued by the good-natured witticisms of every Biddy and Molly from her doorstep, to walk the six miles or so of steep road which lay between Longbally and Black Bog. Every now and again the old huntsman would wind a loud call on his battered horn whilst passing some cottage or small farm on the road, and at the sound a fresh addition to the pack would be seen making its way across country towards the slashing green coat.

So staunch were the hounds that day, and so fast the runs, that the young Squire’s initiation to beagling was attended with but little success in the way of gaining a knowledge of the art of hare-hunting. But upon taking

leave of Timothy and his companions, he expressed his warm appreciation of the sport they had shown him, and as a token of the same he handed Timothy the where-withal for him, and the rest of the followers of the Longbally Beagles, to christen the green coat. Right well did the jolly beaglers keep up the ceremony.

The bells of the picturesque old parish church of Longbally were calling the good folk to their morning devotions when Tim O'Leary, accompanied by a few other members of the hunt, and followed by several couples of jaded-looking hounds, made his way up the village street. The worthy huntsman's coat had lost much of its pristine splendour, and in spite of the fact that he had pulled the peak of his somewhat rusty velvet cap well over the left eye, he was unable to hide the dark halo which encircled that organ of sight. In short, Timothy and his friends had made "a night of it," while their good dames at home nursed their wrath, and on the arrival of their worthy spouses, they used their power of speech to some effect. The Sunday home-coming of the beaglers furnished scandal to the village gossips for days, to the detriment of the fair fame of the members of the hunt generally.

Some of the wiser heads amongst them, therefore, took counsel together, and used their influence that the next Saturday's meet should be well within the bounds of their own parish, not on the same grounds as before, as had been previously arranged. The younger members remonstrated: "There wasn't a single hare in the parish to hunt." But the babblers were speedily silenced and overawed by their elders.

“Whisht,” said Pat Lynch, “we’ve hunted before gossoons like ye iver saw the light, an’ here’s ould Tim O’Leary has raised (found) hares on land where larks looked big as turkeys, and where ye could have hunted an earwig from one march ditch to the other, for all the cover there was.”

The Squire was advised of the change of ground, and, acting up to his promise of the preceding week, he put in an appearance at the meet, which was at Hogan’s Cross Roads, and that day the inhabitants of Longbally heard the music of hounds within sound of their own doors.

Anxious to learn the craft of hare-hunting, young Egan stuck close to old Timothy, who had the reputation of knowing all that was to be learned in that particular branch of the chase.

Some likely-looking ground-cover on a scrubby hill-side was first tried, but this proved blank, and during the working of the hounds the young Squire was introduced to some astonishing facts relative to the haunts and habits of *Lepus hibernicus*, which it would be difficult to find in any work on natural history or sport.

A good hour was spent in drawing grassland, plough, roots, stubble, and rush-covered bottoms, all of which proved as blank as the hill-side. At length hounds were put into a large field of turnips, and they had not been at work many minutes when Pat Lynch, who, by some extraordinary means, had detached himself from the rest of the field, gave a “view-halloa!” from a far corner of the turnip-field. The pack, piloted by old “Doctor,” flew to the halloa, and no sooner were they on the line

than with a burst of music they streamed across the next field, while every man strove his utmost to outpace his fellow. The Squire was the first to negotiate the stiff, quick-set fence, with Timothy following close on his heels; nor were the other followers far behind, for all were keen as mustard. Over plough and fallow, springy turf, deeply rutted bramble-fringed lanes, high banks, and thorny hedges, led the chase, the racing of the little pack proclaiming a breast-high scent, and the music almost incessant.

Hell for leather ran the "field," but, run as they would, they were unable to keep on terms with hounds. "Ould Pat Lynch is in over the head in the big flax-hole beyont," cried one of the followers, with a guffaw, as O'Leary's bosom friend fell "neck over crop" into a foully-smelling flax-hole.

"Take thunderin' good care I don't sit beside him at supper, for he'll stink like an ould weasel," replied the man addressed; and on they went, seeing the unfortunate Pat had managed to pull himself safely to the bank.

For twenty-five minutes did that little pack of beagles run without a check, and almost as straight as though their quarry was a fox, so straight, indeed, that some of the older hands began to wonder of what nature the hunted game would prove to be at the death. No one entertained the smallest doubt that hounds would gain their blood; "Trust ould Tim for that."

"Gamest ould hare as iver run," said one man enthusiastically to a neighbour, as he panted and pounded across a heavy plough, a good quarter of a mile behind the sterns of the flying pack.

"Aye, by me sowl," responded another, "she's the divil of a long-winded one, an' niver a view iv' her yet, begob."

"An' niver did I run wid a sweeter 'cry' iv dogs; musha, God bless the darlints!" cried a third.

The words were scarcely uttered than hounds came to an abrupt check on the banks of a small osier-fringed brook, utterly at fault, and unable to puzzle out another yard of the line. The welcome check allowed the Squire, Timothy O'Leary, and those of the followers who had managed to "stay the burst," to come up.

"Three good miles as the crow flies, the divil a foot less. Did iver ye know a hare run so straight in all your life, Tim?" asked McLoughlin, the village cobbler, as he mopped his bald head with the tail of his checked woollen shirt, which, in the scurry across country, had managed to work itself free from the grip of the leathern belt that he used to keep up his nether garments.

"She must be off her pad" (*i.e.*, out of her habitat), explained O'Leary, with decided confidence.

"Begorra, she is, Tim," added Pat Lynch, who came up at that moment, clothed in a coating of the blackest and most unsavoury mud imaginable. "An' she'll never be on it again wanst we've done wid her."

O'Leary lost no time in getting to work again, and, making a cast forward, he very soon had his hounds on the line once more. His skill as a huntsman was warmly applauded by his admirers.

"Takes oud Timothy yet," proudly remarked one of the field to Pat Lynch.

"An' if he couldn't, who could?" retorted Pat.

"Didn't his ould father before him break his leg jumping a ditch afther the hounds, an' didn't he sit down that very minute on the bank an' splice it, and then, begorra, he was in at the death?"

"Go along, Patsey, wid your blarney; ye got out iv the flax-hole the wrong side this morning."

"Sure, an' it was a wooden leg he had," slyly added Pat, as he sailed away in the wake of the pack as fast as his waterlogged condition would allow. On and on raced the pack, harder than before, in a catch-us-who-can sort of style, the weedy harriers outpacing and stringing away far ahead of their smaller cousins, the beagles. Not a few of the short-winded or less game members of the "field" began to lag perceptibly; but, possibly spurred on by the idea of a second "christening," at the expense of the Squire, never a one threw up the sponge.

Old Timothy, closely followed by the Squire, was ever in the van, and every now and again the ear-piercing "Forrard! forrard! forrard! me darlints," of the veteran would be heard above the music of the hounds.

At length the line began to ring somewhat, and some of the followers declared that the hare would shortly double back to her "pad" again. The swing taken by hounds was but small, however, and up hill and down dale they flew, pointing for a small whitewashed farm-house, which lay nestling amongst a cluster of thatched barns and outhouses about a quarter of a mile ahead. Suddenly the report of a gun rang out, and, upon hearing the sound Tim O'Leary cried, "Come on, boys; that ould divil,

Tom Cassidy, is up to his poachin' thricks again, an' I'll warrant he has popped our hare."

Helter-skelter ran the crowd of puffing, mud-soiled hare-hunters, yelling vengeance against Cassidy, "the cursed pot-hunter," and as they approached the homestead there, surely enough, stood the hated farmer on the topmost rungs of a stock-ladder, pouring out curses on the heads of the Longbally Beagles, which were baying at the foot of his haven of refuge.

"Come down, ye murderin' thief; come down and bring the hare ye killed this very minute as is, or I'll shake ye off your perch to feed the hounds," cried Timothy, violently shaking the ladder.

Without answering a word, the red-headed, foxy-looking husbandman descended from the rick, and then, surrounded by a score of angry, panting men, and with the hounds jumping excitedly all round him, he pulled forth from the pocket of his fustian coat an old charred boot, a dead rat, and a tattered red herring, well anointed with aniseed, and attached to a long length of twine.

"That's the only hare *I've* set eyes on this day, and you're welcome to it, Tim O'Leary, and it's one iv your own poachin', too, for it's meself saw ye layin' the thrail wid it this morning," grinningly remarked Cassidy, as he handed to the astonished and, we might add, outwitted huntsman the damning "drag."

O'Leary was too taken aback to answer a word, and for several moments he stood gazing vacantly at the "bundle of tricks," which he still held in his hand.

"And that's the animal whose habits you were teaching me all about so carefully this morning, O'Leary?"

exclaimed the Squire, pointing to the drag, with a look of disgust. "Is that the quarry we've been running our legs off after for the last two hours? Timothy, you are a disgrace to your uniform."

"An' so he is, your honour," cried the rest of the beaglers in a breath. No sooner were the words uttered than Timothy O'Leary was borne down by a score of his late admirers and boon companions, and, although the veteran fought tooth and nail to save the green coat, it was torn into a hundred pieces, and a strange figure did he cut with his bare arms sticking out beyond several inches of coarse Irish lace and linen.

"An' it's the illigant shirt you have on to-day, Tim, wid the beautiful lace where the sleeves ought to be," roared one of the rioters.

"An' it's the illigant lot iv blackguards ye are to tear the coat off the back of the man that learned yez how to lay on the best 'cry iv dogs' in the conthry," replied Timothy, not too anxious to discuss the subject of his linen.

"Musha lave off about the coat, Tim, that's past prayin' for; sure, it's the foine shirt we're admirin'."

"An' if I wasn't a sportsman out and out, d'ye think I'd be afther wearin' the ould 'ooman's? Didn't I pledge me own to back Joe Murphy's 'Betsy' for the Longbally steeplechase? Och! you're a disthressin' set o' villains altogether," cried O'Leary, as he stood shivering and abashed at the unexpected exposure of his underwear.

O'Leary was made to undergo the further penance of being "chaired" on the shoulders of his fellow hare-

hunters to the "Egan Arms" with the savoury "drag" hanging gracefully round his neck. Great was the joy of the villagers who flocked into the street to swell the procession on its way to the hostelry, where the "wake" of the green coat was kept up as fervently as was the "christening."

POTTERING

“COME, old lady, let us go and potter.”

These words were addressed to an old Cocker spaniel bitch who for a number of seasons past has been my good friend and trusty servant, and who upon this dull October morning is to accompany me round the boundaries of a certain shoot amidst the Chiltern Hills.

“Jet” clearly understands what is going forward, for she lays at my feet an old rustic hat which I am wont to wear a-gunning or angling, and which is ornamented with bedraggled-looking artificial flies of various patterns—March Browns, Pheasant Tails, Alders, *et hoc*. Dropping a few Nos. 6 and 7 shot cartridges into the pocket of my coat—my better-half declares I commandeered the dear old garment from some scarecrow—I take a 12-bore gun, and with “Jet” twisting her short black barrel almost into knots with delight, set out with the intention of killing a brace of “hedgerow” pheasants.

The way to the shooting leads through an orchard, one side of which is flanked by a high and thick quick-set fence—a sure find for a rabbit. With a backward glance over one shoulder as though to say, “Look out, master, and I’ll hustle out a bunny for you!” “Jet” disappears into the hedgerow. Ere many minutes have passed, an excited little whimper from the old bitch

puts me on the alert. The whimper is followed by a dash amidst the undergrowth of the hedge, and out darts a rabbit, offering a very pretty snapshot as he flashes through the foliage of the trailing bramble vines *en route* to a friendly bolt-hole. But that nimble rabbit is too quick for me, and before I have time to salute him he has taken sanctuary. "Jet," hot on his line, now shows herself from amidst the tangle of bramble scrub, and, having satisfied herself that the rabbit has "gone to earth," she looks up at me with a puzzled and disappointed expression in her liquid-brown eyes, and as though asking why I had failed to execute my part of the contract.

The old Cocker works every inch of the orchard hedgerow, in many places a thorny jungle of briars and brambles, through which nothing but her extraordinary love of hunting would force her to hunt. But mark how she "feathers" among the fir saplings in the corner of the orchard, her stump of a tail revolving like the propeller of a steamer! She is on feather, not fur, this time. A swishing of the stump from side to side is an infallible sign of hare or rabbit, while a rapid circumrotary motion of what remains of her caudal appendage indicates feathered game of some kind. In this case it tells of the presence of an old and somewhat disreputable-looking cock pheasant, which rises from a patch of coarse herbage with a great amount of fuss and "cocketting." I strongly suspect the bird to be a wanderer from a neighbouring game-farm; but, whether he be or not, he finds not his way into my bag, and leaves but two or three scapular feathers behind him. Again does "Jet" look at me in reproachful

surprise, and I doubt not she imagines me uncommonly slack this morning.

Braving the very remote possibility of my worthy landlord prosecuting me for damaging his hedge to the extent of one halfpenny, I enlarge a gap in the same and enter a big wheat stubble. The sun now emerges from the bank of leaden clouds behind which he has been sulking since early morning. What a vast difference does a little sunshine make to either man and beast ! Half-an-hour ago it was a "toss up with a button" as to whether I remained at home or took out a gun for a stroll in search of a brace of "little brown birds" or wild pheasants. Now that the sun is shining, however, I feel like "beating the boundaries" from point to point, while my four-footed companion also seems to appreciate the belated but thrice-welcome visit of King Sol.

That time and labour-saving invention, the self-binding and reaping machine, has shorn the stubble well-nigh as close as a cheap German barber crops the heads of his customers. One does not, therefore, expect game to lie like the proverbial stones in such sparse ground-cover as this. Nevertheless, a covey of twelve well-grown birds are flushed from the headland of the field, and within easy range, a few minutes after I have forced a passage through the before-mentioned gap. How I managed to miss with the first barrel will ever remain a mystery to me, for it was an absurdly simple shot; but miss I did, and only succeeded in "winging" one of the old birds with the second. The "runner" sprints into a ditch half-filled with water and overgrown with brambles. "Jet" very quickly brings it to hand,

however, still alive, but wet and bedraggled from its immersion in the muddy drain—a very poor beginning, especially as the eleven birds remaining have crossed over to the adjoining land, upon which I have not the sporting rights. Better luck next time, perhaps.

A second covey rises from near the headland, but a good two gunshots distant from me. The birds settle in the centre of a patch of late and still standing oats, and, having marked them down, I have perforce to leave them there. Near one corner of the wheat stubble lies a small reed-fringed pond, and, with the intention of affording the old spaniel an opportunity of hunting for a moorhen, I take her over to the place. Scarcely has "Jet" entered the clump of sedges than, to my surprise, a bunch of five wild duck spring therefrom. In less time than it takes to record the fact, a couple are floating on the weedy surface of the pond paddles upward, while a third duck, after carrying on bravely for some little distance, flutters on to the stubble and commences to waddle towards the nearest hedgerow. "Jet" retrieves the dead ones from the water in good style, and then starts off in pursuit of the cripple and brings it to hand as tenderly as though she loved it. The finding of those mallard proved a very pleasant surprise, for during the several seasons I have exploited the shooting in question, never a feather of more importance than a moorhen or dabchick have I seen on the pond. I more than half suspect that the duck strayed from some neighbouring farm, as the majority of the farmers in the district rear a few mallard by hand, and even hand-reared wild duck will wander.

While I am in the act of stowing away the broad bills

in the "poaching pocket" of my much maligned coat, Mistress "Jet," who has been working round the margin of the pond on her own account, suddenly gives tongue. Looking over my shoulder, I view a thumping hare loping over the ground, and, to my horror, "Jet"—that sedate and steady old matron of eight seasons—just starting off in pursuit. My cry of "'Ware chase!" pulls her up short, and she comes slinking back, stump down, and looking thoroughly ashamed. Remembering it is the old lady's first day out with the gun this season, I do not rate her too severely, and off we go again on our quiet potter.

For some little time after the passing of the hare, nothing, with the exception of a rabbit which gets away unscathed, is met with.

At length we arrive at the apex of a triangular-shaped enclosure of rough, knee-high bents interspersed with firs and other young trees. "Hie in, good bitch! Steady!" and old "Jet" crawls through the low posts and rails that enclose the plantation, and commences to work the rank ground-cover up-wind. With a loud and startling "whirr," up gets a nide of seven pheasants, so near to me that I notice how forward in plumage two of the young cocks are. Five of the "long-tails"—their "steering-gear" is remarkably well developed—go on their way rejoicing, while the brace of young cocks in question come crashing through the firs, to the evident delight of the Cocker, whose dusky, satin-like head is just visible above the bents.

A few minutes later "Jet" puts up a well-grown leveret, and, although the black of her lugs are the only portion of her anatomy showing above the cover, I

manage to bowl her over with the contents of my first barrel. Not wishing to burden myself with an extra five or six pounds of dead weight, Miss Lepus is laid on a bed of dry rushes to be called for on the return journey.

An overhead double shot is next attempted at a wood-pigeon passing high over the rich, autumnal-tinted foliage of a belt of giant beech trees. Result : A brace of clean misses.

“ But what is ‘ Jet ’ on to now. Steady old girl, steady ! ” A barren old redleg, begad, running before the excited dog at a deuce of a bat, and “ Jet ” half-inclined to chase again ! Up gets the old sinner at a good fifty yards’ range, but $1\frac{1}{8}$ oz. of “ No. 6 chilled ” proves too heavy a dose for the “ Frenchman,” and he doubles up instanter.

“ Hallo, here comes the rain ! Well, we’ll call this a morning’s work, old lady ! ”

THE PUNCHPUDDLE HUNT

I

IN the Punchpuddle Hunt there are tinkers and tailors
And rich men and poor men of every degree ;
There are beggarmen, thieves, there are soldiers and sailors
The only thing lacking's a Labour M.P. ;
There are butchers and bakers (old men with new acres),
And of sportsmen—at times—a stray couple or three.
Oh, happier far with a duckgun and punt
Were the Nimrods that follow The Punchpuddle Hunt !

II

See The Punchpuddle Hunt on "The Walnuts" converging,
The seat of Sir Solomon Ikestein (we'll say),
Through villages surging, from stations emerging,
The high-roads and by-roads with scarlet are gay.
On covert-hacks spurring, in motor-cars whirring,
In hundreds they flock to the breakfast to-day.
The steeds of the Ikestein are turned in the stalls ;
The ancestor Ikesteins leer down from the walls ;
On the chairs in the halls are the famous Three Balls,
Or, on a field *sable* ; while yonder the table
Is groaning beneath a repast that appals.
Oh, the food and the drink and the roads bear the brunt
Of the damage that's done by the Punchpuddle Hunt !

III

See the Punchpuddle Hunt on the terrace assembling,
 All swelling and pompous and ripe for the fray.
 How the horses are jostling and wincing and trembling
 As they push to the front of the motley *mêlée*.
 See the head carried high,
 See the crop-hand on thigh,
 For the local photographer's busy to-day.
 It is done : they are off to the Ilkestein plantations—
There's a fox, goes the song, in the spinney, they
say ;
 " Eleu, in ! " and the whips hurry down to their stations ;
 " Tally-ho ! " from the laurels—the fox is away !
 View-haloes are pealing ; yes, there he goes stealing,
 His pads full of sawdust, his brush full of hay.
 O'er the tennis-lawn sailing, he slips through the paling,
 And a strong scent of aniseed clings to the clay.
 With the dog-pack behind and a bagman in front,
 See the charge down the drive of The Punchpuddle Hunt !

IV

See, The Punchpuddle Hunt on the gravel are striding
 Away to the lodge-gate as straight as a die.
 The huntsman is riding : the field-master's chiding :
 And behind them, amongst them, the hounds in full cry.
 At the lodge one cries, " Whoa ! "
 And again, " Tally-ho ! "
 There's the fox ringing back to his crate in the sty ! "
 Through a gate on the right throng the gallant first flight,
 And the wily one crossing the orchard they spy.

On the musical grey
And the collar-marked bay
And the job-master's hack that goes out every day,
Feet home, shoulders up, through the meadows they fly,
Under branches low-hung and through gates widely swung
Till a ragged, black bullfinch looms hairy and high.
Right round to the left see the multitude swerving,
For yonder goes Reynard the bold and the sly—
Ah, right in the line is a vision unnerving,
A grim, four-foot drain, terror-striking—though dry !
So they circle like birds, using horrible words,
As they search for the bridge which they hope to be nigh ;
Save a youth on the roan with a will of its own ;
See him rise to the sky : hear him yelling “ Almigh—! ”
See him cling to the saddle and land with a grunt—
'Tis the “ Hard-riding Dick ” of The Punchpuddle Hunt !

v

Oh, The Punchpuddle Hunt are unflinching, untiring !
Three times round the house at full gallop they sail,
Red, panting, perspiring—domestics admiring—
Already the leaders are catching the tail.
Three times has the fox
Had a try for his box,
And three times have they headed him off with a pail,
And now through the meadows once more he is slinking,
Since attempts at the pigsty in nowise avail ;
He's right back for Leadenhall, beaten and sinking ;
He'll run the embankment—he came down by rail.
“ Tally-ho ! ” in the lane ;
He'll be crossing that drain !

There's the governess waving with might and with main,
See her walking-stick thumping his back like a flail !
The hounds in full cry close behind him are tearing ;
His limbs seem to totter, his lungs seem to fail ;
He leaps for the bank with an effort despairing,
And into a rabbit-hole creeps like a snail.
The spade and the pick get him out double-quick ;
" Who-hoop ! " and the bagman is dead as a nail.
" Forty-five of the best. Now for luncheon and rest ;
And let Leicestershire envy and Lincolnshire quail ! "
(Oh, a three-leggèd fox and the words " *Quid prosunt ?* "
Should be motto and crest for The Punchpuddle Hunt !)



“JET : A GOOD TYPE OF RETRIEVER ”

[To face p. 76

THE HIRED GUN-DOG

“WHERE can I hire a really well-broken and reliable retriever or spaniel? I can spare but a couple of weeks in September away from business, and have arranged to spend my brief holiday among the partridges. If the dog suited me I might purchase it.” A somewhat difficult question to reply to is this. Glance through the advertisement columns of the sporting journals, and you will see any number of gun-dogs advertised for sale, and in many cases a trial is offered prior to the purchase being completed. There are also several professional dog breakers and owners in the kingdom, especially in the North, who advertise well-trained dogs for hire during the shooting season. In some cases, without doubt, these people do own and hire out to their clients reliable dogs, or teams of dogs, which perform all that is required of them, more especially when in charge of an experienced man whom the dogs know, and who understands how to work them. On the other hand, hundreds of so-called steady and well-broken sporting dogs advertised for sale and hire are absolutely useless and worthy of nothing better than a dose of shot; wild, hard-mouthed brutes, which will chase anything wearing fur or feathers, mouth the entrails out of everything they retrieve, run in and flush game far out of range—in short, play the very deuce generally, to the utter detriment of sport and temper alike.

There is an ancient axiom which runs something as follows : " Lend not your dog, gun, or wife to a friend " —perchance I have misquoted, and the wife should be given the place of honour among the trio. In such case may I crave forgiveness from readers of the fair sex? Now it seems to me a vast amount of wisdom and good advice is embodied in that old saw. Be this as it may, I for one would consider long and earnestly before lending either one or the other to my very dearest friend even. Setting aside both wife and gun, precious few sportsmen with a true regard for their pointers, setters, retrievers, or spaniels would hire out their dogs to strangers, I think.

No two men handle a gun-dog precisely alike, and an incalculable amount of harm may be done to a dog within a very short space of time at the hands of a duffer. In many cases the hired sporting dog will have travelled a long distance by rail, and arrives at his destination half scared to death with the unwonted noise and bustle of the journey, besides being half famished from lack of food and water. He is then taken in tow by a perfect stranger—a lad, perchance, who regards an ash plant as being the best and only true remedy for canine timidity, and doses his charge liberally enough with the same—and kennelled in surroundings which are absolutely strange and new to him. Next day, in company with others of his kind, who resent his presence as a stranger and " rag " him accordingly, the unfortunate alien is taken into the field, and great things are expected of him by his new, albeit temporary, owner. The poor creature's heart is with his old master, however, whose voice and methods are so different to those of the new man, who, by-the-bye, has scarcely bestowed a word upon him

since his arrival the preceding evening. Besides, he has not yet quite recovered from the effects of his long journey by train, and is far more fit for the kennel than the field. Under such conditions the hired dog—or any other dog for that matter—be he never so good, will not work, and long before the day's sport is over he will have been roundly anathematised as a skulking, useless brute, which ought to be "peppered" to save other unsuspecting shooters from being similarly victimised. Well, the chances are that the value of the hireling as a gun-dog is rather less than that of a "pepper-caster" in the shape of a 12-bore cartridge, otherwise he would not have found his way down to Mr. Eastcheap's manor. But even had he been the most perfectly-trained dog ever whelped, ten to one he would not, under the circumstances suggested, have shown himself in anything approaching his true colours. Very few dogs will work even moderately well with strange "guns," and any sportsman who has had *practical* experience will be willing to admit that no two dogs of precisely similar characteristics and temperament ever came under his notice. In this respect the canine race resemble their human masters, and—tell it gently—we have met with more than one dog that was gifted with common intelligence of a higher order than was his owner. But let it be clearly understood that in neither instance did the intelligent creature belong to us.

One of the steadiest and best working Cocker spaniels we ever shot over was of such jealous disposition that he would not hunt one inch of ground if another dog happened to be in the same field or covert with him, and upon an opportunity occurring he would give his rival a thundering good trouncing on the quiet. When alone, old Jock was

as good an all-round dog as one would wish to shoot over, but with other dogs in the field, the most useless and jealous brute imaginable. What would have been the probable result had we sent that particular spaniel out on hire without fully explaining his peculiar traits? Simply this: The dog would have been returned as absolutely useless and its owner dubbed an infernal impostor for having hired him out as a reliable gun-dog. A number of years have flown by since our good and faithful servant Jock departed to "the happy hunting-grounds." We have owned and trained not a few dogs since then, and have discovered some peculiarly interesting traits, good and bad, in well-nigh every individual animal taken in hand. We repeat that the hired gun-dog usually proves "a snare and a delusion." As before mentioned, however, there are a few kennels from which good working dogs may be obtained at reasonable rates—*anything* cheap is generally nasty—per week, month or season, as required. Any one who wishes to hire a gun-dog would be well advised in requesting the editor of one of the sporting journals to furnish him with the name of an owner or breaker of good repute. Having hired your dog, grant him a fair chance and sufficient time to become used to you and to his new habitat. Do not take the poor creature into the shooting-field the day after his arrival in your kennel and then return him as useless because, forsooth, he does not work to your satisfaction. Rather try him round the boundaries of your shooting with a gun in the first place, and by so doing you will very soon learn whether he be of any use or not.

DOWN ON THE SALT-MARSHES

It was still a good hour before sunrise when the curlew-like whistle of old Jasper Collins, the professional wildfowler, prompted me to hurry over my toilette. Candle in hand, I groped my way down the narrow staircase of the small, old-fashioned hostelry which forms my head-quarters when I go a-fowling. A glass of fortified milk and a biscuit furnished an ample breakfast for me at such an early hour of the morning, but the old gunner gave preference to a pint of purl (a villainous concoction of beer and rum stirred with a bunch of wormwood, but held in high esteem by marshmen and fenmen) and a "mossel o' cold spotted-dog puddin'." Then we clattered up the narrow, crooked street, the iron-studded soles of our heavy tuck-boots playing the Devil's tattoo on the time-worn cobblestones.

"Wind be roight, tide be roight. But do 'ee knock out that flamin' fowl-scarin' pipe o' yourn, maister, afore we reaches the wall!" ejaculated my companion as we neared the high embankment, beyond which lay the salt-marshes.

Jasper, though by no manner of means a teetotaler, is wont to vote the smoking of tobacco "a masterful disgustin' habit." But, truth to tell, he retires to rest with a goodly plug of the soothing and aromatic herb

deftly stowed away in one cheek, rises in the morning with a chunk in the other, and so chops and changes from cheek to cheek throughout the day. But smoke a pipe—nay! The very idea is hurtful to Jasper Collins.

Notwithstanding that the morning is as black as the proverbial hat, the old marshman pilots me across the drain-intersected saltings to a gunning-pit, sunk in a patch of salt-marsh lying near the mouth of a small tidal creek, with almost as much ease as though it were broad daylight. Recent high spring tides have left the duck-hole half-full of sea-water and rubbish, and with a "Do you hode the shootin'-irons while Oi diddle out t' owd duck-hole," my companion sets to work to bail out the superfluous water with a superannuated bucket, which is prevented from floating away on the rising tide by a length of cod-line fastened to one of the mouldering timbers of the gunning-pit.

Old Jasper is not long occupied in dipping dry the hole, and bidding me "'Bide patient a diddy while," he pays a visit to a straw-stack on the adjacent marsh, and very soon returns with a bulky bundle of clean wheat straw under either arm. Then, having lined the duck-hole with the "borrowed" litter, he once more disappears into the darkness, this time to take possession of a second gunning-pit further across the salt-marshes, declaring the while that I should be as warm and comfortable as "a caddler (jackdaw) in a chimbley corner." Personally, I feel more inclined to vote my temporary retreat as being unpleasantly moist and uncomfortable in the extreme. A piercingly cold nor'-easter comes howling in from the main to search out every nook and corner of the unsheltered levels, and, though the greater

portion of my anatomy is sheltered below the surface of the surrounding salt-marshes, the wind blows round my head most icily.

The roar of the serf on the treacherous sand-bar, and the dancing of the will-o'-the-wisp-like lights of weather-bound sailing craft anchored in the ship roads, tell of a heavy sea running in the main. Ever and anon the weird, far-ranging cry of the curlew and redshank, the plaintive call of the ring-plover and lapwing, and the curious bleat of a bar-tailed godwit are heard from the ooze-banks lying beyond the fringe of saltings; while the distant, hound-like clanging of a herd of grey geese passing inland comes down to my tingling ears from high up amongst the clouds.

At length the grey streaks which herald the advent of dawn begin to appear on the eastern horizon, and the dancing lights of the shipping grow dim and pale as darkness slowly but surely gives place to the uncertain light of "peep o' day." Very soon now will the flight commence, and, standing my old 12-bore in a corner of the pit, I anxiously await the coming of anything wearing feathers and worthy powder and shot.

"Swish—swish—swish!"—a bunch of mallard flash past the old duck-hole, and I obtain a momentary glimpse of a number of hazy forms winging seaward at something approaching one hundred miles per hour. But ere I can get my gun up the ducks are out of danger.

Well, better luck next time! Nor am I kept long in suspense, for following close in the wake of the mallard comes a "spring" of teal, flying low and clean over my hide. The "Normalis" in the old gun awakens the slumbering echoes of the marshes. The report of the

second barrel is replied to by a splash in a neighbouring swidge—a sure token that one at least of the teal is down; and, lest it should be crippled and able to harbour amongst the dense growth of saltwort, or in some friendly gully, I lose no time in gathering it.

From time to time the report of Jasper's antiquated 8-bore comes booming across the salt-marshes. Nothing worthy a cartridge comes within range of my "lay up," however, and I begin to think that a solitary teal may prove the sole occupant of my game-bag at the close of the morning flight. But luck sometimes falls to the lot of the shore-shooter when he least expects it, and in this case luck takes the form of a small bunch of tufted duck, which come swinging over the salts at a great racket, and heading straight for the gunning-pit. On and on come the "tufties," swerving neither right-handed nor left, and travelling at astonishing speed on their short but powerful wings. The leader is now within shot, and a dose of No. 3 sends him hurtling into a bed of saltwort, while one of his fellows, after a halting flight across the salts for a distance of some 200 yards or so, crumples up like an old glove and drops with a splash, that is heard from the gunning-pit, into a small gully, and I am compelled to pull my high boots well up before venturing to wade in and retrieve the duck.

The golden spears of the rising sun now scintillate upon the horizon, and very soon the eastern heavens are one blaze of colour—gold and scarlet, burnished copper and turquoise-blue, rose and crimson—and the rising, foam-flecked tide is transformed into a veritable painted ocean. The sea-walls no longer appear like leaden clouds against the skyline, but are high, grassy escarp-

ments of solid and unvarying structure; while stunted trees and thorn-bushes on the contiguous marshes lose the grotesque forms which they assume under the pale beams of the moon and in the uncertain light of early morning. The dawn of a stormy day is here; the morning flight is finished.

HELD UP

TIMES in the Golden City were just about as bad as they could well be, for a dead slump had fallen among the Rand, and day by day fresh stories of crime and outrage were rehearsed in police court, club, and drinking saloon.

Among the most eagerly sought after of all "quarry" by "gentlemen of the road" were the treasurers or paymasters of gold mines and other persons holding similar positions of trust in outlying districts. The veld-bandit's mode of procedure was as follows: Having ascertained the date upon which the wages of a certain gold mine or factory were paid, he, accompanied by an accessory—or, perchance, half-a-dozen—would follow on the heels of the victim as he drove into the Golden City by Cape cart or buggy to draw from the bank the monthly wages for the employees of his mine or factory, as the case might be. The unfortunate man would, of course, be "shadowed" during his visit to the town, and as he drove along some quiet spot on the veld on his return journey he would suddenly be "held up," relieved of not only the specie in his charge, but also of every "tickey" (*3d.*) and article of value he happened to carry on his person. He would then be gagged, bound hand and foot, and left on the open veld, or in some eucalyptus or mimosa plantation, prospecting pit, or any other convenient dumping-place

contiguous to the scene of the outrage, until some passing Samaritan, white or black, happened to stumble over him. The jehu would be meted out the same kind of treatment as his master; but, being a native, he would receive sundry "cuffs" and "shinnings" to boot, while his equine charges, if not shot dead during the early stages of the proceedings, were released from the vehicle, and allowed to roam at their own sweet will, for clip, dock, or alter the general appearance of a South African horse as you will, the animal still remains an uncomfortable incubus to the man who "jumps" it.—The brand-marks give the game away.

These robberies on the high veld usually proved entirely successful, so much so indeed that the "man in the street" began to suspect—and even to hint—that more than one of the "held up" treasurers deserved also to be "hauled up" as *accessories before the fact*.

On the other hand, however, these gentlemen of the veld occasionally met with a Tartar, as this sketch will presently show.

A certain young Britisher who had tried his hand at almost everything under the African sun, without "setting the Thames—or rather the Vaal—on fire," at length obtained a surface billet on one of the principal gold mines on the Rand. Z's duties were by no means arduous, and, being a fine horseman and devoted to Nature and sport, he spent much of his leisure time in the saddle and in studying the *fauna* and *flora* of the veld. A boon companion and an excellent raconteur, Z was a general favourite, and although of a somewhat wild, devil-may-care nature he always managed to scrape out of his peccadilloes with a certain amount of *éclat*, and no dance or

dinner, christening or burying, was complete unless he made one of the party.

Amongst Z's many friends and acquaintances was Mr. X, the treasurer of the mine, and the official who paid Z his hardly-earned (?) monthly "screw."

There being no railway available, X had perforce to travel to Johannesburg by road whenever called upon to visit that city of gold and dust and hustle. Day by day the news of some murder or robbery on the veld and in the town reached the ears of the treasurer, and he invited Z, over a glass of grog, to accompany him on his next visit to Johannesburg, casually mentioning the while that the object of his mission was to bring back money from the bank for the working expenses of the mine. Scenting a good luncheon at the club, Z accepted the invitation with alacrity, for to tell the truth he was a bit of an epicure.

The morning of what was to prove an exciting day for Z and the treasurer at length came round, and shortly after ten o'clock a.m. off they started in a Cape cart drawn by a pair of upstanding "Free Staters"; a Cape boy, rejoicing in the name of Ticky, acting the part of jehu.

The eight-mile journey into town proved uneventful enough, and having partaken of lunch at the club, a large sum of money in gold and silver was drawn from the Standard Bank, packed in bags, and stowed away. Then the return journey was begun.

Johannesburg left behind; the rough boulder-strewn road ran along the base of a short range of rugged kopjes, while on the other hand extended a wide expanse of level veld interspersed with clumps of stunted acacias

and wait-a-bit thorn, and flanked by a second range of hills.

The little treasurer and his companion had not proceeded far along the valley before their attention was attracted by a couple of horsemen who, although but mere specks upon the veld when first sighted, by dint of making a detour at a hand-gallop, very soon approached to within almost hailing distance of the Cape cart, and then rode parallel and a little in advance of the vehicle. As both men were mounted on good-looking ponies, and there being a stable of racing ponies and galloways in the neighbourhood, Z took but small notice of the strangers, imagining that they had been running off a trial. The momentary glint of steel in the brilliant rays of the afternoon sun, however, warned Z that at least one of the men was armed with either a rifle or shot gun; and turning to his companion he said, "Don't like the look of those chaps very much."

The paymaster did not appear to grasp the import of Z's laconic speech, and turned to the latter for enlightenment. Being quite fearless himself, Z did not notice that the treasurer's naturally sallow complexion gradually assumed an ashy-grey tint, as he (Z) blurted out, "They mean to 'hold us up' or I'm a Dutchman. You'd better get out the pistols."

Notwithstanding that the mere *idea* of being "held up" had, but a few evenings previously, given X a severe attack of "nerves," he had neglected to arm either Z or himself with any fire-arms of more importance than a brace of army revolvers of antiquated pattern, which, in the hands of any one but an expert pistol-shot, were just about as harmless, if fired at anything smaller than

a barn-door standing at more than fifteen yards range from the firer, as a couple of boy's pea-shooters. But to hark back to our friends on the veld.

With a hand which was anything but steady, the treasurer gave Z one of the revolvers, and the latter, having ascertained that all six chambers of the weapon were loaded, dropped it into the side pocket of his jacket, ready to handle at a moment's notice. The Cape cart had by this time been driven to within a couple of miles of its destination, and realising that if the horsemen—who, by-the-bye, kept in pretty close attendance—meant business the only possible chance of escaping them lay in making a dash for the mine, the high smoke-stacks and head-gears of which were now visible above the brow of a steep incline that had to be negotiated by the cart ere assistance and safety could be hoped for. Z ordered the driver to "spring" his horses gradually, and, in the event of the men ahead pulling up, to gallop them as hard as they could lay hoofs to ground.

Scarcely was the order given than the bandits—for such they proved themselves to be—put spurs to their ponies, crossed the road some 500 yards ahead of the Cape cart, and, having gained a cluster of outcrops, one of them dismounted, threw his bridle-reins to his confederate (who remained in the saddle with the lower part of his face hidden in a bandana), and, taking cover behind a high outcrop, he commenced "pumping" out lead at Z and his unhappy companion with a repeating rifle.

The first two bullets went wide of the mark, albeit they whistled unpleasantly near the ears of the human targets. Z urged the driver—who stuck manfully to his

box—to set his pair going at their utmost speed. The cart was now within seventy yards' range of the bandits, and while bullets began to rain round the vehicle—the body of the cart was hit in several places—Z discharged all six chambers of his revolver at the men behind the outcrops, needless to say without doing the smallest hurt to either. Fortunately the man with the rifle was but a very poor shot, otherwise not a soul aboard the cart could have escaped his bullets. Then, again, he was but a tyro at the gentle art of “holding up,” or he would have first turned his attention and rifle to the horses, and, having killed or maimed one of them, the travellers would have been more or less at his mercy.

On galloped the scared horses until the cluster of outcrops was almost abreast, when the near side one stumbled on to his knees. The gallant animal was up in a moment, however, and at break-neck speed the swaying, bumping vehicle passed the outcrops and began to ascend the incline leading to the mine, while a number of men both mounted and afoot, who had heard the firing, came rushing pell-mell towards the flying Cape cart.

Suddenly, with a groan, the near side “Free Stater” gave a great plunge forward and pitched on to his head, bringing the other horse down also, and depositing the driver into a shallow but particularly foul refuse drain which ran in close proximity to the road. The animal had been shot through the lungs, but, spurred on by fear, had managed to gallop to the foot of the hill before lying down to die.

Although the “quarry” was still close at hand, the bandits saw that the game was up. Clambering into the saddle, the highwayman and his lieutenant put

spurs to their horses and were soon but mere dots on the arid veld. Chase was given, and for some little time the fugitives were kept in view by the half-dozen or so men on horseback who formed the pursuing party. But the scoundrels had a long start, were well mounted, and got clean away.

Thanks to the pluck of Z and the Cape boy, not one "tickey" of the treasure was lost during that exciting drive, but as to whether X ever again ventured upon a similar mission during his official connection with the — Mine is very questionable.

THE DERELICT—AN EX-TRANSPORT RIDER'S STORY

" I'M a thundering bad hand at spinning a yarn, boys," said Conway Barton to half-a-dozen young Templers who had raided his chambers for a chat, a whisky and soda, and a cigar; " but as you have each in turn been trying your hardest to outlie the late lamented Baron Munchausen, I suppose I must have a shot also. So here goes.

" You all remember poor old Jack Mortimore of the I.L.H., who was laid low on Spion Kop. Well, shortly after the last Matabele row, when supplies in Bulawayo were at famine price, Jack and I went down to Johannesburg and sunk what few hundreds we were able to beg and borrow in mules, buck-wagons, and provisions. We decided to trek through Pretoria and Pietersburg and across the Limpopo instead of taking the usual route *via* Mafeking. All went as merrily as marriage bells until we got well into the low country, when the *tsetse-fly* attacked my companion's spans, and within three days he had lost four of his best mules. In spite of reduced teams we managed to continue the trek until within a four days' journey of the Limpopo. One evening, however, just as I was sitting down to an *al fresco* supper, Jack rode up to my uitspaan, and, seating himself before the *arba lingua* fire, he opened as follows: ' Three more of my mules are down with the cursed " fly," and half a

dozen of those hideous *ass vogels* (vultures) are awaiting to feast upon their carcasses. Just my luck,' continued Jack, as he blew great clouds of 'Pioneer' tobacco smoke in the vain endeavour to drive away a cloud of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, which buzzed about our heads like a swarm of bees round a hive.

"I agreed that it was very hard luck, but the crippled span had to be made up with fresh mules or donkeys, by fair means or foul, otherwise one of the wagons would have to be abandoned, and bang would go a fourth part of our aggregate fortune. For some little time we puffed away at our 'corn-cobs' in silence, and but for the distant 'yap-yapping' of a prowling jackal dead silence would have reigned over that vast expanse of rolling veld, for the Kafir drivers and loep-boys were fast asleep under the wagons, and the mules were haltered to the dessel-booms, round which had been built a *laager* of 'mcopi thorn to secure the animals from beasts of prey.

"At length I suggested that either Mortimore or myself would have to set out at daybreak and scour the country for mules, or failing mules, horses, or donkeys. A coin bearing the effigy of Oom Paul was spun in the air, and the same fell within the glow of the fire the reverse side uppermost, Jack had lost the toss, and muttering something that sounded very unlike a blessing on specie generally, and that of the late Transvaal Government in particular, he jumped on his pony and cantered off through the darkness towards a distant glimmer of light which marked the scene of his own *witspaan*, for owing to one of my mules having cast a shoe I called a halt some three miles to the rear of the leading wagons.

"The first golden spears of early morning were gilding

the broken summits of a distant range of hills when Mortimore rode out of camp carrying a two days' ration of biscuit and *biltong*, a prismatic compass and a Mannlicher rifle to search the surrounding country for the required animals. For many miles with the scorching sun beating upon him did he ride across the arid veld, halting here and there at a spruit or dam to water his pony. But neither Dutch homestead, Kafir kraal, or human habitation of any kind did he fall in with, and an occasional antelope, paauw, or koorhaan were the only signs of life on that vast expanse of sun-scorched plain. But no; not quite the only signs of life, for as Jack looked upwards into the cloudless heavens he saw a number of dark specks wheeling at a great height over head. The 'specks' were Egyptian vultures, those loathsome winged scavengers of the veld, and grim was the smile that hardened Mortimore's sun-tanned face as he muttered, 'Mule meat begins to pall upon your appetites, does it, you ugly devils?' and then, pushing forward at a smart canter, he added, 'But you won't make a meal off old Bushman or his rider just yet.'

"At midday Jack off-saddled on the shore of a reed-fringed pan of water to eat his banquet of macadam-like biscuit and buck-biltong. He had just finished the repast and was in the act of lighting a pipe, when suddenly he heard a rustling amongst the reeds. A few minutes later a tall, gaunt, tatterdemalion of a white man emerged from the dense cover. 'Good-morning sir; you have wandered far away from civilisation; may I ask what brings you to this God-forsaken corner of the earth?' opened the stranger as he approached Mortimore, carrying an antiquated muzzle-loading gun over his shoulder.

Notwithstanding his haggard, unkempt, and scarecrow-like appearance, this strange man spoke like a cultured and educated person, and the sad, far-away expression of his world-weary face touched poor old Jack, who, as you fellows know, was as soft-hearted as a woman.

“ Having briefly explained the object of his mission, Mortimore handed his saddle-flask to the stranger who, after taking a long pull at the *dop*, remarked that he believed he could obtain the required mules from a neighbouring Dutchman if Jack would spend the night at his hut and accept what poor hospitality he was able to offer him. Delighted at the prospect of getting our crippled wagons once more under way, and if the truth were known, not a little curious regarding the history of the ‘ dead beat ’ Samaritan, Jack willingly accepted the proffered hospitality.

“ ‘ You will find my cabin at the foot of the *kopje*,’ said the stranger, as he pointed towards a rugged thorn-clothed hill that towered high and gaunt amidst the vast, verdureless waste. ‘ Go in and rest, and tell Boowin, my Kafir servant, to make you some coffee ’; adding with a soulless smile: ‘ That is the best fare I can offer you until my return, when I hope to bring in a brace of *koorhaan* or pink-bill teal for supper.’

“ A twenty minutes’ canter took Jack to the *kopje*, where he off-saddled, knee-haltered, and turned loose his pony to pick up what scanty herbage it might be able to find on the sun-scorched veld. For some little time not a sign of a habitation could he see among the huge boulders and outcrops of quartz which lay scattered round the base of the hill. At length a thin spiral of blue smoke, ascending, apparently, from the midst of a clump of those

strange thorn-armed trees, or rather bushes, which, from the tenacious manner in which their long double thorns cling to one's clothing are known as wait-a-bit bushes, attracted his attention. After a stiff climb up the steep side of the *kopje*, Mortimore found himself standing on a level, fertile spot through which babbled a little lily-decked stream of water fringed with tree-ferns and beautiful flowering shrubs. Still there was no trace of the hut to be seen, and the mysterious spiral of smoke had disappeared as though by magic.

“ ‘ Devilish queer thing ! ’ muttered Jack as he looked above and below, to right and to left. ‘ Devilish queer thing ! I’ll swear that smoke came from within ten yards of this very spot. ’ Scarcely were the words uttered, than a huge and magnificently proportioned Zulu, very airily attired and armed with a formidable *knobkerrie*, glided out of the foliage and stood towering and motionless like an ebony statue before the somewhat startled Englishman.

“ ‘ Whom do you seek, baas ? The great white Induna has gone hunting and will not return until the sun has sunk beyond those far-away hills, ’ at length said the Zulu, in the soft musical language of his race, as with *knobkerrie* held high over his head in salute, he pointed first to the sun and then to a distant chain of mountains to sign that his master would not return until the first shades of evening had fallen. Jack told the sable giant that he had just left the great white Induna, and then Boowin, with the natural courtesy of his tribe—the Zulu is the native gentleman of South Africa—said, ‘ Your visit, baas, is as welcome as rain after a long drought ; come up to the *kraal* and I will cook mealies and coffee. ’

“ A few minutes of difficult climbing up a narrow, tortuous pathway through the thorn scrub, and Mortimore found himself at the doorway of the strangest human habitation he had ever set eyes upon. Standing in a cleft of the kopje, the walls of the cabin were constructed of small boulders and darga (mortar made by mixing the earth of ant hills, cow-dung, and water together), a thick plaster of the latter material being laid over all to keep out the wind and rain. In lieu of slates, pantiles, or corrugated iron, the skins of antelopes, jackals, klip-das, and other animals, stretched across strips of raw-hide reims, acted the part of roof. A little loophole of a window, open to the wind and weather by day, and closed with the beaten-out tin of an old biscuit tin by night, gave light and ventilation to the interior of the hut, while the entrance boasted a leathern-hung, dilapidated door, which, in years gone by, had probably belonged to one of the early Transvaal Government mail-coaches, for the motto was still legible although the coat-of-arms had long been obliterated by the elements. High above the hut and its well-kept mealy and melon patch towered the almost perpendicular side of the *kopje*, a pair of great Egyptian vultures keeping watch over their nest on one of the topmost spurs of rock, like grey sentinels of evil. To north, east, and west stretched a seemingly boundless expanse of perfectly level desert; a broken chain of rugged hills, a patch of stunted acaciæ, and a small lagoon of water glinting in the rays of the afternoon sun being the only objects to break the wearying monotony of the desolate scene.

“ Pushing open the obsolete coach-door, Jack found himself in the strangest and, from a sports-

man's point of view, most interesting interior imaginable. The hut consisted of but one room, the walls of which were hung from roof to floor with skins and trophies of many different kinds of animals and birds. The *daraa* floor of the room was also carpeted with pelts, a magnificent lion skin forming the centre trophy. A roughly-hewn table, a loosely-swung hammock, an old deck-chair, a huge brass-fastened oak chest, and a litter of saddlery and rusty 'odds and ends' thrown carelessly into a corner completed the inventory of furniture. Thoroughly fatigued after the long ride, Jack flung himself at full length on the lion skin, and within a very few minutes he was wrapped in that deep, dreamless slumber which comes to little children and weary men only.

"Upon awakening Jack found that his host had returned, and that he was busily engaged in plucking a leash of lesser bustard, or, as the Boer has it, *koorhaan*.

" 'I am afraid bean coffee and boiled mealies are not much to your taste,' said the owner of the hut to Mortimore, as his eyes rested on a pannikin of cold coffee and a couple of boiled corn-cobs which lay on the table untouched. Jack declared, however, that so soundly had he slept he did not hear the native bring in the improvised meal.

"It was during the dressing and cooking of the game that Jack learned something of the history of his host, whom henceforth I will call G——. G—— was a younger son of one of the oldest and best-known families in the west of England, and after distinguishing himself at Winchester and New College, Oxford, he was launched into the ocean of so-called fashionable life—that sea of shoals in which so many impecunious younger sons have

founded during their first voyage. He spoke of Hurlingham, Ascot, Cowes, and other well-known resorts of the English world of leisure. But when telling of the good days he had spent with horse, gun, and rod amongst the heather-clad valleys and tors of the home of his boyhood, and of the wild red deer, Exmoor, it was that the hard, world-weary face softened, and the deeply sunken eyes lost something of their usual hunted expression. Then came a blank page in the stranger's book, and he spoke no more of the land which Jack knew his heart yearned for. Of his life in South Africa G—— said but little, but from that little Jack gathered that after squandering the greater part of the few hundreds which his father had given him to start afresh in a new world, he had found his way up to Kimberley, where with a fellow adventurer, he seemed to have done fairly well at the 'poor man's diggings.' Having sold his share of the claim to his partner, he journeyed to Natal with the intention of trading amongst the Zulus and Basutos. For a time he thrived in his new venture, and it was during one of his expeditions to Zululand that he met with his faithful servant Boowin. His gambling spirit once more got the upper hand of him, however, and between horse-racing and cards he lost nearly every 'tickey' (3*d.*) of his hard-earned savings. Then, as he grimly remarked, he crossed the Transvaal border 'for the benefit of his health'—there was no extradition treaty between Natal and the Transvaal in those days. At length, after experiencing many hardships on the journey, he made his way to Pretoria, and became driver of a mail-coach running between that town and Pietersburg. How long he held the post or his reason for leaving it did not transpire. From coach-driving he

descended a step lower and became waiter and man-of-all-work in a roadside store and eating-house.

“ ‘ Couldn’t stand “ slinging hash ” and serving tickey’s-worths of sugar to a lot of cursed, unwashed doppers, so I found my way to this God-forsaken spot; with Boowin, and here I shall die,’ declared he, as he finished the last drop of *dop* in his guest’s flask, adding, ‘ But I must turn in and snatch a few hours’ sleep, for I want to be in the saddle before daybreak to try and get those mules for you.’ ”

“ It was two good hours before sunrise when G—— mounted Mortimore’s pony. Striking a bee-line in a northerly direction, he galloped across the veld, heedless of the innumerable *aardvark* earths, meerkat holes, and other horse traps with which in many parts the ground was simply honeycombed. Jack was discussing the remains of the game stew which Boowin served for breakfast, when he heard a great clatter of hoofs on the rocky ground at the base of the kopje; and looking out of the hut door he saw his tattered host bringing in three pairs of as good-looking mules as he had seen for many a long day. ‘ Old José Swartz let me have them at twelve pounds a head, and every animal “ salted ! ” ’ exclaimed G—— as he entered the cabin. The price was ridiculously low, for ‘ salted ’ mules at the time were fetching at least thrice that sum in Pretoria and Johannesburg, and as Jack counted out the purchase-money and commission he wondered within himself whether those same animals would be claimed by Oom Swartz ere they were safely across the Crocodile River.

“ Jack lost no time in saddling up, and having promised to bring G—— a stock of necessaries and ‘ medical com-

forts ' on his return from Rhodesia, he bade him good-bye, and arrived at our *uitspaan* with the mules late the same evening.

"To cut a long story short, we rode our transport up to Bulawayo with the loss of but one other mule, and meeting with no further adventures worthy of mention. Our stock-in-trade was sold at a handsome profit, and, as luck had it, we obtained a sub-contract to carry railway materials for the then new line between Fort Salisbury and the Rhodesian capital.

"One blazing hot day, as Jack and I were drinking a 'long schooner' of beer in the 'Grand Hotel,' three men of the B.B.P. came in, one of whom had served with Mortimore in the first Matabele war. In the course of conversation Jack mentioned his strange meeting with G—.

"'Did you notice whether your man had lost the index-finger of his right hand?' suddenly asked one of the troopers, a tall, bony Scotchman, who had hitherto remained silent.

"Jack declared that G— had lost the finger mentioned, and also he bore a big 'horse-shoe' scar on his forehead.

"'Then, begad, it was the same chap who gave me the slip when I was in the N.M.P., and after him with a warrant for I.D.B.!' exclaimed the Scot.

"More of the history of Jack's former host was now told. For eighteen months or so after leaving Kimberley he had passed from more or less reputable trading in Basuto and Zulu lands to illicit diamond running, but, having got wind that a warrant was issued for his arrest

on that serious charge, he managed to elude the law—and perchance the 'Breakwater'—by crossing over the Transvaal border. Then—as he himself told—he drove the mail-coach between Pretoria and Pietersburg, but so frequently was his charge held up and robbed that the authorities began to entertain suspicions that he was implicated in the outrages, until at length things grew so hot for him that he was obliged to fly, and nothing had been heard of him for some years.

“ ‘It’s long odds that he “jumped” those mules, for he’s got the cheek of the Devil, and has no more care for his neck than a Kafir,’ said the Scot, helping himself to a four-finger peg of ‘Black and White’ from the bottle.

“ Four months later Jack made the return journey from Bulawayo to Pretoria by Cape cart, for the purpose of bringing up another lot of transport, while I remained to ‘boss’ the railway contract. He did not forget his promise to G——, and took a goodly store of the best provisions, liquid and solid, obtainable in the town of Bulawayo. Mortimore saw no sign of either G—— or Boowin as he climbed up the kopje; but upon gaining the plateau, the first object that met his eyes was a heap of stones piled up on the bank of the little fern-fringed stream which flowed below the hut. Then he knew that either G—— or his faithful henchman had trekked to his last *uitspaan*. The Zulu, hearing footsteps on the pebbly path, now appeared on the scene carrying his *knobkerrie*, blanket, and cooking pot, and coming towards Jack, he exclaimed, ‘The great and good white Induna passed to the happy hunting-grounds as the sun dropped behind the hills last night. Boowin returns to the land of his

fathers with a heavy heart and sad for the loss of his master.'

"Then extending his open hand high above his head, Boowin stood like a magnificent ebon statue and chanted a strange, weird dirge over the poor heap of stones. Then, with the stately stride of his race, he passed down the narrow trackway; and Jack lost sight of him for ever.

"The interior of the hut appeared just the same as it did when Mortimore paid his first visit there; the same skins were on the floor and walls, and the muzzle-loading gun stood in its wonted corner. Deeming it possible that the dead man had left some token or written message behind him, Jack searched every likely and unlikely corner. For some little time the hunt proved fruitless, and he was in the act of leaving the sad, solitary chamber, when his attention was attracted by two white objects lying half hidden amongst the folds of the lion pelt. They were the portraits of a woman and of a golden-haired child exquisitely painted on ivory. The woman was dark and very beautiful, but of a type witch-like and evil, a type that contrasted strangely with the angelic loveliness of the child. Jack made a further search of the hut, but the outlaw had left not a scrap of writing behind him. He died—as did many a better man before him—unknown, uncared, unprayed. Still not quite uncared or unprayed, for Boowin the Zulu loved and honoured his master, and though the dirge that flowed from the unsanctified lips of the half-naked savage as he bade farewell to the mortal remains of 'the good and great white Induna' may not perhaps appear in the book of the Recording Angel, who will believe that it was but a mere fleeting echo amongst the kopjes?

“ ‘A worthless blackguard,’ did you say, sir? Perhaps he was, but I wonder had that beautiful woman, whose picture was probably the last earthly object the ‘worthless blackguard’s’ dimming eyes looked upon, anything to do with the downfall and solitude of his life? ”

AN EARLY MORNING RUN ON THE VELD

IT was a glorious African winter's evening when I left the dust and bustle of the Golden City (Johannesburg) behind me and rode along Bezuidenhuit's valley for the double purpose of paying a visit of inspection to the then recently imported pack of English foxhounds and of spending the night at the kennels on the Geldenhuis Estate; for, at the invitation of the Master, I had arranged to act the part of volunteer whipper-in the next day, when the hounds were to meet on the old coach road at a point about midway between Johannesburg and Pretoria.

I had ridden to within a mile or so of my destination, when my heart was gladdened by a sound sweet as a peal of church bells chiming across a wide river, now swelling, now falling in volume, until softening and softening, gradually lower and lower, the melody died away, and death-like silence again reigned over that vast expanse of rolling veld. It was the "singing" of the little pack of English foxhounds, exiled seven thousand long miles from their native shires. Only a true sportsman could imagine what fond memories of Home that hound-music brought back to me. For a time the bustle and excitement of everyday life abroad will teach a man to forget many things, but, if he be at heart a sportsman, the "whimper" of a single hound even will awaken the slumbering memory of many a good run enjoyed with

the dappled beauties in the dear old country at home; or, perchance, his thoughts will hark back to *that* day at covert-side—ah! so many years ago—when a certain pair of bright eyes looked into his own so fondly, and—. But hold! The rest of the story is sacred.

How well does the writer remember a pathetic little incident he witnessed one morning when out with the Johannesburg hounds. Hounds were drawing a big blue gum plantation, and I had been “told off” to view away any buck which might happen to break at the far end of the covert. There was but one other man anywhere near me, a ragged unkempt old fellow, mounted on a rough Basuto pony, whom I had often noticed loafing about the Johannesburg horse market and on the Turffontein race-course. Hounds had not been in covert long when a whimper was taken up by the full chorus of the pack, and the plantation was filled with glorious music. Suddenly the sound of deep sobs as of one in dire distress reached my ears, and turning in the saddle I saw the old loafer with head bowed down upon his pony’s neck, sobbing as though heart-broken. I rode towards him, but with a gesture he signed me not to approach nearer and brokenly exclaimed, “Don’t take any notice of me, sir, I’m a d——d weak old fool, but the cry of those hounds reminded me of the old home I left twenty-five years ago, and which I shall never see again.”

Would the most eloquent sermon ever preached from the pulpit have touched the one soft chord of that tough, world-beaten old heart as did the cry of that little pack of exiled foxhounds? I think not.

But enough of this babbling, and now that the singing of the hounds has died away, I send my pony along at a

smart canter across the arid veld, jump the wide spruit that has to be negotiated ere the kennels are reached, and five minutes later I draw rein before the huntsman's bungalow. Having done ample justice to an excellent little dinner, I pay a visit to the kennels to find as good-looking a little pack as one would wish to see comfortably benched for the night. Then the huntsman takes me to view the first litter of foxhound puppies ever whelped in the Transvaal.

"Isn't it a lovely picture?" exclaimed Tom Parker, as he gazed fondly at the sleek and beautifully marked little hounds nestling up to their matronly-looking badger-pied dam, old Amazon. Yes, indeed, it was a lovely picture. But, alas! not one of that litter of eight ever lived to hunt either jackal or buck (there are no foxes in the Transvaal; the pack were therefore entered to both jackal and antelope). Neither was Tom, although a most painstaking and good houndsman, ever successful in rearing a litter of whelps. For a time they would apparently thrive remarkably well, but would suddenly contract a virulent form of distemper, a couple of days of which malady generally sufficed to wipe out a whole litter.

"We must leave home before sunrise to-morrow, sir, for it's a good ten miles from the kennels to 'Halfway House,' and it isn't worth the price of red-herring trying to hunt after the dew has gone, for the veld don't hold a scrap of scent then," were Tom's parting words to me as I jogged off to the Master's house which stood within a stone's throw of the kennels. It wanted yet a couple of hours to daybreak when a long-drawn blast from the huntsman's horn caused me to jump up from my bed; but

so brilliant were the stars that we experienced but little difficulty in striking a bee-line towards the appointed fixture at "Halfway House." More than once during the ride across the veld the hounds got on to the line of a "jack," but they were, of course, whipped off immediately, for the business of the day was not to begin until later.

"Halfway House" being anything but a get-at-able place from Johannesburg, not more than a score members of the J.H.C. put in an appearance at the meet, including two ladies, both of whom, before their migration to South Africa, were well-known followers of the Oakley. After we had made a substantial breakfast, hounds were taken off to draw a large blue wattle (mimosa) plantation, in which, the landlord of the hotel informed us, often harboured a small herd of blesbok. By the time we were in the saddle the sun was just appearing above the summits of a distant range of chocolate-brown kopjes, and a peculiar haze floated in the air a few feet above the surface of the earth, while the "hanging" of the aroma of our cigars, cigarettes, or pipes gave promise of good scent. But then, as Tom Parker very truly declared, "Scent be the trickiest thing in creation; there's no getting to the bottom of it."

The huntsman now waves hounds into covert, and the cheery cry of "Yeaw-eup! Push 'em up, my little darlings. Yooi wind 'im!" re-echoes through the plantation as he cheers them on to draw. Suddenly a challenge from Guardsman is taken up by the full chorus of the pack, and a few minutes later the soul-moving cry, "Tally-ho! gone-away! gone awaaay," is shrieked out by some one at the far end of the covert. In almost less time than it

takes to record the fact, the pack is out of the plantation and streaming across the veld at a pace that proclaims a breast-high scent.

The Master, huntsman, and perhaps a dozen of the "field" get well away with hounds, and the ladies hold their own with the best of us. In parts the high, rank vegetation of the veld reaches well above the saddle-girths, hiding completely from view the waving sterns of the flying pack, and galloping through this rough veld "grass" and sage bush is rendered dangerous by innumerable antbear earths, meerkat holes, and other horse traps quite invisible from the saddle. It is little less than marvellous, however, the manner in which the native-bred horses, more especially the Basuto ponies, dodge these pitfalls by jumping over, or swerving to one side of them. But mark! Hounds—which might almost be covered by the proverbial sheet—turn off right-handed and point for yonder Dutch farm, round which is built a high and roughly constructed stone wall. The hunt ponies have been schooled over every kind of obstacle and jump like deer; but a good number of the horses ridden by the "field" have never been over anything of more importance than the average spruit or nullah, and at least two-thirds of the hunt go off at a tangent before the wall is reached. The master and huntsman fly the obstacle girth and girth, and the ladies, following their "lead," manage to get over safely. It was "touch and go" with one of them, however, as her galloway pecked badly on landing, and very nearly deposited his fair rider in to a prickly pear bush. One man comes a "cropper," but on the right side of the wall, and, although a little stream of scarlet trickling from a cut

on the forehead tells its own tale, he is very soon in the saddle again.

For twenty-five minutes we have been riding at almost steeplechase pace, and the quarry is now running in view, for the veld here and for a couple of miles ahead has been fired, and not a vestige of herbage is there to be seen.

“Forrard! forrard! forrard!” shrieks Tom as he cheers on the eager, straining pack, fearful that they may not gain the blood they thirst for, and so richly deserve, for he, with the experienced eye of a huntsman, knows full well that if once the buck gains yonder boulder-strewn kopje, towards which it is heading, the run will prove bloodless. No horse ever yet foaled could find footing up the face of those steep, rocky hills, and the hot rays of the sun will already have dissipated what little scent might have been found when the scant vegetation of the hills was drenched with dew.

The Boer homestead is now but a mere white speck on the sun-scorched plain, for hounds are running at a pace they seldom, if ever, showed in their native country. Not the sign of a check has occurred since they left covert, nor, with the exception of the stone wall, have they met with a single obstacle to hinder them. By Jove! the buck is heading towards the reed-fringed pan of water which lies shimmering in the bright rays of the sun like a sheet of molten silver. Yes, in he plunges, and now it is a case of sit down and ride and the devil take the hindmost. “Forrard! forrard! forrard!” again shrieks the huntsman, as he rides close to the sterns of the hounds as though his Satanic Majesty were behind him.

Headlong we go, each man striving to outride his fellow, heedless of the fact that his mount is sobbing out

“bellows to mend,” heedless of everything on earth in his struggle to be in at the death.

A mighty splash and some ten couple of hounds are madly swimming across the shallow lagoon towards the antelope, which, having “soiled,” is struggling gallantly to reach the further shore.

But, alas for him! he has stopped to “soil” too long, for several couple of the older and more knowing hounds have skirted the shore and are already baying round the clump of tall reeds towards which he is swimming, and those in the water are close to his haunches. At length he touches ground, and, with a mighty spring, the gallant little antelope jumps clean over the heads of the waiting hounds. His last bolt is shot, however; old Amazon has fastened on to his throat, and next moment he is pulled down by a living, dappled torrent. “Who-whoop, whoa-whoop!” the run is over.

A RECORD RUN

FARMER SANDERS, one of the old school of yeomen, was well known throughout his native county as a fine horseman, a dead shot, and a rattling good fellow; and the six-acre covert lying near the centre of his well-tilled farm invariably proved a sure find for a fox. The worthy yeoman boasted that the wood had not been drawn blank for twenty years; but twenty years is a far-away cry, and we are bound to confess that "we ha'e our doots." Anyhow, on the day preceding the hunt we are about to tell of, Sanders sent his bailiff, Tom Thorogood, down to the wood to ascertain if the artificial earth therein harboured a fox; and to the disappointment and disgust of the farmer, Thorogood returned with the report that the earth had not been used for at least a week. But as this story will presently show, Sanders determined that the hounds he loved so well should, by fair means or foul, obtain a run next day. We happened at the time to be staying with an old friend who resided within a short distance of Sanders' homestead, and upon the morning appointed for the meet at the cross roads, our host and ourselves had taken our guns out before daybreak for the morning flight of the duck as they passed from their nightly feeding grounds inland to the neighbouring estuary. We were returning home with a solitary mallard, when we met

the farmer hurrying along the road leading to his homestead as though his Satanic Majesty were behind him.

Upon approaching nearer we discovered that he was splashed with mud from head to foot, his clothes were rent in many places, whilst his face was scratched and bleeding as though he had been dragged through a Leicestershire bullfinch.

The farmer looked particularly sheepish as he hurried past us with "Morning, gentlemen, morning; just been to look at my fat beasties up in forty acres." "What the devil has Sanders been up to?" ejaculated our companion, when the farmer had passed out of ear-shot. "If I didn't know him well, I should have said he had been on a poaching expedition."

It was a grand hunting morning, and at least 300 sportsmen and sportswomen, of all sorts and conditions, met at the cross roads, amongst whom was Sanders, very smart in cords and butcher-boots and mounted on a good-looking and well-bred chestnut mare.

Just as the last stroke of eleven o'clock sounded from the tower of the old grey Norman church hard by, the M.F.H. arrived on the scene, and the beautifully level pack was taken off to draw the Round Wood. Nor had they been in covert two minutes when a challenge from old Amazon was taken up by the rest of the pack, and in less time than it takes to write it hounds were out of covert and racing across a big grass field. But strangely enough, not one of the score or so of men, who, waiting within a yard of the spot whence the fox should have broken, had viewed him away; nor was the soul-stirring cry of "Gone away! Goo-ne awaaaay!" heard from any part of the wood. There was no time, however, to com-

ment upon such details, for hounds were carrying a breast-high scent, and were heading for a lovely line of country. Farmer Sanders was one of the first over the big bank and newly-cleared ditch that had to be negotiated ere the grass field was entered. Quickly following in his wake rode the Master and perhaps a score of others; not more, for the preliminary jump was a bit of a "yawner," and a convenient lane, running parallel with the line taken by hounds, afforded excellent going to the "tailor and cockney" sportsmen, from which classes of horsemen the field on that particular day was largely recruited. The pace was a "clinker," the going all that could be desired, and a finer line of country it would have been hard to find in any corn-growing country.

"Yonder's a double with a big drop and a brook on t' other side," shouted Sanders *pro bono* as he pointed towards a stiff bullfinch which was of such a height as to render it impossible to see what lay beyond. "Swish!" and old Kitty bored her way through the thorny fence, and dropped, cat-like, at least eight feet into the ruddy lane beyond. Then a stride and a half, another cat-like scramble on the part of the old Irish mare we were riding; bang through a thicker and thornier bullfinch than the first, and we found ourselves, minus a hat, and with face scored like the back of a Christmas sucking pig, safely over the double.

Still there lay a wide, rotten-banked brook yawning a dozen lengths ahead. But Kitty—an ancient chaser—knew her business as well as she loved it, and with a snort and a toss of her ugly old coffin head, she put on full steam and flew the obstacle with a good six feet to spare. The man on our right, however, a well-known sporting

medico who rode not an ounce over eight stone, was not so fortunate, for although his clever little blood mare landed on the right side of the brook, the undermined bank gave way under her weight, and she fell into the discoloured water with a broken back.

Having ascertained that the doctor was unhurt, and being unable to render him any assistance, we sat down to ride again; for so fast was the pace that hounds were running almost mute. Gad! how hounds flew that day! And such a head did they carry that the proverbial sheet would almost have covered them.

But never was there such a silent hunt. Scarcely a note of music, and never a cheer nor a halloa was heard from the time they were put into covert, nearly thirty minutes before.

Hounds suddenly turned off left-handed and pointed towards Sanders' farm, which lay but a short half-mile ahead. There soon they checked in the stackyard, utterly at fault, and although the huntsman did everything possible to assist them, they seemed quite unable to puzzle out another yard of the line. A buxom woman now appeared on the scene, and walking up to the Master, opened as follows: "Oh, sir! that lazy varmint Dick forgot to take the vox Maister Sanders sent over last night out of the bag, and this marnin' when my good man loosed him in the stackyard, as Maister Sanders told he to do, the poor creetur wor that stiff and bad he couldn't hardly crawl, and so we put him into a pail o' warm water, but it didn't seem to do him no sort o' good 'cept to make snap and prowl loike a madun, so we shut 'un up in the granary. But Oi do hope as yew 'ont give him to the 'ounds, sir."

To the granary we went *en masse*, and there, surely enough, curled up in the corner of an old sack was a wretched bedraggled creature, which bore some kind of resemblance to a fox.

“First time ever I saw a fox sweating in the coat, gen’lmen,” grinned the huntsman as he raked up the miserable animal with his crop.

“And begad, it’s the first time during my ten years of mastership that I’ve hunted a d——d red herring to find a half-drowned ‘bagman’ at the end of the run. Where’s Sanders? Hang him!” roared the Master.

“Gone to look at his fat beasts, sir,” suggested one of the field.

THE FIRST OF SEPTEMBER ON THE MARSHES

To the man who is wont to shoot on the uplands, where coverts abound and hedgerows separate one field from another, a day's partridge shooting on the marshes would not greatly appeal, perhaps. More especially would this be the case if the "uplander's" method of shooting took the form of driving, and not the older-fashioned mode of "walking" up or "dogging."

Not a hedgerow, nor anything bearing the slightest resemblance to one, will be found on the vast expanse of marshlands that fringe many portions of the east and south-east coasts. Generally speaking, indeed, these low-lying levels are devoid of timber, trees, and bushes, beyond, perchance, a stunted elm or willow, with here and there a clump of bramble-shrub growing under the more sheltered sides of the sea-walls. These high escarpments in many cases entirely surround the marshes, and thus prevent the incursions of the spring tides, which would otherwise inundate them. In lieu of fences, one marsh is divided from another by a system of narrow dykes or drains, which not only carry off the superfluous surface water from the levels, but also, to a certain degree, irrigate them. On the majority of marshes, will be found one or more small sedge-fringed lagoons, or, as they are locally called, fleets, of fresh water. These lagoons give excellent harbourage for wild duck and

other kinds of waterfowl; the bents and rough herbage that flourish in rank profusion on the inner face of the sea-walls afford warm and well-sheltered nesting sites for partridges; while great numbers of lapwings, red-shanks, *et hoc*, breed on the marshes.

On cultivated marshes, such as E—— Island, which forms the topographical subject of this sketch, very fair bags of partridges are sometimes made during earlier stages of the season, and the fleets and dykes usually hold plenty of mallard, teal, coot, etc.; no fewer than fifty-three couple of young wild duck, or “flappers,” having been killed on August 12 last by five “guns” working the sedges and reed-ronds with spaniels. Containing an area of some 1600 acres of exceedingly rich pasture and arable land, this minute dot on the map of England faces the North Sea, and lies seven good miles from anywhere. E—— Island is only approachable during low tide, for the very simple and sufficient reason that the road—or, rather, track—leading from the mainland thereto, is beacons out across a vast expanse of treacherous sands and ooze flats, which are awash shortly after half-flood of ordinary tides. A navigable tidal river or creek of considerable breadth runs round three sides of the island, the waterway being bordered by saltings and mudflats, such as are beloved by many species of wading birds. Of the latter, heavy toll is sometimes taken by local punt-gunners and shore-shooters; the foreshores being what are known as Crown rights, and therefore any man’s shooting ground.

The island boasts two human habitations, namely, a quaint, but by no means picturesque, early Georgian homestead, occupied by a ruddy-complexioned old farmer

and a baker's dozen or so of equally ruddy sons and daughters; and a cone-shaped hut, thatched with reeds cut from the neighbouring ronds. The latter strange, hive-like dwelling is inhabited by a species of Robinson Crusoe, who earns a livelihood between "watching" oysters and capturing eels. In other words, an octogenarian eel-catcher and oyster-watchman; great numbers of oysters being cultivated in the river, while eels, in their season, simply swarm in the dykes and fleets. Not a timber tree of any kind, and scarcely a bush even, is there to be seen on the marshes. Nothing, in fact, to break the monotony of the wide stretch of perfectly flat, drain-intersected levels, with the exception of the before-mentioned buildings, and a few horses, cattle, and sheep dotted upon the lush pastures. A dour and inhospitable-looking landscape enough, but excellent shooting for all that.

To attempt to drive partridges on a small marsh would but end in disaster, for, although the birds might be driven over artificial "blinds," or guns placed behind the sea-walls, practically every covey set awing would very quickly pass over to the neighbouring marshes lying beyond the creeks. Indeed, this usually occurs when either partridges or duck are flushed near the outside boundaries of these marshy islets. The birds are, therefore, generally walked up, steady and well-broken spaniels accompanying the guns for the purpose of working the dykes and fleets for duck, snipe, etc. From lack of better accommodation, our small party of four guns, on the Sunday night preceding the First of September, slept on pallets of wheat-straw laid down on the oaken threshing-floor of a more or less wind- and weather-proof barn, which the farmer declared to be "free from all sich pesky

varmin as rats, and mice, and vampires." I had reason to suspect the old marshman's veracity anent the non-existence of rodents in our improvised lodging ere dawn began to appear through sundry chinks in the roof and walls of the barn. Still, men who have slept for months at a stretch on the bare veld, as had two of my companions and myself, make light of such small details, and we deemed a couch of clean straw and blankets preferable to lying soft upon feather beds in the frowsy old rooms of the homestead.

The sun had not climbed very high above the blue horizon when, clad in flowing blankets, we four sprinted down to the brimming tidal river for a swim, and emerged therefrom greatly refreshed. Ere the majority of shooters had left their beds we had breakfasted, and one of the first partridges of the season, in the shape of a barren old "red-leg," was hanging limply from the game stick. "First blood" was drawn by Capt. N., the centre man in the short line of guns and beaters; the latter consisting of five bronzed and stalwart marshmen, who had been granted half a day's respite from their work on the land to beat for us. "What little corn be left standing may stand for another day, while that in the stooks be muck wet, growing fast, and only fit for feeding pigs," declared Farmer P. ruefully, as he gazed across the rain-sodden marshes, which, but a few days previously, had been practically flooded, and were, in parts, still ankle deep in water.

Near the centre of the marshes were some eighteen acres of roots, consisting mostly of swede-turnips and mangolds, which flourished exceedingly well on the island. The idea was to drive the birds from the outlying marshes

into these roots. As outside gun on the left flank, my beat led me along the bank of a wide and brimming, sedge-fringed dyke, which looked as though it might hold duck. I had almost forgotten to mention that a steady old retriever, of the now well-nigh extinct brown curly breed, and a brace of somewhat leggy but remarkably fast-working and clever water spaniels, formed a very important part of what our American cousins are wont to call "the outfit." One of the spaniels, who—seeing that she was a bitch—bore the somewhat incongruous title of "Captain," accompanied me, and into the dense reed cover she went, throwing me a backward glance as though to say, "If there is anything to be found, you bet I'll find it!" The first marsh shot happened to consist of rough grass, dry bushes, and other rank ground-cover, and being but a narrow strip of land, one beat sufficed to shoot it. The guns on my right were soon busy, for a covey of ten or eleven well-grown partridges, after rising just out of range of myself, ran the gauntlet of the line. Four of the covey failed to reach the neighbouring marshes situated on the further side of the tidal creek, and as I watched the remainder pass over the sea-wall, it seemed to me that one of their number dropped on to the saltings beyond the escarpment. My eyes probably deceived me, however, as old Rake, the retriever, failed to find the supposed "dropper" when taken to the spot. A thumping big hare was next set afoot and very promptly bowled over by N., the report of whose 12-bore had hardly died away when "Captain" gave a whimper, which put me very much on the alert. Another whimper, followed by a little dash amongst the sedges, and up sprang a leash of mallard from apparently under the nose

of the spaniel, and within a dozen yards of myself, offering very easy crossing shots. It would have required a precious poor performer to have "muffed" either of those duck, and a couple dropped dead as the proverbial door nail to the contents of my two barrels. The survivor, after wheeling over the marsh, settled on the big fleet. I had just reloaded when out of the dyke blundered a coot. The sable bird also dropped, to the evident delight of the marshman who carried my cartridge bag, for he declared in a kind of stage whisper that "the ode bald-head, cooked with a morsel o' salty pork or beef, would make a masterful good supper for the missus loike." From this it will be gathered that any coot shot on E— Island are given to the marshfolk, who, by the way, seem to prefer them to wild duck, widgeon, or teal.

An extensive wheat stubble was now reached, and scarcely had we set foot therein than two rattling good coveys of partridges rose almost simultaneously, and within easy range. A considerable amount of powder was burned, the result being one old and a leash of young birds down. The man on my right accounted for a brace of the latter, while I missed as easy a right and left as one would meet with in a season's shooting. But I was not the only man in the field who "muffed" those two beautiful coveys—twelve and thirteen birds respectively—nor did I excuse myself by swearing that my gun was an adjective gaspipe, or my ammunition rotten, etc. Four beats up and down the stubble resulted in five and a half brace of partridges, a brace of hares, and a whimbrel, the last being flushed from a small, oozy dyke running under the sea-wall. The maybird (local name

for whimbrel) was shot by myself, and, judging by its halting flight, I am inclined to think it was a "pricked" bird.

Thanks to the modern reaper and self-binder the stubbles on the island would hardly have harboured a shrew-mouse, while the mowing machine had shorn the grass and clover marshes so close that, in many cases, it was easy enough to distinguish a covey of partridges or a hare at a considerable distance away. In such sparse cover birds could hardly be expected to lie very close, even so early in the season, and the coveys often took wing when still far out of range. A number of these were marked down into the before-mentioned roots; some passed over to the next island, while not a few sought the sanctuary afforded by the standing crops of wheat, oats, and barley, a considerable acreage of which had been left uncut owing to recent inclement weather.

At length, having shot the surrounding marshes, we entered the turnips, and by walking the same very carefully and in close order, nine and a half brace of birds and seven hares were accounted for, and when a halt for lunch was called, under the sheltered side of the sea-wall, the aggregate bag for the morning's sport made a very fair show. Not wishing to disturb the remaining portion of the island, which was to be shot later in the week, we divided forces after "tiffin," G. and H. going off to explore the creek and saltings in an antiquated gunning-punt on the off-chance of picking up a few "waders," while Capt. N. and myself, accompanied by a couple of marshmen and the dogs, elected to try the fleet and dykes for duck. My gallant friend and I shot eleven mallard and a

couple of teal, several coot and a snipe (probably a home-bred bird, as a few pairs of snipe breed on the island annually). The hardy explorers returned later in the evening with a solitary redshank and a good ducking. They had capsized the punt.

THE SURGEON'S FIRST GOOSE

“THE ode geeze be a-comin' in, Doctor. I seen seven flightin' over the meal-marshes last evening as ever was,” declared “Gaffer” Gilson enthusiastically, as the local surgeon dressed the old wildfowler's left hand, which had been badly poisoned by the venom-charged spines of a “bullrout,” a small and particularly ill-favoured species of the Gurnard family.

“Well done, Gilson! We must get your fin mended before the big herd arrives, or you won't be able to use the old 4-bore shoulder-kicker,” replied Dr. Conway, who, under the able tuition of the sexagenarian gunner, had become a very keen wildfowler during a five years' sojourn in the at one time important fishing town of Oozeleigh—it appears under a different name on the map—which lies on the fringe of the Norfolk marshes. But the little surgeon had never been fortunate enough to bag a pink-footed goose, although he had been out after those wary of wary birds in every kind of light and weather.

“I'll let you know when the ode geeze du come in, for sure, Doctor, and I doubt not t' ode blunderbust will bark loud as ever—and bite as hard, too—when the time du come for her to bark,” were the parting words of Gilson, as, with the gammy hand neatly swathed in lint, he clattered away from the surgery towards his reed-thatched cottage on the neighbouring marshes; the heavily

studded soles of his great and well-oiled tuck-boots kicking up well-nigh as much clatter on the cobbled side-walk, as do the wheels of a loose-jointed traction engine when travelling over a newly metalled highway.

True to his word and calling, "Gaffer" Gilson kept both ears and eyes open for the advent of the geese, which from time immemorial have wintered on the Oozeleigh fowling-grounds 'twixt marsh and sand-bar, the greater number arriving on the east coast from their summer habitat within the Arctic circle about mid-October.

One night, when returning home from eel-spearing in the marsh-dykes, Gilson heard the clanging "music" of what he knew to be a goodly herd of grey geese flighting to the great banks away out in the Wash. The clangour of the great birds was as welcome to the ears of the old fowler as the music of a pack of hounds in full cry is to a keen foxhunter, and, for that matter, the "honk-honking" of a herd of wild geese in flight resembles nothing so much as distant hound-music. Hence the fenman's legend of the pack of hell-hounds which upon wild wintry nights are wont to "draw" these vast expanses of sedgy dyke and fleet intersected levels for benighted and unfortunate wanderers, and hunt them mercilessly to perdition.

For some little time after the passing of the geese, "Gaffer" Gilson stands with eyes turned towards the tide, and as though watching the flight of the "skeins" through the darkness. Then, as the weird goose-chorus dies away in the distance, and the muffled thunder of the North Sea coamers breaking upon the treacherous sand-banks rolls shoreward over the watery waste once more, he resumes his solitary trudge homewards, muttering,

“I’ll be after ye to-morrer eve; so don’t ’ee worrit!” between the whiffs which he takes at a short and particularly black “nose-warmer.”

Gilson was up betimes next morning, and called at the surgery while the Doctor was breakfasting.

“The main herd o’ geeze be comed in. I heered they last night in flight to the banks,” opened the old gunner, upon being ushered into the Doctor’s presence. “Do ’ee be at the dole-stone [parish boundary-stone] jest afore sundown this even, maister. I do reckon on gettin’ clean under the line o’ flight-like.”

But “Gaffer” Gilson was not the only man in Oozeleigh who knew of the arrival of the “pink-foots.” Tom Mullins and his mate, Hoppy Brill, while setting out to gather cockles at peep o’ day, had heard “the geeze a-talkin’” as the big grey birds flighted from the banks to feed upon the wheat and barley stubbles inland. Neither of the cocklers, however, cared a rap for gunning; indeed, they voted it very poor sport in comparison with flight-netting—a somewhat questionable, albeit legal, method of “birding,” by which a considerable number of ’fowl are sometimes taken during the morning and evening flights.

The annual invasion by the grey-feathered legions of the far North is the great event of the season amongst the hardy shore-shooters of Oozeleigh. The news spreads like fire in a timber-yard, and great is the overhauling of “shootin’-irons,” from cumbrous 4-bore breech-loaders and antiquated “’cussion-guns,” enormously long in the barrel, and warranted—by their owners—to knock over a goose dead as a door nail at 100 yards’ range, down to the light and delicate-looking 20-bore hammerless, a charge

from which, by the way, has accounted for more than one tough old pink-footed gander during a low flight.

"We'd best dodder down to the sand-dunes and lay up in the owd wreck, Doctor. The whole town seems to be out a-gunnin' this evenin'. Must heve got wind o' the geeze, I doubt," growled Gilson, whom the Doctor found seated upon the lichen-covered dole-stone, with a huge single-barrelled M.L. fowling-piece over one shoulder, a home-dressed canvas bag over the other, while a sagacious-looking retriever of the now well-nigh extinct brown curly-coated breed lay comfortably stretched at his master's feet.

"Do 'ee chuck away that there fowl-scarin' seegar afore we crosses the sea-wall, maister!" said the "Gaffer" to his companion, whose glowing and aromatic "Havana" he had been eyeing in but ill-disguised displeasure ever since the worthy surgeon made his appearance.

Crossing the high escarpment which, according to local tradition, has withstood the incursions of the spring tides, and thereby saved the contiguous marshes from inundation, for well over two centuries, the gunners and their canine servant take up their stands in an old vessel, through the decaying timbers of which sprout maram-grass and other rank herbage indigenous to sandy foreshores.

The last scintillant spears of the setting sun have now disappeared beneath the horizon, and the western heavens are one blaze of gold and crimson. But the breeze which comes creeping shorewards finds not favour in the eyes of Gilson, for he mutters something to the effect that "it doan't blow near hard enough to keep the geeze down."

The gold and crimson glory of the west pales to a sheen

of amber, splashed and streaked with scarlet, and this, in turn, is transformed into the sable robe of night. Ever and anon the report of a gun fired on the marshes lying beyond the sea-wall, warns the waiting gunners that the evening flight of the wild duck to their nocturnal feeding-grounds inland has commenced. All anxiety to score his first wild goose, Dr. Conway nervously opens the breech of his 12-bore to see that the cartridges are in the chambers all right. A grim smile of amusement overspreads the hirsute countenance of "Gaffer" Gilson as he watches this movement on the part of his companion. He knows full well that the geese, unless disturbed, will not commence their seaward flight just yet.

"Swish-swish-swish!" A team of mallard pass through the uncertain light to the left of the old wreck, and well out of shot of Gilson's long gun even.

"They mollard would heve come clean over us if yonder dodderin' furriner hadn't popped out o' the marrin-grass like a juggin' Jock-o'-the-box," grumbles Gilson, pointing the while to the dim form of a man kneeling under the sea-wall.

By what means the old chap is able to distinguish in the half-light the man as being what he is pleased to call a "furriner"—in other words, a stranger—is difficult to tell. He imagines, perchance, that no Oozeleigh sportsman would have shown himself to fowl at such a critical moment.

Standing at intervals along the base of the high embankment, like so many sentries, are to be seen a number of men, armed with guns of sorts, and bent on shooting the first goose of the season.

"The whole township's come a-goozin', I should

reckon," murmurs Gilson, after glancing at the row of statue-like figures dotted under the sea-wall.

Truth to tell, the "Gaffer," although a good enough old chap in most respects, is somewhat a selfish gunner, and seems to entertain the mistaken idea that wild-fowling grounds and wildfowl were created for his own special benefit and behoof.

The old gunner suddenly holds a hand to his right ear, and, listening for a moment, he ejaculates, "Hinter come the geeze! Can't ye hear them a-talkin'?"

The Doctor listens intently, but can hear nothing except the monotonous dirge played by the waves upon the wreck-strewn sand-bar. Then the faint but ever-increasing sound of many pairs of wings beating the air is borne to him on the breeze, and, despite the whispered warning of "Don't 'ee move or pull trigger till I give the word!" the excited little surgeon cannot resist straightening his back, and in so doing displays more of the upper portion of his anatomy than is desirable in "waiting-up" for fowl.

"Keep down, maister! Keep down!" mutters Gilson, as the hoarse "honking" of the approaching geese drowns the fanning of their wings.

The first "skein" is near at hand, and a number of hazy forms flying in irregular wedge formation pass over the sea-wall and head for the old hulk. Half-a-dozen shots are fired at the geese by the men lining the wall, including a couple of barrels from the "furriner." But that unmistakable thud which proclaims a fallen bird does not reply to the volley.

"Too high, I doubt, but let 'em have it!" ejaculates "Gaffer" Gilson, springing to his feet.

Up goes the ancient fowling-piece, but an ominous "click," followed by a loud and very weighty adjective, speaks only too eloquently of a missfire. The Doctor's gun snaps out twice in quick succession, and a heavy splash in a shallow pan of water left by the receding tide tells of a tragedy in the feathered ranks.

A perfect fusillade now ensues among the gunners lined up under the sea-wall, for the geese, flying in their wedge-shaped "skeins" cover a considerable width of space. But the flight of the big grey fowl is very quickly over. The little surgeon carries his first wild goose home in triumph, and then sets out on a mission of mercy to his fisherfolk patients.

A BLOODLESS HUNT

“ EIGHTY-SIX in the shade, sir ! 'Tis hotter than yesterday, I reckon,” remarks a medal-bedecked park-keeper to me in passing, as I sit within the shadow cast by the leafy and wide-spreading boughs of the giant chestnut trees for which the Royal Park of Bushey is world-famous.

My inseparable companions, Chloe and Jet—a brace of flat-coated retrievers—lie at my feet as I pen these lines. Both are in the land of dreams, dreaming, perchance, of the good days they enjoyed amongst the partridges and pheasants in the past shooting season. It certainly is an exceptionally warm day for early June, but the thermometer would not register eighty-six degrees in my cool retreat under the giant timber trees. In point of fact, I feel delightfully cool and comfortable, notwithstanding that the heat-rays are dancing over the mile of dusty road which extends between Teddington and Hampton Court gates. But the men and horses travelling along the highway look jaded and fatigued enough.

Although from a naturalist's point of view Bushey Park is not so interesting as Richmond Park, it is by no means devoid of wild life. At no great distance from my bower is a small rabbit warren, surrounded by gnarled and ancient hawthorn trees.

The glorious sunshine has coaxed the bunnies from their subterranean habitat, and quite a colony, of all sizes and

ages, are to be seen basking on the sandy heaps which the rabbits have thrown up to the surface during their tunnelling operations.

Chloe and Jet are now wide awake and have sighted the rabbits, whose movements they watch closely and eagerly. Both, however, will remember the ratings and "rib-roastings" which, in puppyhood days, were meted out to them for chasing hares and rabbits, and though Chloe—whose blood is still young and hot—evinces unmistakable signs of restlessness as a couple of half-grown rabbits commence to dance a veritable "bunny-hug" round a grassy mound, a gently spoken "'Ware chase!" proves quite sufficient to drop her alongside the matronly-looking and steady Jet, who has been shot over five successive seasons.

Hallo! there is danger in the air, or the old buck rabbit doing sentry-go on the warren bank would not beat the earth with his hind legs as he is doing. Every coney above ground disappears below the surface at the signal, and a few moments later one of the largest stoats that ever came under our observation appears on the scene. After sniffing round the entrance of the main bury he also darts below.

Very few minutes elapse ere a dozen pairs of long brown lugs and big brown eyes pop out from divers and sundry holes. The stoat has disturbed the peace of the colony by his unexpected and unwelcome visit, and apparently half-scared out of their senses, rabbits, both old and young, sit gazing helplessly towards the big burrow. Strange though it may seem, never a bunny attempts to take flight from the warren.

A little cloud of dust suddenly rises from the mouth of

one of the earths; out bolts a well-grown rabbit, which, looking neither to right nor left, races across the springy turf at top speed, heading for a neighbouring copse, from which comes, ever and anon, the brave challenge of a cock pheasant.

The cruel, snake-like head and long, lissom, and sinuate body of the stoat emerges from the bury a few moments after the exit of the rabbit, and although one would imagine that the fierce sun-rays had evaporated every drop of moisture from the ground and herbage, and thereby destroyed every vestige of what is known to sportsmen as *scent*, the keen-nosed, bloodthirsty little tyrant seems to "carry" the "line" of his quarry with just as much ease and certainty as a well-entered and steady hound will hunt a fox to its death on a breast-high scenting morning. At the appearance of the stoat a great stamping of feet takes place among the scared colony of cottontails, followed by a wonderful display of snow-white scutts, as a general exodus below ground again takes place.

Both pursuer and pursued are by this time hidden from view by the high fence which encloses the copse. In the ordinary course of nature, however, we shall see more of the hunt, as a rabbit, when chased by dog, fox, stoat, or any other four-footed enemy, almost invariably runs in a circle. Therefore, if the unfortunate little denizen of the neighbouring warren is possessed of sufficient stamina and pluck to travel so far, he will assuredly come within view of our shady retreat once more. In such case we will do our best to preserve his life by whipping off his merciless enemy.

But hark! The sharp report of a gun rings out from the wood. The head keeper is on the prowl for vermin, and,

judging by the direction whence the shot came, 'tis even betting on the death of Master Stoat from an overdose of "No. 6 chilled."

Ah! Here comes the hunted rabbit, running somewhat slower than when he started on his race for life, it is true, but still going fairly strong. The frightened creature does not, as might be expected, make tracks for the warren, but, apparently heedless of our presence, he heads straight for the tree under which we are seated.

On and still on he comes until within a dozen yards of us. Then he comes to a dead stop, squats flat, and commences to shriek in a piteous manner.

"Steady, Jet!—'Ware chase, Chloe!" The dogs, probably believing the rabbit to be wounded, set off to retrieve it, and without doubt they might do so, for the poor little creature, paralysed with fear, is awaiting its death-blow from the stoat, which it believes to be close behind.

But the stoat comes not; a timely shot from the game-keeper's gun has doubtless put an end to his marauding for ever.

Jet and Chloe steal sheepishly to heel, looking thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and the rabbit, having regained sufficient strength and courage to use his legs, returns to the heart of his family.

WITHIN A MILE OF JOHANNESBURG

“THE Wemmer dam has been drained dry by the droughts and mine pumps, and the spur-winged geese and pink-bill teal of which we used to take toll a few years ago have flown to other waters.”

The foregoing extract from the letter of a mining engineer recalled to my mind many an enjoyable early morning and evening spent among the different kinds of fowl which used to frequent the small lagoon in question some ten or twelve years ago.

The Wemmer dam lies within a mile of Johannesburg, and at the time of which I speak it was a fine, albeit shallow, piece of water, covering an area of perhaps twenty acres, and being fringed on all sides with high reeds, with clumps of the same, growing in different parts of the lagoon, it afforded excellent cover to the spur-wing geese, duck, pink-bill teal, coots, and other species of wildfowl which resorted thereto in considerable numbers. The spongy shores of the dam, as well as the surrounding patches of spruit-intersected bog or marshland, were the favourite feeding-grounds of common and painted-snipe, greenshanks, avocets, pied plover, sacred ibises, and other kinds of wading birds. Several varieties of herons and cranes used also to frequent this piece of water, amongst them grey, purple, and white herons, crested cranes, and hammerkops.

Well do I remember my first acquaintance with the place. I was jogging quietly across the veld, after an early morning visit to the then recently imported pack of English foxhounds which were kennelled at Geldenhuis, when a bunch of duck passed over my head, and I marked them down into the Wemmer dam. Upon nearer approach I discovered that the pan of water was simply alive with fowl, paddling in and out of the network of open channels amongst the dense carpet-like growths of beautiful aquatic plants. Determined to pay a visit to the water at an early date, I cantered into the "Golden City," and that very same evening made arrangements with a couple of English mining engineers and a well-known Dutch advocate to shoot the dam two days later.

Shortly before dawn of the appointed morning my friends and I, accompanied by a numerous following of blubber-lipped Kafirs, left the slumbering and odorous—the sanitary men were engaged in their unsavoury work—city behind us, and once free of tailing heaps, head-gears, noisy stamp batteries, and gold mines generally, we set out on a bee-line across the veld. We had not gone very far, when G——'s pony put a foot into an aard vark's (antbear's) earth, and, turning a complete somersault, gave his rider what looked to be a very nasty "purler." G——, who rode well under ten stone, was but little the worse for his involuntary fall however, and was quickly in the saddle again.

It was broad daylight by the time we arrived at the head of the dam, where a "pow-wow" was held to instruct our ebon beaters in the manner in which the dam was to be driven. Having learned their lesson, off went the Kafirs, led by a huge Zulu, who bore the

somewhat unenviable name of 'Mamba (a venomous snake). While hobbling the ponies, preparatory to turning them loose to nibble at anything green that they might be fortunate enough to discover on the arid boulder-strewn veld, a beautiful chanting goshawk suddenly appeared on the scene, to the evident alarm of the fowl assembled on the dam, as they instantly took refuge in the dense reeds. The timely visit of the hawk augured well for sport, however, as waterfowl, in common with all birds, lie very close under a bird of prey.

Having watched the natives enter the far end of the lagoon, my companions and I took up our respective stands among the reeds growing at the head of the water, each man choosing the firmest footing he could find. In spite of the fact that the goshawk must have been cognisant of our presence, he still continued to quarter the dam, often passing within shot of the guns.

For quite three minutes the natives maintained what must have proved to them a painful silence, but as they sprang a little bunch of pink-bill teal, such an unearthly volley of war-whoops went up that the friendly hawk departed from the scene at his very best pace, while huge spur-wing geese, duck, teal, coots, and ibises seemed to rise from every growth of reeds and patch of sedge-fringed slob, and trips of greenshanks and avocets and small wisps of snipe restlessly flitted round the shores of the pan. A bunch of perhaps thirty duck passing between the lawyer and myself afforded the former a beautiful crossing shot, and he very promptly cut down a couple with a "right and left." The duck were too far off for my light 12-bore, and with a sigh of regret I watched them pass away across the veld. The other

guns, who had taken up stands beyond the Dutchman, were hard at it by this time, and although the high reeds obscured the men themselves from sight, I saw duck after duck and teal upon teal drop to the contents of their guns. At length, just as I was beginning to think my luck was out, a big spring of teal came heading straight for me. The teal passed within twenty yards of my blind, and so closely packed were they that no fewer than three fell to my first barrel, while another, hard hit, dropped into a growth of water-plants. For the next ten minutes or so the sport was fast and furious, and although personally I shot but indifferently, my companions acquitted themselves in first-rate style, more especially the lawyer, who was indeed one of the finest shots I ever met. The beaters enter the last belt of reeds that lies between the guns and themselves, and in couples and dozens and small bunches the coots begin to leave their final haven of refuge, and, quickly getting up speed, afford us some really pretty shooting as they pass high up overhead, or to right or left, at a great pace. The drive is now over, and the yelling, slime-soiled natives are set to work to gather the slain, which, when counted, run very nearly into three figures.

The marshy land bordering the dam was next visited, when several couple of snipe and a beautifully plumaged avocet were shot. Then we rode back to the "Golden City," well satisfied with the morning's sport, and with appetites that must have astonished the waiters of the Grand National Hotel, at which hostelry we breakfasted.

SPORT IN ONTARIO

I WAS returning to my hotel, after enjoying very fair sport with the brook-trout inhabiting one of the several small streams which debouch on the shores of Lake Muskoka, when I fell in with an up-country farmer whose dusty, travel-worn team drew with pessimistic slowness a heavily laden wagon of produce of sorts towards the neighbouring township.

In the familiar dialect of the "land o' cakes and heather," the worthy husbandman inquired if I would care for a lift into town. Having made myself as comfortable as possible amongst barrels of early, rosy-cheeked apples, bags of potatoes, baskets and boxes of water-melons, pumpkins, tomatoes, cranberries, sweet corn, etc., I passed my cigar case to the driver of the vehicle and inquired whence he hailed. But the canny Scot was not to be drawn so easily by a stranger, and the only satisfaction I received for my somewhat impertinent curiosity was that my cigar was "verra guid."

To be quite authentic, however, my inquiry was not made out of mere idle curiosity, for in one corner of the wagon I had noticed quite a heap of ruffed grouse, woodcock, and wildfowl of sorts. As to whether the farmer came from Klondyke or Jerusalem I cared not a vast deal, but I did want to learn whence came the game, and, incidentally, I meant to ascertain before parting company with my new friend.

In due course we pulled up before the verandah of the hotel which formed my head-quarters, and, having partaken of sundry tots of the spirit of friendship, in the shape of excellent rye whisky, the Scot opened his heart sufficiently to admit that his farm was situated near the township of C——, some six-hours' wagon journey north-west of Muskoka, and also that some very fair shooting was obtainable in the neighbourhood.

But to curtail a long story. During supper that night, I arranged to accompany the Scotsman to his farm the next day. The team was hitched to the wagon, and we left the still sleeping township of Muskoka shortly after dawn. It was a glorious morning, such as one so often experiences in Canada during what is known as the Indian summer.

A great portion of the way led through virgin forest, and the foliage of the giant forest trees had, by the magic touch of Queen Autumn, passed from their summer verdure to gorgeous tints of scarlet, gold, and crimson. But the forest glades were wondrous silent, for the feathered songsters had long ceased their love carolling, the summer migrants had flown to their winter habitats, and, but for the occasional crow of a ruffed grouse, the laugh-like cry of the woodpecker, or the harsh shriek of a blue jay, one might have imagined the woodlands were devoid of life.

Shortly after midday we arrived at our destination, and a more curious, albeit picturesquely situated, building than Mac's homestead I had seldom, if ever, set eyes upon. Approached by a rough corduroy wagon track cut through the heart of the extensive woodland,

Dunrobin Farm lay a good three miles from the mail road. Mac had, obviously, been his own architect and builder, and had built his house in what I can only describe as a go-as-you-please style of architecture.

Erected in a cleared corner of the forest, the original portion of this heterogeneous habitation had been built from the trunks of trees felled on the site and roofed in with wooden shingles. Then came a two-storey section of corrugated iron walls and high-pitched roof of the same useful but somewhat inartistic material, and then a further addition of staring red brick and pantiles, the whole being surrounded by a verandah painted to resemble the skin of a quagga.

Briefly, it was the strangest-looking human habitation imaginable. Nevertheless, my host appeared to regard it with just as much pride as a Chicago millionaire pork-packer would a newly-acquired Scottish castle.

On the other hand, the surroundings of Mac's mansion were just as beautiful as the house was hideous. Standing on the banks of a crystal-clear trout stream, a glorious view of woodland scenery was obtainable from the verandah, a vista of a small lake being caught between the trunks of the forest trees, and the well-tilled corn-fields and pasture-land spoke volumes for the industry, perseverance, and good husbandry of the worthy Scot, who, the son of an Ayrshire crofter, had, twenty years before, taken up his grant of Government land and cleared some 120 acres of it by dint of sheer hard labour, and at the time of my visit was able to show a very substantial balance at the bank.

"But, mon, had I remained in the Hielands, it's

crofter or gillie I'd be the noo, wi' never a bawbee put awa' for a rainy day," said Mac, as he punched the sleek and well-fed quarters of a remarkably good-looking and docile Angus bull, which he had imported from his native country for stock purposes.

Having lent the farmer a hand in unhitching and racking down the horses, I was duly presented to Mrs. Mac, a somewhat angular but pleasant-looking Scots-woman, who greeted me in a most hospitable manner, and then commenced to ask all sorts of questions about the auld country.

It was during the progress of a remarkably substantial meal that I noticed a rather antiquated, but apparently serviceable, spliced fly-rod standing in the corner of the kitchen which—barring high days and holidays, when a state apartment was opened—formed both sitting-room and refectory.

Now, to say that the farmer's home-tied flies were rough would be putting it very mildly; they were the most wonderful and fearful specimens of the tacklist's art imaginable. Fashioned from the very coarsest of coarse gut and of a size generally used for sea-trout fishing, the wings and hackles of these fearsome lures consisted, for the most part, of the plumage of the common or garden barn-door hen; here and there was the feather of a guinea-fowl, or the bronze back-plumage of a turkey being used by way of variety.

"They're a wee bit uncanny-lookin', but they will kill fush, and that's the main thing," declared Mac, as I surveyed the very artificial flies, which, for order's sake, had been placed in a cheese-box sufficiently capacious

to have held the whole stock of a prosperous tackle-maker.

It so happened that I had, a few days previously, purchased in Toronto a very fine-drawn cast and a number of beautifully tied trout-flies of various patterns, which still remained in one of the pockets of my old shooting coat. But the "speckled beauties," like the fair sex of our own species, are very capricious at times. Not to offend the sensibility of my host, I ornamented my cap with a few Buff Orpingtons and Plymouth Rocks, took the ancient greenheart rod from its wonted corner, and wended my way to a bend in the little river, from which I knew my movements could not be closely watched by the inhabitants of the homestead. You see, I had no intention of using the good farmer's flies.

A "bulge" here and there on the surface of the stream told me that at least a few trout were on the feed and, tying a beautiful little Black Gnat to my finely tapered point, I dropped the fly in a most natural kind of manner just above a rising fish. But he would have nothing to say to me, though coming up to the surface ever and anon to suck down a small insect which closely resembled my Black Gnat. At length I gave him up in despair, and utilised all the care and skill I had gained during many years' experience as a dry-fly fisherman in trying to coax some of his brethren.

But devil a bit! The Black Gnat was substituted for a March Brown, the March Brown for an Alder, the Alder for a Red Tag, and so on and so forth until almost every pattern in my old fly-book was exhausted. At length, in sheer desperation, and just as the first roseate

tokens of the very short Canadian twilight were beginning to appear on the western skyline, I "hitched to" one of Mac's Buff Orpingtons, and, with a splash that would have scared any self-respecting British trout out of his six senses, cast the fly under the further bank. In an instant it was sucked below the surface in such a decided manner that striking was quite unnecessary, and I realised that I had a good fish on.

Now, despite all that may be said to the contrary, experience with the Canadian trout leads one to believe that he is not as game a fighter as his British cousin, and after a couple of rushes up-stream and a leap or two, that beautifully marked 18 oz. fish allowed itself to be drawn on to a shelving bank of ooze which was fringed with beautiful white arum lilies.

Placing my fish amongst a cool bed of rushes, I fished up-stream until too dark to distinguish my rustic lure from amidst the surrounding water-plants, adding a brace of half-pounders to my score. Then I returned to the homestead. It was obvious that Mac did not very much appreciate my powers as an angler; indeed, he scrupled not to tell me that he would have filled a creel with trout while I "monkeyed round" after a leash.

The farmer and I were up betimes next morning, and after breakfasting upon buckwheat cakes and maple syrup, venison, ham, and, judging from the flavour thereof, bean coffee, we took our guns (Mac a 12-gauge repeater and myself a 16-bore), and, accompanied by a nondescript-looking member of the canine race (a cross between a spaniel and a "window-shutter," I fancy, which answered to the somewhat theatrical name of

“ Zaza ”), we started away from the homestead to what Mac was pleased to call the “ ’cock ground.”

For half a mile or more the way led along the banks of the little river, and my companion halted every now and again to point out a goodly trout or brilliantly coloured sun-fish, the latter specimen being allied to the perch, and very excellent eating. Then we crossed a little trestle bridge, and, after walking for some considerable distance along an old Indian trail through the sugar-lands (sugar maple forest), we arrived on the outskirts of a tract of boggy ground. This was the farmer’s “ ’cock ground.” Covering an area of perhaps 150 acres, this marshy land was interspersed with deciduous cedars, willow, and alder scrub, while a small natural drain, fed by a number of warm springs, trickled its sinuous course through the centre of the bog. A casual examination of the springy shores of the small creek sufficed to tell me that it was a favourite haunt of the longbills, for the “ borings ” of the birds were to be seen in many places. But for some little time not a feather was moved, with the exception of a small flock of purple grackles, which, not being worth powder and shot, went away unscathed.

Suddenly, however, the dog, after “ feathering ” round a clump of evergreens, gave an excited whimper, took a dive into the shrubs, and out flapped a woodcock within fifteen yards of me. Ere I could pull trigger he had screwed behind the trunk of a cedar; but as he flashed across an open space I dropped him with my right barrel, and in almost less time than it takes to record the fact the mongrel brought the bird to me with scarcely a feather ruffled.

That was the very first American woodcock I had ever

shot, or handled even, and I was admiring the beautiful rufous-red plumage of the bird (the American woodcock is of about the size of a double snipe, and very much darker and brighter in colour than the European species), when three shots rang out in quick succession from Mac's pump-gun.

"Hoots, mon, but it keeps one busy to kill a brace o' 'cock and an ould jack-rabbit with three shots!" quoth the farmer, holding up a couple of woodcock and a forest hare, or, as the Canadian has it, jack-rabbit, for my edification.

It certainly was a remarkably clever shot, but Mac proved himself to be a very fine shot; indeed, I do not think he missed feather or fur throughout the morning, despite the fact that his repeating gun was an extremely heavy and cumbrous weapon.

Again old "Zaza" took a dive into a clump of under-covert, and out came another 'cock within very easy range of me. To the evident amusement of my fellow-gun, the bird beat me by doubling in and out among the bushes, the contents of my second barrel cutting through foliage a good two feet behind him.

Three beats of the cedar swamps were made, and seven and a half couple of woodcock and a leash of hares were bagged, but I am bound to confess that the greater number of the longbills were accounted for by my companion.

At no great distance from the cedar swamp lay, in the very heart of the woods, a small lake or lagoon, round the shores of which, Mac told me, we were likely to pick up a duck or two, with, perchance, a few brace of ruffed grouse. Before reaching the lake-shore we had to pass through many acres of wild raspberry canes, which earlier

in the season must have borne many bushels of rich and luscious fruit ; in fact, the farmer assured me that his better half had made over one hundredweight of jam from their delicately flavoured berries.

As we approached nearer the lagoon, my companion drew my attention to a small " paddling " of mixed fowl resting on the water and apparently asleep, within easy range of the shore. Clutching old " Zaza," who began to evince signs of excitement at the appearance of the fowl, Mac ordered her in a whisper to lie down, and she dropped still as a log into the growth of blueberry bushes. Then, taking advantage of the patches of low scrub which grew down to the very edge of the lake, the farmer and I commenced to stalk the duck, crawling cat-fashion on all fours, and as silently as a couple of kittens.

I shall not very quickly forget that long and painful crawl—painful owing to the ground being strewn in parts with the husks of spine-covered hazel-nuts, which stuck on one's hands and knees like so many needle points ; long because we had to dodge in and out amongst the under-covert to remain hidden from the duck.

At length my companion stopped crawling, and then signalled me to kneel. This I did, and upon peering through the foliage of a belt of evergreens I discovered that the paddling of fowl, consisting of mallard, red-head, and green-wing teal, was within forty yards' range of us, and apparently oblivious of the fact that danger lurked so near at hand.

Up went the pump-gun to the farmer's shoulder, and, pulling into the midst of some nine or ten red-heads which sat huddled together, three of their number

immediately turned paddles upward. Then, with a great to-do, the remainder of the bunch rose from the water, and, paying my attention to the mallard, which happened to be nearest me, I fired into the "brown" of them just as they rose from the water. A couple fell to the contents of my first barrel, while a third, hard hit, after carrying on a short distance over the lake, dropped with a splash amongst a bed of water-plants. Meanwhile the farmer pumped out three more shots from his repeater, bringing down another red-head and a leash of green-winged teal. At the sound of the shooting, up galloped "Zaza," and in a very short space of time she retrieved the slain from the water, including the mallard, which had dropped a good three hundred yards from the shore.

We were now pretty well laden with game and fowl, and I think Mac would have preferred returning to his work on the farm rather than "monkeying round" with me. But I was out to make a mixed bag, and did not intend throwing up the sponge without trying for a ruffed grouse.

Cramming the birds and hares into an antiquated and capacious game-bag, Mac tied the same to the branch of a spruce fir, well out of reach of marauding creatures with a taste for game; and then, without wasting time, we skirted the shore of the lake and once more plunged into the heart of gaily tinted woods.

For perhaps an hour we walked in single file along a narrow trail, which in years gone by had been beaten by the moccasined feet of many an Indian brave, until a more open part of the forest was reached. Here the undercovert, to a great extent, consisted of blueberry

and other fruit-bearing plants, which in parts grew well above one's knees. This formed what the farmer facetiously called his grouse moor.

The day was warm, and it was precious stiff walking through the ground cover, and my thoughts flew away to the purple heather-clad moorlands of Scotland. For a long time not a feather was moved, and I began to wonder whether the farmer had not depleted his "moor" to supply the market. Suddenly, however, the dog, which was ranging a short distance ahead, gave tongue, and up got a covey of seven ruffed grouse between the farmer and myself, and came past me left-handed.

Singling out the leading bird, I had the satisfaction of seeing him crumple up like an old glove; but I missed clean with my second barrel. The farmer scored a long and very pretty "right and left," and then the remaining four birds disappeared behind a clump of silver-birch trees. To my disgust—I was unacquainted with the duties and ways of the Canadian bird-dog—"Zaza" galloped off hell for leather in the wake of the grouse.

Thinking that the farmer had not noticed the sudden exit of his beloved dog, I ventured to rate her, but I was very silenced by Mac's somewhat vehement, "Hoots, mon, leave the bitch alone! She's only gone to tree the birds."

What "treeing" meant I hadn't the faintest idea, but, not wishing to display further ignorance about ruffed grouse shooting, I refrained from asking any questions.

For the space of a few minutes silence reigned over that vast expanse of forest, and then the distant yapping of the dog came faintly to our ears.

“The old bitch has treed ’em; hustle, mon!” now cried the long-legged Scot, as he sprinted through the tangle of undergrowth in the direction whence the sound proceeded, while I brought in the rear.

After a quick burst of ten minutes’ duration, we espied “Zaza” gazing towards the topmost branch of a tall spruce tree, and giving vent to short and excited yaps.

“There they are!” exclaimed Mac, pointing upwards into the tree. I peered and peered, but could see nothing bearing the slightest resemblance to a grouse, or indeed, to a bird of any kind, amongst the dense, dark foliage.

“Stand clear and shoot as they come out!” said my companion.

I did as he bid me. A couple of shots cracked out from the pump-gun; a brace of ruffed grouse came hustling earthwards, bouncing from bough to bough like a couple of rubber balls, and the remaining brace flew over my head, offering such easy shots that I could not well have missed them. The first bird fell dead as a stone almost at my feet, but the other, with a wing down, led the trio a merry chase among the surrounding tangle of undergrowth ere the dog succeeded in capturing it. Thus did I shoot my maiden brace of ruffed grouse.

Then through the silent forest we wended our way homewards, for, although personally I was anxious to shoot more game, my companion seemed still more anxious to return to his work on the land.

A MORNING'S TROUT-FISHING IN GALICIA

THE first roseate tints of early morning were beginning to show above the summits of the Carpathian Mountains when my young Austrian friend B. and myself shouldered our creels and started off to walk the four miles or so of forest-track which lies between the garrison town of Sambor and the river Bystrzyca.

It was a glorious June morning, and the forest glades and valleys were filled with the melody of a thousand feathered choristers. Every patch of tangled brake and under-covert seemed to harbour a nightingale, and the sweet lovesong of the thrush and of the blackbird was heard amidst the delicate green foliage of the giant forest trees.

In parts the narrow forest road led through dense growths of waist-high bracken, or a stretch of emerald turf thickly spangled with wild hyacinths, pale-blue dog violets, and star-like wood anemones. In the open portions of the forest were to be seen many acres of heather-clad moorland, and more than once the crow of a blackcock reached the ears of my companion and myself as we brushed through the springy heath cover.

At length, after seventy minutes of brisk walking, we arrived on the bank of one of the most charming mountain streams imaginable. Of crystal clearness, the river Bystrzyca, after leaving the Carpathians, winds its

serpentine course through smiling valleys, deep ravines, wild moorlands, and virgin forests until it joins the treacherous Dniestr. In parts the banks of the first-named stream are fringed with beautiful willows and other water-loving trees. There are, however, plenty of open reaches where one can throw a fly without fear of getting "hung-up," and the clean gravelly bed of the stream would delight the eye of any English fly-fisherman. Indeed, it is strange to me that the rivers and streams of Galicia are not better known to British devotees of the rod, for goodly trout are to be found in many of them.

Before starting on the business of the day B. went in search of dry sticks with which to build a fire, while I busied myself preparing the various good things which we had brought with us in the picnic hamper. He soon returned with a double armful of dry twigs, and, having laid them under the drooping branches of the weeping-willow which formed our camping-ground, he filled the kettle with water from the river, whilst I set light to the sticks and very soon had a pan of Frankfurter sausages hissing over the blazing fire. To build a second fire upon which to boil the kettle was but the work of a very few minutes, and long ere our friends in the neighbouring town had awakened from their "beauty sleep" we were enjoying an *al fresco* breakfast in the midst of the most beautiful forest and mountain scenery to be found in all Galicia.

Breakfast finished, the light ten-foot split canes were put together, and, having arranged to meet at the same spot under the willow at midday, my companion and I parted, he going up while I elected to try my luck down stream. There was no lack of insect-life on the

river, and, having noticed a number of small fish rising to a fly resembling a blue-dun, I turned over the time discoloured parchment leaves of my dear old fly-book until I came to a bunch of small and beautifully tied "blue-duns," one of which I selected and attached to the finest drawn point I could find amongst my tackle. There was just sufficient ripple on the water to lend a well-thrown dry-fly a life-like appearance. My first cast, however, was about as clumsily managed as possible, but in spite of the fly having fallen all of a heap, it was taken instantly by a plucky little four-ounce fish, which jumped high out of the water when he felt the "steel," and fought as gallantly as many a trout of twice his weight which I have caught in English trout streams. At length I had him safely in the landing-net, and a brilliantly spotted little fellow he was. Elated with the success of my first cast, I carefully "whipped" every foot of water running between my starting-place and a belt of alders growing about a quarter of a mile lower down the reach. For some little time, however, I failed to rise a fish of any kind, and was in the act of reeling in my line, preparatory to looking for a fresh beat beyond the alders, when the "swirl" of a heavy fish travelling in the direction of my fly attracted my attention, and the next moment the artificial "dun" was sucked beneath the surface. It was quite unnecessary for me to strike, as the fish had hooked himself hard and fast. Up and down stream and across he rushed with all the gameness of a Dee grilse. Suddenly, however, to my unspeakable disgust, "bang" went the trace and at the loose end of it what I honestly believed to be a good three-pound trout. It's always the heaviest fish of the day that gets

away. It was useless crying over "spilt milk," or rather "spilt" trout, however, and, having rigged up a fresh trace, I started off to try my fortune further down the stream.

Once clear of the alder belt, I had a fine stretch of open water before me, and in some parts the river widened out to quite eighty feet. There were several deep pools in this reach in which, from former experience, I knew lay some lusty trout.

It was by this time nearly eleven o'clock, and the sun blazingly hot, but, thanks to a cool south-westerly breeze, I was able to continue on my beat in comparative comfort. There were now but very few fish rising, and for perhaps three-quarters of an hour I did not get a touch of any kind. While throwing under the further bank, however, my fly was taken greedily, and in a moment I knew that I was into something heavy. "There's no trout about that gentleman," was my inward ejaculation as the fish, after making a wild rush up stream, caved in like a lamb, allowing me to reel him into the bank without a struggle. I was right in my surmise, for my capture proved to be a very handsome chub of nearly three and a half pounds' weight. I was in the act of scaling the fish when a Ruthenian shepherd approached me. After gazing in open-mouthed astonishment at my delicate-looking little rod, to the butt of which was attached a bright steel spear-head, the shepherd asked if I speared my fish. Upon showing him the fly and explaining the use of the same, not only did he open his mouth wider than before, but his eyes seemed as though they would bolt out of their sockets, as he half-frightenedly examined the tiny lure of steel and feathers.

“Bah!” exclaimed the rustic, “the fish that take that thing [pointing to the fly] must be born fools.” He probably thought the person who used such a bait to be as great a fool as the fish which took it, but the Ruthenian peasant does not dare to voice his opinion regarding his betters outside the precincts of his mud hovel. In the circuitous manner peculiar to his race, my new friend begged for largess with which to purchase tobacco. Having bestowed a twenty kreuzer piece upon him, I asked how he and his fellows caught their fish. “Rake up the bottom with a pole and spear them with a four-tine eel-spear. Or,” went on my bucolic instructor, “when the stream is narrow and shallow enough we build a dam across it, and [with a grin] we sometimes catch a cartload of fish.”

Alas! that the fishing laws of Galicia, or rather Austria, are so lax.

Bidding the peasant carry my landing-net and creel, I fished steadily and carefully down stream, picking up a trout here and a dace or chub there as I went. Neither of the first-named fish exceeded three ounces, however, and, somewhat tired of catching such pigmies, I determined to fish back to the starting-point. At the last cast, however, my fly was taken like lightning, and as I struck a beautiful two-pounder leapt high out of the water, and had I not dropped the point of my rod as he fell back I should in all probability have been smashed. For quite fifteen minutes did that speckled beauty fight manfully for his freedom, and during the mad rushes he made I quite expected to see him carry away my fine-drawn cast into his sanctuary amongst a cluster of big boulders. In spite of his gallant battling, however, he

was unable to cope against cane and steel and tested gut, and at length, thoroughly spent, he allowed himself to be drawn over the landing-net. Two pounds and as many ounces did that game trout weigh, and a more beautifully proportioned or more brilliantly marked fish I never hope to grass again.

A few more unsuccessful casts over the pool in which I rose the last fish, and I retraced my footsteps to the willow, where I found B. awaiting my advent.

On comparing notes I discovered that my friend's creel contained two and a half brace more trout than did my own. Nevertheless, my two-pounder proved the show fish of the morning.

THE MISSED MEET

(*A Ballad of the Chase*)

THO' hoar-frost lingered in the shade, and rime lay white
in copse and glade,
Upon the winter landscape played
A sun as mild as May.
With trampling hoof and stirrup-clink
The lanes beneath them rang ;
Whole hamlets ran to watch them prink in brown and
yellow, black and pink ;
Blithely they laughed and sang :
So for the meet rode HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey :

To meet the hounds at Hare Park Gate ; the road was
long, the time grew late,
And still they rode, serene, inflatè,
The unfamiliar way.
The road divided left and right,
No signpost there to guide ;
The right-hand road lay cold and white ; the left-hand,
bathed in sunshine, bright,
And fair, and smooth, and wide :
So to the left rode HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

The fair wide road became a lane, and to a cart-track
shrank amain—

A cart-track, and at that not plain—

And fretful men were they ;

Each in his glum foreboding shut,

Through fields forlorn they filed,

And followed till the grass-grown rut, by wains of Early
England cut,

Was lost in empty wild.

And empty, wild, were HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

And now with caution, now with haste, now South, now
North, now East they faced ;

Now madly spurring through the waste

(For frantic men were they),

Anon they thundered unawares

Upon a guilty man—

A simple rustic setting snares. Image of Evil sowing
tares,

He leapt, and looked, and ran ;

And after him rode HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

Dark visions of a felon's jail, his wife's despair, his
children's wail

Were lifted from him as a veil.

When questioned, blown, at bay.

His red right hand out straight he threw :

“ Hare Park ? ” he mused, “ Hare Park ? ”

As one would indicate Peru, just where the distance met
the blue,

His arm described an arc.

And fuming left him HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

All thro' the waning afternoon they pricked towards the
dead white moon :

No trace, no sign of lord or loon :

Before them backed away

The same long bleak horizon line,

The same grimacing whins,

The same daft sheep, the same croaked whine, the same
wide down, outrolled, supine,

As like as any pins ;

Dogged, depressed, rode HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

By whins and sheep, morose, adroop, until the sun's long
westering stoop

Shot out before the jaded troop

His last expiring ray :

It flickered through the wood-smoke's haze

Domestic, fragrant, warm,

On happy homesteads, miry ways, and lighted in a final
blaze

Upon—a scarlet form !

Then leapt the hearts of HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

They cried, " 'Tis BEN as sure as sin—his shoulders and
his cheery grin ;
And yon's the wood the hounds are in,
My soul—my life—I'll lay ! ”
Then spurred they o'er the space between,
And naught could stay or hold :
Beyond the turf-land sound and green yawned a morass
obscure, unclean,
Loathly, and dank, and cold ;
But into it plunged HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

And tho' the rank slough sucked and clogged, they
wallowed, floundered, dragged and flogged,
Until triumphant, waterlogged,
Unsavoury men were they ;
Smothered in slime from spurs to stocks,
Unflinching, keen as—mules.

No sign of huntsman, hound or fox : naught but a rural
letter-box,
Erect, regardant, gules.

Came dreadful words from HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

* * * * *

A crimson smoulder in the West ; the last late crow had
won to rest ;
A breath of ice that gripped the chest—
And freezing died the day.
A hoof-struck flint-spark lit the gloam,
A shivering horn-shake rang ;

With hammering drum on lane and loam, and pattering
feet as light as foam,

And crop-thong's whistling bang,

At last the hounds met HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

“ Good-night,” the Huntsman cried, “ Good-night ! Been
with the Harriers, eh?—All right,
You've missed a clinking day—— ”

But raving home went HARBOTTLE, SILLITOE,
GRIGGS and BRIGGS and BULLER-BROWN, and GRUMBY
on the grey.

SOME SMOKING-ROOM YARNS

THE Rector of a certain remotely situated parish in Norfolk, although a rattling good sportsman at heart, is an exceedingly bad shot.

Squire D——, who did not shoot, had given the parson permission to walk over the manor with a gun whenever he felt so inclined. One day, during early September, his reverence, accompanied by the Squire's head keeper, went out to try and bag a brace of partridges. The coveys were numerous and easy of approach. But alas! the good Rector couldn't hit them, and at the end of a long morning's tramp amongst the stubbles and turnips the "bag" totalled one humble rabbit only.

Suddenly a big hare was put up from almost under the reverend sportsman's feet. He let fly with both barrels just as Madam Lepus bolted under a gate.

"That is a dead hare anyway, Giles!" cried the parson to the gamekeeper. The latter did not deign to reply at the moment, for he knew full well that the hare was quietly loping across the next field unscathed. Then walking up to the gate he carefully examined the top bar of same, and said:

"'Tis a pity that ode heer sneaked under t' gate instead o' leapin' over 'un. Like as not yer riverence would heve hit she had she only jumped, for the top bar be fair smudded with shot."

* * * * *

A few seasons ago I formed one of a party of eleven "guns" on a certain well-stocked partridge manor in East Anglia. Among my fellow guests was an officer of one of the Lancer regiments, and also a rotund little man well known in the leather world.

The gallant soldier—he is a splendid shot—shot brilliantly throughout the morning, while the leather magnate proved a far better friend to his cartridge maker than enemy to the "little brown birds." Briefly, his contribution to the bag, when a halt was called for lunch, consisted of one very small leveret.

Like many other bad shots, the little man anathematised his gun, ammunition, the sun (which was always in his eyes just as he was getting on to his bird, don't you know!), everything, indeed, barring his own lack of skill. Needless to add, Mr. Leather came in for his full quota of good-natured chaff during luncheon. He took his roasting somewhat badly, however, and well primed with "Dry Monopole," and smarting under what he erroneously imagined to be a direct insult from the Lancer, he offered to bet the latter a level "tenner" that his (Mr. Leather's) "bag" would be the heavier of the two at the close of the afternoon's sport. Not caring to take undue advantage of "crooked powder," and knowing full well that in the usual course of events his challenger had not the ghost of a chance of winning the bet, the Captain very properly refused to accept the wager. At length, however, upon Mr. Leather suggesting that he funked the match, he condescended to take up the gauntlet.

Shooting was resumed, the soldier dropped bird after bird as usual, while Mr. Leather blazed away without

touching feather or fur. Our host—one of the kindest of men—feeling sorry for the little sportsman, and realising that driven partridges were utterly beyond his ken, sent him off with a keeper and a well-broken cocker spaniel to work some thick double hedgerows for outlying pheasants.

We had just finished a successful drive and were moving off to take up our stands for another one, when the report of Mr. Leather's gun reached our ears. A few minutes later the spaniel came limping across a wide stubble, "pen and inking" for all he was worth.

"By Jove! Leather has peppered my best cocker!" exclaimed our host, as the dog ran up to him, bearing unmistakable signs of having been shot in the hind-quarters. Scarcely were the words uttered than the sportsman in question came into view, waving his arms frantically and shouting "Help! help!"

"Hanged if I don't believe our friend has made a double event of it and winged the keeper to boot," quietly remarked the Captain, as we sprinted towards the spot.

Sure enough the little man had scored a double event for, upon firing at a hen pheasant as it blundered out of the hedgerow, he missed the bird but hit both the dog and the keeper, who happened to be beating on the further side of the fence.

"I owe you ten pounds, Mr. Leather, for you certainly did make a heavier bag than did I myself this afternoon," said the Captain in the smoking-room that night.

"Thankee. I'll send it to Velveteens as a plaster to heal his wounds," was the unblushing reply of our fellow guest.

* * * * *

Here follows a sequel to the foregoing story :

Not very long since, Captain J—— met Mr. Leather at a certain well-known London gunmaker's shop.

“ Had many invites to shoot this season, Captain ? ”

“ No, sir, have you ? ”

“ I should *rather* say so—far more than I can possibly accept.”

“ You are fortunate in being so sought after, Mr. Leather. May I presume, however, that your numerous shooting hosts take the precaution of insuring the lives and limbs of their keepers and dogs prior to your visits ? ”

* * * * *

An eminent West End silk mercer, by dint of industry and enterprise, has raised himself from the obscurity of an errand-boy to a very honourable position in one of the home counties in which he has acquired a fine estate noted for its head of game. The well-stocked coverts thereon were shot during Christmas, and Mr. ——, having been placed by his keeper in a very warm corner, the pheasants came both high and fast over his head, like a veritable meteoric shower. Now it happened that the man who acted as loader for the Squire had placed just seventy-five cartridges in his master's bag at the commencement of the first beat. It may also be mentioned that the loader had been well rated by the Squire that morning for some trivial transgression. As before stated, the “ rocketers ” simply streamed over the Squire, and as fast as his guns could be loaded and fired he had at the birds. But alas! those seventy-five cartridges only accounted for a brace of hens and one old cock pheasant.

“ I can’t shoot worth a button to-day, Taylor—very trying time in town yesterday— Here, don’t stand grinning like a fool, but help me stamp some of these confounded cartridge cases into the ground before the rest of the party come up ! ”

The Squire and his henchman were still busily engaged treading the accusing shells into the soggy ground when the funny man of the party appeared on the scene, accompanied by half-a-dozen other tweed-clad sportsmen.

“ Hallo, Squire, practising the turkey-trot I see ! ” cried the joker facetiously, adding : “ By-the-bye, you seem to have burned a rare lot of powder, what’s the score ? ”

Purple with shame and rage at being thus caught, the Squire, doubtless expecting his attendant to reply diplomatically—in other words to lie well—inquired of him the number of birds down.

“ Seventy-five runs for three wickets, sir—— Beg pardon, I meant to say seventy-five cartridges for three pheasants,” came the ill-timed, albeit truthful, reply of Taylor, who is by way of being a cricketer.

“ Hence the turkey-trot ! ” roared the funny man, as he unearthed a cartridge case with the spike of his shooting-stick.

Moral: Don’t rate your loader on the morning of a big shoot.

* * * * *

“ The partridges are unusually wild for early September. It would be useless trying to walk the coveys up, we must drive ’em,” said the owner of a small shooting in Essex to his guests, just before setting out for a day’s partridge shooting.

“ Ah yes, drive them into nets ! I’ve seen wildfowl taken in that fashion on the shores of the Wash,” very naïvely remarked a “ sportsman ” from town.

He was placed on the extreme left of the line of “ guns,” and well out of range of any one during the day’s sport.

* * * * *

The pack had just been “ thrown into covert,” and the noble M.F.H., who hated to be spoken to when his beloved hounds were drawing, was anxiously awaiting for the challenge which proclaims a find.

Suddenly a pink-coated snob, of a decided Hebraic cast of features, pulled up alongside the silent and solitary horseman, whom the oldest member of the hunt did not dare to approach at such a moment, and in a loud tone of voice opened as follows :

“ Good-morning, my lord ! We haven’t had the honour of seeing you hunting in *our* country yet.”

“ No, sir,” replied his lordship, “ and you ain’t likely to either, for I understand that Holy Land is a damned poor fox-huntin’ country.”

* * * * *

“ Hold hard, madam ! For Heaven’s sake hold hard, or that camel you are riding will be the death of some of my hounds ! ” cried the choleric master of one of the south-eastern counties’ packs of foxhounds to a lady who was riding rather too close to hounds.

Without deigning to turn her head, she steered her mount a little to the left and clear of hounds, rode her own line like a centaur, led the van through a long and very fast run, and was the first of the field to see the fox rolled over in the open.

Having recovered from his temporary fit of churlishness, and delighted with the manner in which the lady had ridden, the Master approached her, somewhat sheepishly it must be confessed, with the "brush" and an apology.

"Pray don't apologise, sir," was the smiling reply. "You simply mistook my favourite hunter for a camel, and I your foxhounds for fox-terriers. It seems we were both mistaken. Thanks awfully for the brush."

* * * * *

The huntsman of a certain old-established pack of foxhounds, kennelled within thirty miles of London, was laid up with an attack of influenza, and the new Master, who entertained a far better opinion of his capabilities as an amateur huntsman and horseman than did the majority of the members of the hunt, elected to carry the horn until such time as Tom —— was able to take to the saddle again.

Now truth to tell, Mr. L——, like the immortal Jorrocks, had spent a considerable portion of his existence amongst bricks and mortar, and knew far more about the wine and spirit trade than he did of the huntsman's craft. Indeed, he knew but the name of one solitary hound only of his pack of twenty-seven couples, to wit, "Tiger," an old Welsh hound, whom Tom, the huntsman, declared would hunt anything from a shrew-mouse to an elephant, was too slow for a parish funeral, and ought to have been drafted out of the pack years ago.

The meet, which happened to be in the market-square of a small country town, attracted quite a large number of sportsmen and sportswomen, who, needless to add,

were anxious to see how the somewhat unpopular Master would shape in his new and self-imposed *rôle*.

He, poor man, very soon found himself in difficulties. Scarcely had hounds been "thrown into covert" than he discovered that instead of his patent "self-playing" horn he had brought an ordinary one, upon which he couldn't wind a single note beyond a shrill squeak; while the hounds, accustomed to hear and obey the musical voice of Tom, their huntsman, paid not the slightest heed to the strange and unorthodox cheering and rating of the Master.

Now a huntsman who can neither blow a horn nor throw his voice to advantage is just about as useful in covert or field as a shooting man without cartridges with which to charge his gun. Mr. L—— very soon found himself deserted by every hound in the pack barring poor old Tiger, who potted about the covert a few yards ahead of him.

Suddenly a distant challenge from one of the errant hounds was replied to by the full chorus of the pack, and almost simultaneously Tiger hit off a "line" on his own account, opened with the deep, bell-like "music" peculiar to the Welsh hound, ran a short distance up a ride and so out of covert with the Master following and blowing the most discordant notes on the horn imaginable. Meanwhile a fox had "broken" near the far end of the wood, and the main strength of the pack, followed by the scarlet-coated hunt servants and the "field"—who by-the-bye, appeared to have forgotten the very existence of the Master—were racing after their quarry across a lovely line of country. With the exception of a welter yeoman named Rodwell, who,

mounted on a great upstanding half-bred cart-mare had turned up late at covert-side, the Master found himself absolutely alone. He comforted himself, however, with the mistaken idea that hounds were only a very short distance ahead, hunting the same "line" as Tiger, and that a timely check would enable him to get on terms with them.

But perhaps it would be well to tell the remainder of the story as it was recited by Mr. Rodwell, the belated farmer, to divers members of the hunt a little later in the day :

" Well, ye see gentlemen, I arrove at covert-side just in time to see the Master blunderin' through a gap with that old blear-eyed rough-coated 'ound, Tiger, huntin' on scent, and givin' tongue as only they Welsh fox'ounds know how. There wasn't a sign of any other livin' soul, but I could hear the rest o' the pack in the distance, and as it seemed to me, a bit left-handed like. Howsoever, never doubtin' that the Master had been hung up in covert, but knew exactly which way hounds were runnin', I stuck as close to him as my old elephant of a mare could lay hoofs to ground. Mr. L—— is a rare good pilot for a heavy man like me, seein' as he always rides for a gap or gateway, and never so much as takes a twig or water-furrow even. Every now and again he'd blow a note on his 'orn which sounded for all the world like a boy's penny trumpet, while to 'ear 'im a-cheerin' on old Tiger—'Forrard! forrard! forrard, Tiger!' ('Squeak! squeak! squeak!')—'twas the queerest performance I ever heard in all my born days. The further we rode the further away became the cry of hounds. This puzzled me a bit, but Tiger still stuck to

the 'line,' and went belling and yowling on without checking or faltering for a moment even.

"At length we came across one o' Jim Territ's men a-ploughin' in forty acres.

"'How far ahead are hounds?' yells the Master, pullin' up his mount on the headland.

"'Han't seed no 'ounds, sir, but the hare ran past I 'bout ten minutes ago, and t' owd rough dawg yonder be clean on her scent right enough,' said the man, pointing toward Tiger, who was trundling along a dry water furrow at about six miles an hour.

"'Hare, you fool! Don't you know the difference between a hare and a fox?' shouts the Master, as ugly-tempered as a bag o' weasels.

"'If it wor a vox as passed me, danged if it worn't the longest eared-'un and shortest tailed-'un as ever I set eyes on!' replied the man, as he set his team a-goin' again.

"The Master didn't wait to argey the point, and off he galloped again, a-squeaking his horn and a-cheerin' Tiger like mad.

"It was pretty clear to me by this time that Tiger had been runnin' on the line of a hare right away from covert, and as I wasn't out for 'currant jelly' with half a couple o' hounds, I cut away sharp, left-handed, and half-an-hour or so later fell in with Bill Saunders, the second whip, who had been sent by the hunt secretary to look for the Master.

"'Seen anythin' o' the governor?' asks Bill, ridin' up to me.

"'Yes, left him on Territ's forty acres hare-huntin' with old Tiger.'

“ ‘ Ah ! so long as he’s safe that’s all right,’ says Bill, with a wink, adding, ‘ Tiger will keep him out o’ mischief for the rest o’ the day. The old ’ound dearly loves a hare, though he’s too slow to catch ’em.’

“ Bill and I rode to Hydes Hollow to find hounds drawin’ Dawson’s gorse for a fresh fox, they havin’ killed their first.

“ Ten to one, Tom, the first whip will carry the horn next Saturday, and a hundred to one the Master will resign at the end of the season.”

Farmer Rodwell’s prophecy proved correct in both cases, and the ex-Master is still spoken of by the members of the — Hunt as “ Tiger L——.”

FAIR PLAY FOR THE OTTER

To champion the cause of the hated and much maligned otter is a thankless task, and I quite anticipate a good rating at the hands of devotees of the rod. Ah, well, perchance I shall survive the ordeal! I would, however, mention that the statements anent the otter contained herein are based upon practical knowledge, gained during years of close and careful observation and study of the habits of this most interesting species of our native fauna in his natural habitat.

In the first place, what is an otter? That doughty knight of immortal fame, Sir John Falstaff, during a heated tavern argument once likened his worthy hostess to one of those animals, much to the disgust of the lady.

“An otter! Why an otter, Sir John?” asked Merry Prince Hal, who happened to be of the audience.

“Because,” replied the weighty knight, “she is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; a man knows not where to have her.”

A short time ago we read in a certain Scottish newspaper a wonderful—and fearful—description of an otter-hunt, in the course of which the quarry was repeatedly spoken of as the “fierce and bloodthirsty amphibian.”

Now, although of amphibious habits, the otter belongs

to the great *Mustelidæ* family, and is, therefore, allied to the skunk, badger, marten, polecat, stoat, and weasel, all of which species possess the same elongated, low, and muscular, albeit lithesome bodies; the same predatory and cleanly habits; constitutional hardiness, prolificacy, and sagacity. Between the various species of the mustelines, however, a very great difference in dentition occurs.

As to whether or no the otter has any fixed season of nidification was formerly a moot question among naturalists. It is a generally accepted fact to-day, however, that the species has no specific breeding-season, and we have personally seen quite small cubs both in early spring and late autumn; a fact which would seem to indicate that otters breed throughout the year.

And now, having touched upon the physical side of our subject, we will endeavour to persuade those readers who have been guilty of or who condone the "heinous crime" of lutricide, that the otter, like his Satanic Majesty, is not quite so black as he is wont to be painted; while, without doubt, he is one of the gamest of game animals that ever ran before a pack of hounds, and, therefore, worthy a more honourable death than by a dose of shot or a spring trap.

If my memory deceives me not, it was dear old Izaak Walton, who at the finish of his maiden otter-hunt prayed the huntsman (what a d——d bad sportsman that huntsman must have been) to save at least one of the otter cubs which he (huntsman) was about to destroy. Whether the father of anglers begged the life of that cub simply that he might "teach it to catch fish and

doe other things of great pleasure," or whether he did so out of sheer love of fair play, which was largely inherent in him, we know not. But we venture to suggest that not a few Waltonians of the twentieth century might do well to bear in mind this simple lesson in sportsmanship taught by the immortal Izaak.

Ask the average angler what constitutes the food of the otter and the reply will probably be "Fish, and nothing but fish!"

Well, fish certainly does figure pretty largely on Lutra's daily, or rather nightly—he is of nocturnal habits—bill-of-fare, but he is by no means averse to rabbits, waterhens, water-voles, rats, mice, frogs, fresh-water mussels, crawfish, snails, beetles, etc.

Of all fish the otter probably gives preference to the eel; a fact which was demonstrated in the following manner:

A certain sportsman who had reared an otter from early cubhood laid out before his pet a number of different kinds of fish, including salmon, trout, pike, perch, carp, tench, bream, and eels. After "nosing" each kind the otter singled out an eel, and immediately commenced to devour it. This occurred not once only but upon several occasions.

We do not pretend to know why our web-footed friend evinces such a predilection for eels, but, depend upon it, if you find the remains of eels on a patch of flattened-down rushes, or in some sequestered spot along the banks of your stream, there has been an otter at work. If you search carefully, you may, perhaps, meet with the half-eaten carcass of other kinds of fish; but "poached" eels will surely predominate. It may be the natural

richness of the eel which attracts the otter, while their comparatively slow progress through the water renders them a prey not difficult of capture.

Now it is very well known that eels do an incalculable amount of damage amongst the "reds" by devouring both salmon and trout ova, of which they are inordinately fond. Nor do they confine their depredations to ova alone. What better bait could be found for an eel than a small salmon-pink or a fingerling trout, and where is the angler who has not roundly anathematised these slimy, line-entangling pests for running away with his very best dace or minnows while live-baiting or paternostering? This being the case, it is not unreasonable to suggest that on rivers and streams infested by eels an otter or two should prove beneficial rather than otherwise. We use the words "an otter or two" advisedly, of course, for *Lutra's* very best friends even could not, with any degree of honesty, advocate the preservation of an overplus of his kind in either salmon, trout, or coarse-fish waters. But there is not much danger of any stream becoming overpopulated by otters. The moment the young are able to fend for themselves, they are driven by their "affectionate" parents either down to the sea or to some distant water.

Could any intelligent and thoughtful man for one moment imagine that a couple—or, for that matter, half-a-dozen—otters within, say, a fifteen-mile stretch of our larger rivers (which, generally speaking, simply teem with fish) would make any appreciable difference to the sport of the angler? Nay, the suggestion alone would appeal to such a one as being absurd. The Thames Conservancy arrived at this conclusion some

few years ago, and, realising that otters form a very important and interesting species of the river fauna, have rendered the killing of otters on the Thames an offence punishable by law. Then, as before stated, anglers raised a great outcry against the Thames otters, which, they declared, were destroying the fish to an alarming extent, and the Conservators decided to go into the matter thoroughly.

We are inclined to believe that, if it were possible to examine all, or even a tithe, of the fish killed by otters in this country, a very considerable percentage would be discovered to be diseased or weakly specimens. In point of fact, upon more than one occasion we have found on the banks of the Kentish Beult, and once in the River Cherwell, diseased fish partially devoured by otters. Surely the decimation of such finny degenerates is advantageous to any water, even though the much-despised otter performs the good work.

“ Have you, sir, either kingfishers or dabchicks on your fishing? ”

“ Ah! your stream boasts both those beautiful species of birds, and you receive pretty frequent visits thereto from an old heron.”

“ Being yourself a lover of nature, you like to see them there, and wouldn't have one shot for any money, although you suspect them of doing a good deal of damage to the water.”

“ Well, as a matter of fact, if you will take the trouble to walk over to your local police-station and request to see a copy of the schedule of the Wild Birds Protection Acts, you will find that not only are the heron, kingfisher, and dabchick protected by a wise law during the

close season, but also a number of other birds, including the smew and cormorant, all of which are even more destructive to fish than the former species."

But let us take the kingfisher as the least harmful of the before-mentioned feathered marauders, and ask any field-naturalist who has made a close study of both the halcyon and the otter which of the twain is the greater enemy to the angler. I think that the verdict will be "the kingfisher." One has but to examine the nest of a kingfisher to realise the enormous amount of damage these gaily plumaged denizens of our rivers, lakes, and brooks wreak amongst the fry of trout and other kinds of fish. The nest, which takes the form of a burrow or tunnel in the bank of a river or pond, well beyond the reach of the longest human arm, is roughly constructed, apparently from the bones and scales of very small fish, deposited by the parent birds in the shape of disgorged pellets. This malodorous mass of nastiness is of considerable size, and must represent an enormous number of baby fish—a far greater number, indeed, than any two otters would destroy within twelve months.

"Yes, that is all very well, but the kingfisher only kills very small fish, while the otter takes toll of the big 'uns," we fancy we hear some of the readers remark upon perusing the above.

True, but in the ordinary course of nature little fish grow into big fish. Let it not for one moment be thought that in writing thus we wish to "play off" the halcyon against the otter, for such is not the case. But we do not think it just or reasonable that inveterate war by gun and trap should be waged against the otter, while the kingfisher and other predaceous birds, far more destructive

to fish than he, are during certain seasons of the year protected by law.

On preserved waters remotely situated from any packs of otterhounds, and where every individual fish is regarded as a prize, one can argue but little, perhaps, against the trapping of otters. But, in the name of all that is English and sportsmanlike, do not slaughter in cold blood this gallant beast of the chase on waters lying within reasonable distance of a pack of otterhounds. Drop a line to the nearest M.O.H., and, if hounds do but "strike a trail," we warrant you will enjoy rare sport.

WILD LIFE NEAR LONDON

It is difficult to imagine the heart of South Kensington as a "happy hunting-ground" for the man with a gun, nevertheless, an old sportsman, whose veracity is beyond doubt, declares that he has shot both partridges and snipe where to-day are the Exhibition Buildings.

In a certain small hostelry within a stone's throw of the ancient house in King's-road, Fulham, reputed to have been one of the many homes of Nell Gwynne, there may be seen a large glass case containing stuffed specimens of both full and jack-snipe, water rail, teal, and kingfishers—all shot by a local "gunner" on what used to be known as Fulham Marsh.

Wimbledon Park, which lies within seven miles of Charing Cross, possesses a lake of considerable size. In this lake three or four years ago coots were so numerous that it was deemed advisable to thin them out. There were shot during three early mornings $54\frac{1}{2}$ couple by three guns. The "bag" might have been doubled. The coots here are quite wild, many no doubt, wanderers from Pen Ponds, Richmond Park, and other large sheets of water in the neighbourhood. It is worthy of note that during the coot drives a pair of great crested grebes remained on the lake, apparently quite unconcerned at the fusillade.

It may not be generally known that Wimbledon Common, Richmond Park, and the intervening Kingston

Vale can show quite a good head of pheasants, partridges, hares, and rabbits, or that Richmond Park boasts a heronry of some importance, and delightful it is to watch the movements of the great birds as they fly to and fro carrying small fish and other titbits with which to supply the wants of their squawking and always hungry nestlings. The grand and ancient park of Richmond affords sanctuary to many of the rarer and more interesting species of our British birds, including the nightingale, blackcap, redstart, red-backed shrike, yellow, grey, and pied wagtails, nightjar, wheatear, stonechat, whinchat, grasshopper-warbler, great and lesser whitethroats, great tit, cole-tit, blue-tit, and longtail tit, golden-crested wren (amongst the fir trees), nuthatch, wryneck, green and greater spotted woodpeckers, and kingfisher.

All these and many other kinds of birds too one has seen in Richmond Park, including the only hoopoe we ever met with in this country, which was observed running under an old tree-trunk behind White Lodge—Queen Mary's early home.

With the exception of quite a colony of wood owls (the brown or tawny species), which live amongst the giant timber trees, neither Bushey Park nor the Home Park, Hampton Court, has been found a satisfactory hunting-ground from an ornithological point of view. In June last, however, when walking through Bushey Park, the writer noticed quite an exciting hunt between a large stoat and a rabbit, which ended in a "kill" for the stoat, in a strip of covert. Several jolly little squirrels were also to be seen playing amongst the blossom-spangled branches of the magnificent trees in the chestnut avenue.

The gardens of Hampton Court Palace were then a

dream of colour—a triumph of artistic flower-culture, while in the Long Water in the Home Park are not a few pairs of wild duck with their broods of downy youngsters. You may see these merry little chaps dodging in and out among the water-lilies and aquatic plants in search of flies and other insect life. This piece of water is reputed to hold some very fine pike and perch, and on a bright sunny day numbers of enormous carp are to be seen finning lazily in its weedy depths. Permission to fish in this water may now be obtained.

From the Long Water to Ditton Ferry is but a short walk across the Home Park. Many of the fine old timber trees, one notices, have been attacked by that parasite, the mistletoe plant, of which great bunches hang from the topmost branches of the trees.

Here we may cross by ferry to the Surrey side, and at the Swan Inn—mentioned by Theodore Hook—quaff a pint of shandy gaff. Then a walk through the quaint old churchyard of Thames Ditton, along Church Walk, across Weston Green, and so on, to the golden gorse-decked common of Esher—a veritable paradise to a lover of nature.

Snipe are not only to be shot on Esher Common during the season, but their pear-shaped mottled eggs in a nest composed of a few dead bents and feathers may be found there. The head gamekeeper on the Ditton Estate, of which Esher Common forms a part, declared that he had watched and heard the nesting birds soaring and bleating over the bog many a time.

“Do you get any other game on the common?” he was asked.

“Oh yes! There are always a few brace of pheasants

and partridges to be found here, and last time the beagles [the West Surrey Beagles are kennelled in the neighbourhood] drew the common they found four hares and ran one right away to Banstead."

"How about the foxes? Have they worried you keepers much since hounds stopped hunting this part of the country?"

"Well, there are still a few foxes left in the coverts, sir, but they don't trouble us very much. But what do you think we found harbouring in Winterdown Wood, which is just across the common yonder, a few weeks ago? Why, a badger weighing $33\frac{1}{2}$ pounds!" went on the keeper; adding, "The Squire didn't like to kill the brock, but it destroyed so many clutches of pheasant eggs that it had to go. We were digging hard for nine solid hours before we got the beast out of its earth, and it was the biggest badger I ever set eyes on."

"It is good to know that there is some wild life still to be found within fourteen miles of London," said my companion as we walked through the golden-blossomed gorse. We agreed that it was very good.

ANCIENT FALCONRY

HAWKING, according to Beckman, was known to the Greeks and Romans. Its origin in England, however, cannot be traced till the reign of King Ethelbert, in the year 760, when that Saxon monarch sent to Germany for a brace of falcons.

In the reign of James I Sir James Monson is said to have given a thousand pounds for a "cast" of falcons.

In Edward III's reign it was made felony to "steal" a hawk, while to take the eggs of a falcon, or hawk, even in one's own grounds, was punishable with imprisonment for one year and a day, together with a fine at the king's pleasure.

In olden times the custom of carrying a hawk on the wrist was confined to men of high distinction, and it was formerly a saying among the Welsh "You may know a gentleman by his hawk, horse and greyhound." Even ladies in those days indulged in the sport of falconry, and have been represented in sculpture with a falcon on hand.

In Bewick's *British Birds* (vol. i, p. 26), it is recorded that a falcon, belonging to a Duke of Cleves, flew out of Westphalia into Prussia in one day; and in the county of Norfolk a peregrine falcon made a flight of nearly thirty miles, at a woodcock, within one hour.

From Rees' *Cyclopædia*, we read—and accept *cum grano salis*—that some of the larger species of hawks were trained to fly at the wild boar and wolf. "With this view," says Rees, "they [the hawks], should be accustomed to feed, when young, out of the sockets of the eyes

of a wolf or boar's head, the whole skin of the animal being stuffed so as to make it appear alive. While the bird is feeding the falconer begins to move the figure gradually, in consequence of which the bird learns to fasten itself so as to stand firm, notwithstanding the precipitate motions which are gradually given to the stuffed animal; she would lose her meat if she quitted her hold, and therefore she takes care to secure herself. When these first exercises are finished, the skin is placed on a cart, drawn by a horse at full speed; the bird follows it, and is particularly eager in feeding; and then when they come to fly on the field, she never fails to dart on the first beast of the kind she discovers, and begins to scoop out the eyes. This puts the quarry in such distress that the hawkers have time to approach and despatch it with their spears."

During the reign of the "Merrie Monarch" St. Albans seems to have been a favourite hawking ground. Shakespeare says :

" Ride into St. Albans,
Where the King and Queen do mean to hawk."

At St. Albans, Caxton printed a treatise on hawking, hunting, and heraldry. Strutt, in his *Sports and Pastimes*, mentions an historical fact related by Hall, who states that Henry VIII, while pursuing his hawk on foot at Hitchin, in Hertfordshire, attempted, with the assistance of a leaping-pole, to jump over a ditch which was half-full of muddy water. The pole broke, and the king fell head foremost into the mud, where he would have been stifled had not a footman, named John Moody, come to the rescue and released his Majesty from his perilous situation. "And so," says the honest historian, "God of hys goodnesse preserved him."

A RARE "JOE MANTON"

HAPPY is the man who can boast a genuine "Joe Manton" gun amongst his collection of antique fire-arms; thrice happy is he whose sporting trophies include such a rare and beautifully finished specimen of the immortal Joe's art as that lying before us as we write this paper.

From the following extract culled from an affidavit recently sworn by Messrs. James and Thomas Samuel Manton, descendants of the "King of Gunmakers," it will be seen that the weapon in question was built for the "brave old Duke of York," who, according to the barrack-room ballad, "marched ten thousand men to the top of a hill and marched 'em back again." As to whether this was the usual tactic pursued by the royal general in the field, history does not say. But we do know that H.R.H. the Duke of York was Commander-in-Chief of the English Army during the Napoleonic era.

Here follows the extract in question :

"We, James Manton and Thomas Samuel Manton, grandsons of Thomas Manton, of Grantham, and Long Acre, London, gunmaker, cousin to Joe Manton, of 25 Davies-street, Berkeley-square, gunmaker to His Majesty George III, and to their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of York, Cambridge, and Gloucester, and Prince Leopold, do solemnly and sincerely declare that we have examined the gun now in the possession of . . . and from the Manton family records we identify it and know it to be a

genuine Joe Manton gun, and according to the pedigree and records of this particular weapon it was expressly made for, and to the order of, the Duke of York, son of George III, . . . with gold pan, gold touch-holes, and gold mounts."

The gun—it is a 14-bore—is certainly one of the most beautifully balanced and finished "flint-locks" that ever came under our inspection. Armed with such weapons it would be easy to imagine that our forefathers were wont to quit themselves right well in the shooting-field, despite such "slight drawbacks" as missfires, hang-fires, damp powder, etc., which must have been of pretty frequent occurrence amongst old-time gunners.

In such a wonderful state of preservation is the gun under notice, so perfect in "lock, stock, and barrel," indeed, that at first sight one would feel inclined to think that a charge had never been fired from it. Closer examination of the lock, however, reveals the fact that many a time and oft has a spark been created by the clash of an atom of black-flint against tempered steel, and dropped upon the priming-powder in the golden pan; while many a head of game has, doubtless, been laid low by the contents of the shapely "star" barrel of the old flint lock.

Tradition declares that the younger son of George III shone far more brilliantly as a sportsman in the royal preserves of Windsor and Richmond than as commander-in-chief of the British forces in Flanders.

But, alas! the "Joe Manton" in question can but "bark," and even then only when specially charged to do so. Would that it could speak and tell of the "good old days" when Colonel Peter Hawker (who swore that

Manton was the only gunmaker in the kingdom worthy the name) was wont to post up to London from his favourite fowling-grounds to discuss "charges" and "pieces" with "Joe": when single-trigger, hammerless ejectors, or, for that matter, "percussion guns," were undreamed of; the days before Manton patented and placed upon the market the double-barrelled shot-gun, and built one of those "newfangled toys" to the order of the Marquis of Rockingham for the pretty fee of 450 guineas. We warrant the ancient weapon could unfold a tale worthy the listening.

And now, having spoken of one of Joe Manton's works of art, a few words anent the biography of the artist himself may not be incongruous, perhaps.

Joseph Manton was the younger son of John Manton, of Grantham, Lincs, in which town he (Joe) first saw the light, in 1766. Like his brother John, he was apprenticed to a local gunmaker. John Manton, jun., migrated to London in 1788, started gunmaking at No. 6 Doverstreet, Piccadilly, and remained there until his death, the business being carried on in his name until 1865.

Joe first came to London in the year 1790, for the purpose of taking out a patent for one of his own inventions. The Government offered to purchase the patent for the sum of £500, but Joe, having expended double that amount upon the invention, refused this "generous" offer, to the displeasure of the then Duke of Richmond, who curtly advised the young man from the Fen country to bring out his patent as best he might. Two years later Joe Manton found himself established at 25 Daviesstreet, Berkeley-square, and his first patent "for improvements in fire-arms" is dated 1792.

During the year 1825, the celebrated gunmaker removed from Davies-street to Holles-street, W., his sons continuing the business, after his decease in 1835, until 1840, when it was taken over by Charles and Henry Egg, who also became world-famous as gunmakers of high repute.

In the London Directory for 1822 appears this entry :

" Joe Manton, Gun maker to His Majesty and their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of York, Cambridge, and Gloucester, and Prince Leopold."

Again, in the same publication, dated 1832, is found :

" Joe Manton, Gun maker to His Majesty, and the Royal Family, and also to the King of France."

As before mentioned, Joe Manton went over to the great majority in 1835, and the following inscription appears on his tomb in Grantham Churchyard :—

" In memory of Joseph Manton, who died, universally regretted, on the 29th day of June, 1835. Aged 69 years. This humble tablet is placed here by his afflicted family merely to mark where are deposited his mortal remains. But an everlasting monument to his unrivalled genius is already established in every quarter of the globe by his celebrity as the greatest artist in firearms that ever the world produced ; as the founder and father of the modern gun trade and a most scientific inventor in other departments, not only for the benefit of his friends and the sporting world, but for the good of his King and Country."

THE MORNING FLIGHT

“ Do yu be at the dole-stone at six to-morrow marnin’, Maister Jack. Chance us may get a shot or two from t’ owd duck-holes on the salt-marshes, and chance us ’on’t,” were the parting words of old “ Bumble ” Toogood, the professional wildfowler, as he bade Jack Meredith, the Vicar’s nineteen-year-old son, good-night. Then he clattered homewards along the crooked, cobble-paved High-street of the old-time fishing hamlet of Babbleton, which lies on the fringe of a vast expanse of sea-walled and dyke-drained marshes.

“ All right, Bumble, I’ll be there, and if there are no duck to be had, we’ll find a few waders or an old cob [gull] along the foreshores, you bet ! ” came the cocksure reply of the young gunner, than whom not a more ardent wildfowler could be found anywhere between the Black-water estuary and the Wash.

True to his word, Bumble Toogood turns up at the dole-stone (parish boundary-stone) just as the clock of the grey Norman church, hard by, strikes the appointed hour. Upon one broad shoulder he carries a well-oiled double 10-bore pin-fire gun, and over the other is slung a home-made and dressed canvas cartridge bag. “ Crab,” an aged, but still good enough looking, retriever, whose red-brown coat has from constant immersion in salt water become bleached to the tinge of drab-yellow, trots at his master’s heels.

Jack Meredith, who impatiently awaits the advent of the old gunner, sits on the ancient landmark, puffing away at one of those special blends of pungently aromatic "Egyptian" cigarettes which appear to be obtainable in small country towns and villages. Bumble Toogood, however, declines to accept one of these fumy luxuries, declaring the while that "they all-flamed paper smokes be only fit for hobbidies [boys] and white-necked ink-slingers." Never yet did he meet with a gunner worth his salt who smoked aught but a pipe or cigar.

It is but a short walk from the dole-stone to the high sea-wall which, during the Hanoverian dynasty, was erected round what in those "good old" days formed a vast area of tide-lapped foreshores, but which to-day forms exceedingly fertile dyke-and-fleet-intersected marshes. Beyond the sea-wall lies a desert of sand, ooze, and salting, and beyond again the grey foam-flecked waters of the North Sea.

The fowlers cross the escarpment, and, picking their way through the darkness over a patch of glasswort and sea-lavender-covered saltings, they arrive at a small and shallow pit sunk in the salts, near the mouth of a small tidal creek.

The recent spring tides have left the gunning-pit, or, as it is locally called, duck-hole, well-nigh full of water, and, bidding his young companion "hasten and gather an armful of quicks [couch-grass], while Oi diddle [bale out] t'owd duck-hole," Bumble Toogood sets to work with a will to bale out the superfluous sea-water from the pit with a superannuated bucket, while the youngster forages round the sea-wall for the required litter to render the duck-hole tenable.

In a very short space of time the first pit is baled dry and lined with coarse herbage gathered from the walls; then the old gunner, after wishing his charge "good luck and straight powder," moves away to a second lay-up, on what is known as Deadman's Point.

Every now and again the weird cry of a herd of curlew, passing from the marshes and uplands to the out-lying banks; the peculiar goat-like bleat of a bar-tail godwit; the far-reaching call of that fowler's pest, the redshank; and the welcome and unmistakable sound caused by the rapidly beating pinions of a bunch of mallard, come to the ears of the youthful fowler, and his hand moves instinctively towards the double 12-bore which stands in a corner of the pit, ready to handle at a moment's notice.

But alas! the light is not yet sufficiently good to enable him to catch even a momentary glance of the fleeting fowl, nor is he sufficiently expert in the art of fighting to shoot by sound. But for that matter, we venture to say that successful shots at wildfowl, taken by sound and not by sight, are, generally speaking, more the result of good luck than good judgment. Be this as it may, Jack refrains from pulling at invisible fowl, and waits within the narrow confines of his duck-hole with Micawber-like patience for the advent of daylight.

At length the first grey tokens of dawn begin to appear on the eastern horizon, and with eyes turned shorewards he peers through the still uncertain light for the approach of something—he knows not of what species it may be—clothed in feathers. The welcome "swish-swish-swish" of mallard flying through the air is now heard, and a few moments later a number of hazy forms pass the waiting gunner left-handed.

The double-report of his 12-bore awakens the slumbering echoes of the morning. But there is no answering thud on the contiguous salt-marsh—the thud which betokens a successful shot—and the bunch of mallard continue on their flight to the tide, unscathed, while the disappointed young gunner wonders how, in the name of misfortune, he managed to “muff” with both barrels. and, incidentally, whether Bumble Toogood will chaff him overmuch.

Now comes a small “team” of duck flying over the salt-marshes from their nocturnal feeding-grounds on the upland stubbles, and the old gunning-pit being directly under the line of flight, and the light having greatly improved, the young chap manages to score one of them with the right barrel, while another, hard hit, after “carrying on” a short distance across the saltings, drops with a sounding “plunk” into a muddy little gully. The first bird down is as dead as the proverbial door nail, but not so the second, which, although sorely wounded, leads Jack a merry dance amongst the network of slimy runnels and gullies that drain the saltings ere he “runs it to ground” in a bed of sea-lavender.

A good deal of precious time has been lost during the capture of the cripple. The morning flight is of but very short duration, and already a couple of fairly good lots of duck and a small spring of teal, which in the ordinary course would probably have passed within range of the pit, have sheered out of danger upon sighting a man with a gun in chase of one of their kind.

Scarcely has Jack returned to the “hide” than a far reaching “Cur-lee!” puts him on the *qui vive*. Keep-

ing every inch of his lengthy proportions well hidden within the muddy duck-hole, he awaits the coming of a herd of curlew, which, judging from the direction whence the call proceeds, are flying over the neighbouring marshes, and may pass within shot of the pit.

“Cur-lee! Cur-lee! Cur-lee!” What a racket the sabre-billed, keen-sighted birds make as they speed over the silent levels, top the sea-walls, and come streaming over the head of the crouching gunner!

Now or never! Jack springs to his feet, and, singling out a curlew flying within the “thick” of the herd, he pulls.

A couple crumple up to the contents of the first barrel, while the left accounts for another bird. The remainder of the herd fly towards the main.

Elated with the success of his double shot the young fowler gathers the “dead ’uns” and prepares to slay more fowl. But, though the heavy report of Bumble Toogood’s antiquated, albeit deadly, 10-bore booms out every now and again, never another bird of any kind ventures to pass within range of the duck-hole.

Old King Sol’s great fiery head now appears upon the eastern skyline, and he sheds his golden *largesse* broadcast upon tide, sand-bar and ooze-flat.

Daylight is here, and the fighting-time is over.

THE KORI AND THE GREAT BUSTARD

THERE are between thirty and forty species of the bustard family distributed over the face of the Old World, a considerable proportion of which are indigenous to Africa south of the Sahara, the Cape and Orange River Colony, the Transvaal, Natal, and Rhodesia, and, indeed, South Africa generally, boasting their quota of these magnificent game birds.

The bustard is essentially a land bird, and inhabits wide, open plains and steppes, upon which it may roam at large and sight its enemies from afar.

Some two centuries ago the great bustard (*otis tarda*)—first cousin to the *kori* (*eupoditis kori*) of the veld—used to inhabit the wild, open plains, moors, and fenlands of Great Britain in considerable flocks. But owing to the inveterate persecution of its arch-enemy, man, who used every conceivable device to destroy it, this noble bird has to all intents and purposes been extinct in the British Isles for the past hundred years or longer.

One of the many questionable modes of capturing the bustard was as follows: A certain spot on a plain or fen frequented by a flock of bustards used to be baited with grain, within range of a masked battery of fowling-pieces which were so laid that a man hiding up at a considerable distance from the scene of slaughter could by means of a long line discharge the guns simultaneously when the

unfortunate quarry had approached well within range. Writing to his friend the Hon. Danes Barrington, in 1770, Gilbert White says, "There are bustards on the wide down near Brighthelmstone, Sussex."

One of the last of the great bustards observed on the Norfolk fens was, we believe, in the year 1876. It was a male, and every effort was made by the neighbouring landowners to coax the bird to remain. A couple of hen bustards were turned down on the fen in question by the late Lord Lilford in the hope that the male would pair with one of the females and breed, but the attempt proved futile, and after a brief sojourn in the district the bird disappeared, and was seen no more. We read that our forefathers used to course the bustard with greyhounds, but it is a moot question, we imagine, whether any but winged or otherwise crippled birds were ever brought to bag. True, the bustard is able to run like a redshank, but he very much prefers escaping from his enemies by flight, and we have seen a *kori* bustard with one wing hopelessly smashed by a bullet make a vain attempt to fly from its captor, instead of taking to its heels.

The South African *kori* bustard (*eupoditis kori*), or *ghaum paaww* of the Boers, is without doubt the king of all game birds, both as regards size and plumage; while the flesh of a young *paaww* is quite equal, if not superior, to that of the North American wild turkey. Some naturalists assert that the bustards are not very distantly related to the rails. But they differ from the rails in having three toes only to either foot, in the absence of bare tracks on the side of the neck, and the absence also of an oil-gland.

The brown, black, white, and grey plumage of these

beautiful birds (some of the feathers are used in the tying of salmon and trout flies) harmonises wonderfully with the coloration of their natural habitat. Indeed, Dame Nature is just as happy in her choice of plumage for the bustard as she is in that of the woodcock, the grouse family, the fern-owl, or the wryneck. Big though the *paauw* is, it would be possible for a man to stumble right on to one of those huge birds—providing, of course, the bird was fool enough to allow such liberty being taken with it—without noticing it amongst the dead grasses and other herbage of the veld or plains.

The *kori* or *ghaum paauw* is easily distinguished from the European bustard by the greater length of its beak and legs, while its head is surmounted by a crest. This grand bird derives its Dutch name of *ghaum paauw* from its habit of feeding upon the gum of a species of mimosa. It is also particularly fond of locusts and other insects, and when other food is scarce it will devour lizards and other small reptiles. Water appears to be quite a secondary consideration with the bustard family—indeed, it is questionable whether or not it is necessary for these birds to drink at all.

The bustard undergoes a full moult in autumn, and (in common with the rest of the genus) not infrequently a partial one in spring. The male *kori* is exceedingly pugnacious during the breeding season, and has been known to attack not only dogs, but also human beings.

When flushed bustards will usually fly a mile or even a couple of miles before settling again, and gradually mounting higher and higher in their flight with powerful and even wing-beats they often attain an altitude of over 100 yards.

The great bustard and *ghaum paauw* are probably the most wary and difficult of all game birds, and when feeding on an open plain or veld it is practically impossible to approach to within shot-gun range. The bird is very inquisitive, however, and we are told—but have never tried the manœuvre—that by riding round and round a *paauw* and gradually narrowing the circle a *mounted* man may often approach within easy shot of the bird, even though he be armed with an ordinary 12-bore gun only. As the horseman draws nearer, the bustard will usually lie down, hoping to escape notice by so doing, until a dose of shot lays it still lower. It is doubtless the horse which excites the curiosity of this shiest of all shy birds, for it is seldom that a man on foot can out-manœuvre it, even though he pursues the most cunning artifices.

Personally what few *paauw*—they might be numbered on the fingers of one hand—we have accounted for were nearly all shot with a .303-bore “Rigby,” a beautiful little rifle true as a hair up to 300 yards, and just the very weapon for small antelope and large feathered game. It is a good deal more by luck than judgment that the average sportsman bags a *paauw* with either rifle or shot-gun. In the first place, unless viewed on a bare patch of veld or first flushed far out of shot and then “marked down” again, when a stalk may at least be attempted, it is ten chances to one that, however numerous bustards may be in the district over which the sportsman is shooting comparatively few of the birds will be sighted. If armed with a rifle he must perforce stalk to within range of his game and take it as it sits, for big though a bustard may appear when on the wing it is a powerful flyer, and will require a first-rate rifle shot to bring it down.

We have already explained to the best of our knowledge how the *paauw* may *sometimes* be approached on horseback. In certain favoured districts these great birds are sometimes driven over guns placed in suitable stands. But a bustard drive sounds a tallish order to any one who, like ourselves, has never taken part in one or who objects to capturing these grand birds otherwise than by hunting them in a legitimate and sportsmanlike manner. Poaching game appeals as little to us as it does to any good sportsman. Suffice it to say that, although the *ghaum paauw* is no longer so plentiful as it used to be in the days when the Golden City was in its infancy and the Rhodesian capital undreamed of even by that great pioneer and statesman, Cecil Rhodes, it is by no means the *rara avis* its European cousin the great bustard has become in Great Britain.

“ SOLD ! ”

AS to whether mine host of “ The Golden Dolphin’s ” excellent Scotch whisky was responsible for the creation of the huge and savage grizzly of my dreams on the Christmas Eve of which I speak, I know not. Personally, I am inclined to believe that it was not the whisky but Mrs. “ Dolphin’s ” equally excellent roast turkey and mince-pies. In either case, that infernal bear seemed to have been chasing me up a steep and densely wooded incline the greater part of the night, and was devilish near running into me, when a volley of shingle rattled against the diamond-paned casement of “ The Golden Dolphin’s ” sole and only guest-chamber, and drove my unwelcome ursine visitor up the chimney—or to the deuce for aught I know or care.

The shower of pebbles was followed by a loud and remarkably clever imitation of the cry of a curlew, and drawing up the window-blind I saw the indistinct shadow of old Tom Tundridge, the professional wildfowler and eel-catcher, standing on the snowy pavement below.

“ There be a tidy lot o’ widgeon on the mullet-banks, maister, so I thought I’d jest give ye a call, loike ! ” hailed Tom up to me in a tone of voice meant to be soft and lamb-like, but which might have been heard a quarter of a mile away.

Phew ! it was thundering cold—the water in bath and

basin covered with a coating of ice, the morning as black as one's hat, and my head aching and throbbing, as though a 50-stamp quartz battery was at work therein. But the chance of a shot with the stanchion-gun was not to be missed, and after a sponge-down in the "ice-tub" I felt almost fit enough to run another race against my old bed-fellow, Bruin.

Early though it was, upon going downstairs I found my kindly hostess frying ham and eggs in the old-fashioned inn kitchen, while Tundridge sat in a great arm-chair thawing the snow from his heavy tuck-boots before the huge driftwood fire, which blazed and crackled merrily on the wide, open hearth.

"There b'ain't no time to lose, maister, and we mean to catch the best o' the young flood," very thoughtfully exclaimed Tom, as I settled down to my first rasher of home-cured ham and steaming hot cup of coffee.

Now, it may be remarked that the worthy old gunner had just "wolfed" a large wedge of plum-pudding and a pint or so of his favourite "nectar," purl; hence the gentle hint to be up and doing. Upon my suggesting that he should help me through with the ham and eggs, however, he lost no time in bringing up alongside the table, and right manfully did he wield both knife and fork, beating me easily by three rashers and as many eggs. This exciting match of trenchmanship finished, I took my old 3in. 12-bore, cartridge bag, and a "pocket-pistol," well charged with "The Golden Dolphin's Special Fowling Powder," and, with Tom Tundridge striding alongside, went crunching over the frozen snow, which lay deep upon the cobble-stoned, crooked High-street. But the quaint old fishing town of Oozeborough

was still wrapped in slumber, for it was Yuletide, and the hardy harvesters of the sea and their tan-sailed fishing craft were lying snug in harbour.

“Wind be right, tide be right, and Hoppy Guarnard b’ain’t gone afloat yet, that’s sartin’,” quoth Tom, pointing towards the dim outline of a narrow, single-handed gunning-punt hauled high and dry on the beach. No; it was evident that “Hoppy” had not gone out after the fowl. But, unfortunately, he was not the only big-gunner we had to contend with.

We embarked in the clumsy, old, double-handed gunning craft, and shoved off from a little stone jetty into what is locally known as The Gut, a narrow, sinuous channel which runs through a vast expanse of ooze-flats and mussel-hards until it joins a more important water-way called Mullet Creek.

“Do ’ee get forrard, maister, while I sail t’owd craft. ’Tis dark as the Divil’s nutting-bag, and ‘The Gut’ do twist and turn like any sarpint,” said Tom, as he shipped the steering-sweep in its crutch astern, and then set a tiny lug sail on a broomstick-like mast.

The skipper’s order was obeyed promptly enough, no questions being asked anent the colour of His Satanic Majesty’s nutting-bag; and the scrap of canvas bellied to the slight, but nevertheless biting, nor’easterly breeze.

Dark though it was, my companion navigated the narrow and difficult channel with unerring skill, and without once touching ground. True, the wind was almost dead astern, while the punt drew less than three inches of water. Even so, had I, or any one but a native, been at the helm we should probably have run aground about once per minute.

While slowly making the passage of The Gut, the trumpeting of pink-footed geese greeted our ears. A herd of those wariest of wary fowl were fighting from their nocturnal haunts on the sand-bar to the meal-marshes and inland stubbles, deeming it wise to travel under cover of darkness.

"Drat they noisy ode varmints o' geeze!" growled Tundridge, adding, "They kick up very nigh as much row as a pack o' vox'ounds, but nary pull can a big-gunner get into 'em. They allus favours the shore-poppers, and be d——d to 'em!"

Now, as to whether honest Tom's vituperation was hurled at the heads of the "pink-foots," or at the local shore-shooters, whom he somewhat slightly designated "shore-poppers," I know not. One thing is very certain, however—by far the greater number of grey geese which are shot on the coast during the autumn and winter months fall to the guns of the light-shooters.

The mouth of Mullet Creek was entered just as the first grey tokens of dawn began to gather on the eastern horizon. The heavens brightened perceptibly each minute of time. The broad belt of light cast by the pile lighthouse athwart the tide waxed pale and dim: then it disappeared suddenly, and as though by magic, for the boom of a heavy cannon rolling over the foam-flecked waters heralded the advent of the sunrise. It was time to lower the sail and take to the setting-stick.

The flood tide was rapidly filling the creek, which from shore to shore was in parts nearly a mile in breadth, either side being fringed by ooze banks and saltings, beyond which lay the fresh marshes. With the light improving, my companion navigated a high ridge or bank

of sludge, upon which flourished great quantities of *Zostera marina*, succulent, grass-like, marine herbage, upon which the surface-feeding ducks and geese delight to feed.

“Do 'ee hear they fowl a-talkin', maister? I doubt not there be a tidy lot on the ridge, so keep a bright look-out,” whispered Tundridge as he dexterously and silently propelled the low-sided punt through the shallow water, keeping well under the shelter afforded by the high banks of saltwort-clothed mud that extended along the left-hand shore of the river.

Foot by foot, and fathom by fathom, crept the low, grey gunning-punt toward the still invisible fowl, until one could distinctly hear the cackling of mallard in chorus with the shrill, whistling call of widgeon. It requires a keen and ardent big-gunner to imagine the intense excitement which takes possession of the man behind the swivel-gun, when, after a long and trying “set” to a company of fowl, he finds himself gradually but surely approaching within range of his quarry. I tell you, sirs, that the blood simply raced through my veins on that cold Christmas morning as we drew almost within shot of the high bank of slob, behind which I guessed a goodly number of mixed fowl were gathered. I dared scarcely to breathe, or move an eyelid even, and, oh! how my tingling, frost-numbed fingers itched to tug at the trigger-string and send twenty ounces of lead hurtling into the thick of the still hidden feathered ranks. Then I caught a glimpse of the birds over the ridge—mallard, widgeon, and a few teal—three hundred head, all told, at least; but, alas! all still out of range of even the big two-inch M.L. gun.

"Don't pull till I tell 'ee, and then take 'em as they rise," came the almost inaudible and quite unnecessary order from Tom.

Hardly were the words spoken—or, rather, whispered—when, to my utter surprise and unspeakable disgust, a bright flash spurted out from a small muddy gully which ran into the creek at a point about 150 yards above us. The flash was answered by the deep report of a stanchion-gun, which awakened the slumbering echoes of the marshes and went booming across the vast expanse of tide and mud and salting. With a great to-do the fowl rose in a cloud and headed towards the open estuary, but well out of range of our heavy gun even. A march had been stolen upon us. For several moments, and while the unknown gunner was busy with his "cripple-stopper," Tundridge and I stared blankly and sadly at each other.

"Sold—or call me a dago! And by a blazin' furriner, too!" ejaculated Tundridge, as he shipped the sculls and then pulled slowly and silently down creek.

SPORT AND TRAVEL IN THE HIMALAYAS

[Extracts from letters written by an Indian officer while travelling in company with his wife (N——) in search of sport amongst the Himalaya Mountains.]

*Barakat Tehri, Garhwal,
India May 13th, 1906.*

JUST a line to let you know that N—— and myself are quite fit. No letters since leaving Missowi on the 8th. I will give this to the first man I meet going towards Missowi. We are still marching some ten or eleven miles each day, and are going to the wild-sheep (baral) ground up in the snows. We are following the valley of the Bargrothi River along the great pilgrim route. The Ganges has two sources, one at Zai muckh (in the cow's mouth) in the Gamgotoi glacier, whence rises the Baghirathi River, and one at Badrinath in another glacier, whence rises the Anandana River. We are making for the former glacier, and upon arriving there will be at an altitude of 14,700 feet.

We are now 7000 feet high, but in a valley. and the heat in the sun is terrific. The flies are simply awful. As regards shooting, so far we have had none. During the first ten days we could only just drag out our ten miles. The scenery is magnificent. We are roughing it, as each coolie will only carry a load of 50 lb. We started out with twenty coolies and a shikari. We

intended to make this place, where there is a little hut, a base for supplies. If we are so fortunate as to get a couple of good wild sheep we shall descend to about 10,000 feet and try for thar (one of the largest species of the wild goats of India). Last Tuesday (May 8th) we walked to camp at Phedi (between six and seven miles), arriving just before 5 p.m., turned in at 8.15, and experienced the usual thunderstorm and rain during the night. The higher one ascends the more severe are these storms. Wednesday (May 9th) started away at 7.30 a.m., bagged a brace of black partridges on the way, and reached camp at Balgaon (ten miles). The tent was scarcely up when another terrific thunderstorm accompanied by torrents of rain began, followed by hail. On Thursday (May 10th) we trudged over ten miles to Tuhlari, and being at once treated to a heavy thunderstorm which nearly wrenched the tent up; in fact, N—— and self hung on the poles for nearly an hour. On Friday (May 11th) walked to Dharrassa, striking the Baghirathi River and valley and the pilgrims' route before getting to Dharrassa, where there is another apology for a bungalow. Yesterday (May 12th) started at dawn to avoid the terrible heat which rages between 12 and 3 o'clock, arriving at the next halting-place, Danda, at 11 o'clock a.m. On the way we saw some gurrul (the small wild goat) which are found up to an altitude of 8000 feet, and swarm in the Himalayas, but are never to be seen except at dawn and dusk. N——and self had a couple of shots apiece at the gurrul, but as we could never see them (not being acquainted with their appearance) until they were galloping up and down the precipices some hundreds of feet above or below us, we missed. It was like shooting

rabbits with a rifle at two hundred yards. In the evening we visited a hill frequented by gurrul, and both N—— and myself missed a couple of shots apiece at disappearing gurrul. I next had a shot at a rocketing cheer (one of the larger species of pheasants), but failed to bag him, possibly owing to the small-sized shot I was using, for he was hit. A little later I met with a khakar (very small deer of about the size of a mastiff, found at 8000 feet), which I killed. Neither gurrul nor khakar are easily distinguishable as to sex at sight, the female of the former carrying small horns. It was meat for the larder of which we were badly in need. On the return journey to camp I shot a brace of pheasants flying down the khad (steep slope), right and left, but received a "back-hander" a little later in missing a black partridge. That morning we marched eleven miles, a wearying trudge. The only game we saw consisted of two black partridges, one of which I bagged.

*Jangla Bungalow,
Tehri, Gharwal
May 18th, 1906.*

We are still on the march. At present we are some 11,000 feet up. To-morrow we reach Gangotsa, which you will find marked on any decent-sized map of India. The scenery is lovely, but we are still in the valley, and the cold is therefore not very intense yet. The birches, sycamores, currants, violets, strawberries, and so forth are bursting into flower or leaf. These and the deodars clothe the hills up to some 2000 feet above us, and then come the everlasting snows.

The Baghirathi (Ganges) flows between sheer cliffs

200 feet below my feet. I am writing this in a little bungalow, or rather hut, made of rough-hewn pine planks. Both N—— and myself are very fit, but walking ten miles—such walking, too—knocks one up for the rest of the day. On pilgrims' track, which we are still following, there is practically nothing to shoot.

On Monday we walked to our camp at Manero. On the way the shikari sprained one of his great toes, which placed him *hors de combat*. Soon after getting our tent up we were visited by a thunderstorm of high order and sheets of heavy rain, which lasted some four hours. On Tuesday marched to Butwari, where there is another cowshed of a bungalow. On the way thither I shot a pigeon, which fell over a precipice into the river. As usual, a storm came up in the afternoon. It raged furiously half the night. On Wednesday walked into Dangel (eleven miles), meeting the Maharajah of Kathiawar returning from his pilgrimage. On the way I shot a black partridge and a pigeon, which were useful, as the larder was bare of fresh meat. In the evening both N—— and self had shots at a couple of running gurrals, but missed.

Yesterday (Thursday) tramped into Ithala, where there is another bungalow of the cowshed style of architecture. It was a terrible climb, and just as we were within two miles of Ithala the rain came down in torrents, and it was bitterly cold. Both N—— and myself were soaked to the skin, and being in our hot-weather clothes, we sat shivering over a smoky fire until the coolies came in with the paraphernalia a couple of hours later, when we were able to get into winter clothing. Yesterday's storm was a quiet one [*i. e.*, unaccompanied by thunder

and lightning], and I understand it is usually so on these higher levels. Next day arrived at next camp at 1 p.m.

*Gangoiri, Ieri State,
Garhwal, N.P.,
May 29th, 1906.*

Back in the pilgrim route, so may have an opportunity of sending this in to a P.O. We are in splendid health. Have heard no news of outside world since leaving Missowi. A week last Saturday we marched in here from Inugla. This is the Hindus' sacred source of the Ganges, although the river really rises at Ganmukh, eighteen miles higher up in the mountains. There being no path there, however, the pilgrims can proceed no farther along the river.

We spent the greater part of the day arranging our stores, and only then walked several days up the gorge *en route* to Ganmukh, taking ten days' supplies. The way was very bad, and we were treated to a bitterly cold downpour of rain and snow. N—— very poorly with mountain sickness. I shot some chukar, or hill partridge. The snow must have driven the baral down, as just before sunset one evening a little lot of four, including two rams, were seen on a slope close to the tent, or rather they appeared to be close to camp, but in reality were far out of range. We started to stalk them, and it was a race against dusk up the mountain side. Being a little ahead of N——, I took the shot, but was so pumped that I could scarcely stand, and missed one of the rams twice, but rolled him over the third shot, running. I then turned my attention to the second ram, and hit him slightly, but he managed to make his

escape up the precipice. The one I killed was the finer ram of the pair, with 21 in. horns, beautifully curved.

Next day walked into Ganmukh and camped at foot of glacier 13,000 feet. Here all vegetation, with exception of a few stunted bushes, ceased. Here there were magnificent peaks, 21,000 feet to 23,000 feet high. One of the coolies unfortunately dropped our camera on the way back from Ganmukh, and all our photos were spoiled. We put up five baral, all rams, and had several long shots at them. N—— hit a baral on our way, but it got away into the snows. These sheep come down morning and evening to graze on the young grass. Sometimes, however, when the weather is unseasonably cold, they remain below the snow-level day and night. In the evening we both climbed upwards, and N——obtained several shots at sheep, without result, however, as the ranges were in every case very long, and distance in the hills is deceptive. We saw also some snowcock, the only bird beyond crows and kites that lives at this height. We did not fire at the "cock," being fearful of disturbing the baral.

During the journey to Ganmukh and back we came across many traces of musk-deer, red-bear, and snow-leopard, but never obtained a sight or shot at either of them. Remained at Ganmukh until Sunday, when we marched to Camp II, where, as described elsewhere, I shot the ram on Monday week last. At dawn on Wednesday morning, as we were getting up, the shikari came to the tent and said baral were close by. Gulping down a cup of tea and leaving our porridge, we went out, to see the sheep half-way up the slope. N—— deeming it unwise to climb before taking food, I left her behind a

big boulder and went on, but upon arriving at the summit I was unable to see the first lot. There were some others farther along, however, and the shikari and I went after them. It was an awful climb, and in the end I was so done that I had to lie down under a precipice from sheer exhaustion, and while there a ram came and looked over the top, and I dropped him. The kill necessitated our climbing the precipice, which occupied a lot of time. On the return journey to camp I stalked another herd, and killed the best ram in it, but both animals shot were small, and I was not a little disappointed. Saw another lot towards evening. After a long stalk I managed the biggest ram of a herd of ten, only a moderate head, however.

On Thursday morning we again started out at dawn, and had got well into the high jagged rocks when we came upon a fine ram with one ewe feeding. It was not sufficiently light for me to see properly, although the sheep were not more than 100 yards off. N—— therefore took the shot, and missed. As they went away I could only see them indistinctly, but I fired, and shot the ewe, much to my disgust. Just then a ram jumped up from amongst the rocks on our left, and N—— dropped him—a very nice animal. In the evening I went for a climb alone; sighted a large ram coming down the precipice opposite me, and I sat down and waited. He was in no hurry, however, and was very soon joined by a smaller ram and four ewes. After waiting nearly an hour I took a shot at him across the valley, but, misjudging distance, missed him clean. Friday morning I set out with the shikari on another stiff climb while it was still dusk. We came across a flock of baral with a good ram. They were

in the open, however, and I could not get within 300 yards of them, and in the uncertain light, with my defective sight, I knew I could not kill at that range. I climbed higher, and presently got within 150 yards of a flock, amongst them a very fine ram. He stood on a crest, and when I fired disappeared in a cloud of dust, and I felt sure he was mine. The shikari and self searched everywhere, but never found a trace of him. Further on I took a shot across a valley at another good ram, missed him first barrel, and only managed to break a leg at second attempt. I fired again to try and stop him when, as luck had it, a young ram stepped between him and myself, and fell to my bullet, stone dead.

On Saturday we went out early, and succeeded in stalking a herd, N—— getting one ram, and I another, but neither carried very good heads. We came upon another herd later, and I crept up on all fours to within twenty yards of it, but as there was not a shootable head, I did not fire. We then descended the mountain to have our 11 o'clock meal, and while discussing it, saw a very nice ram right across the glacier on the other range. It threatened to snow, however, and as the glacier would have taken some five hours to cross and recross, we very reluctantly gave up all thought of stalking the ram, and spent the remainder of the day packing our belongings. On Sunday, at dawn, we marched back to Camp II, over the top of a down-like hill and precipitous rocks. Just as we clambered to the summit we saw a herd of baral come down the precipice to feed. N——, fearing the dangerous-looking stalk over the brink, endeavoured to get within range of the sheep by crawling along the summit, while I went

down, and, taking advantage of every bit of cover, succeeded in getting to within 150 yards of the herd. I then dropped the biggest ram (21 in. and 27½ in. horns), and quickly covering a second, broke a leg. Up and up he went until I bowled him over at 300 yards, and the next instant he was hurtling down a 500 feet precipice. For a moment he lodged on a spur, and then dropped again some 300 feet. I expected to find precious little of him left, but although all four legs were broken and lower jaw also, his horns, which measured 18 in., were intact. An old ram, with horns very worn down.

On Monday we marched to Camp I. We had to cross the river, and found that the two logs which did duty for a bridge had been washed away. We were therefore compelled to cross a rough and narrow pine log resting on two pieces of ice. The river was swollen with melted snow, and a false step meant certain death: a most unpleasant experience on a bitterly cold morning. Further along we came across a herd of baral, and hit one at 350 yards, but he got away before the shikari got up to him, although the native stuck manfully to the trail for three hours.

This morning (Tuesday) we met with no incident worthy the telling, and are now on our way to the thar (big goat) ground. I enclose some *edelweiss* gathered by N—.

Saturday (June 2nd). Must close my letter, as a man goes towards Missowi to-day.

THE OGRE OF THE POOL AND SANDY

“THE missus do hanker after a rabbit-pie. I wish ye’d come along some evenin’ and shoot a couple or so, sir. Ye might have a try to catch the great old trout in Boulder Pool same time. Though I’d lay a soverin’ to a hayseed he wouldn’t give ye a touch even,” said Farmer Perry as we sat discussing a matutinal horn of “October” in the worthy yeoman’s quaintly picturesque homestead under the Kentish hills.

“But there must be plenty of young ones suckling,” was my objection to the farmer’s suggestion. It does not seem “cricket” to shoot rabbits in June, despite that delightfully unsportsmanlike medley of injustice, the Ground Game Act, which permits—nay, encourages—the killing of rabbits and hares all the year round, in season and out of season. But Farmer Perry so impressed upon me the fact that his better-half was “wholly bent upon havin’ a rabbit-pie” that a compromise was arrived at, namely, I was to shoot only such rabbits as were three-parts grown with a .250 rifle.

The bunnies inhabited a steep, sandy bank and disused sandpit on the outskirts of a small covert, while a modest but rapid stream, which, like the brook immortalised by Tennyson, harbours “here and there a lusty trout,” flanked the warren and ran, twisting, chattering and babbling over pebbles and boulders, stickles and deeps, to join its mother-river, the Medway. The banks of the stream were fringed with belts of sallow and

somewhat sparse growth, but sufficient to afford me ample cover for my purpose.

As before stated, the River B—— (it is little more than a brook) boasts a few goodly trout, and for years past a certain speckled giant of cannibalistic habits and ferocious aspect, who throughout this story will be known as "The Ogre of the Pool," had reigned supreme in Boulder Pool, a miniature bay formed by the widening out of the stream, and situated within "pea-rifle" range of the rabbit-warren. It was in this spot, amidst the tallows, that I elected to take up my stand, and, having stepped the distance to the nearest set of burrows, and found the same to be, approximately, 85 yards, I adjusted the back-sight of my little weapon for that range. Then, having got a pipe under way, I proceeded to put together the light spinning rod which formed part of my paraphernalia, and to rig up a single-hook paternoster, for, despite Farmer Perry's declaration to the effect that "The Ogre of the Pool" was more crafty and cunning than a whole colony of the vulpine race, and had been angled for with every kind and pattern of lure invented by man and youth for years past, I determined to enter the lists against the speckled monster which had so long remained invulnerable against the attacks of Waltonian legions. The question of bait and tackle, however, was somewhat difficult to answer. One might as well, and with an almost equal degree of unsuccess, cast one's hat upon the pool as an artificial fly. "The Ogre" had lived so long and waxed so fat upon juvenile members of his own and divers species of the finny tribe, not to mention other innocent and helpless animal and insect life, carried ruthlessly down to his

dark, deep, rocky fastness by the swift current, that it was more than doubtful if he would condescend to rise to a fat, freshly hatched mayfly even, and less to a bundle of feathers and barbed steel. Brandlings and lobworms, irresistible "wobblers" and "spinners," Devon minnows, and sundry other lures, both natural and artificial, were reviewed in their order, and passed over as useless for the capture of "The Ogre of the Pool."

Generations of bucolic anglers had proffered the first-named juicy morsels, together with such dainties as gentles, wasp-grubs, paste, and cheese, to "The Ogre." The stream was not only too narrow, but also too serpentine to permit of spinning, and I, therefore, determined—although with but small hope of success—to try if paternostering with a lively minnow would not do the trick. By the time I had got my bait out, the sun was rapidly sinking towards the wooded summits of the neighbouring hills, and the timber-trees cast long shadows athwart the lush, daisy-spangled meadows, through which the little river turned and twisted like a silver riband upon a robe of emerald velvet.

Several rabbits now began to appear outside the honeycomb of burrows, but not one of the size I required was to be seen within range of my pygmean rifle. From my stand amongst the shallows I was able to watch every movement amongst the bunnies, and also to handle my rod without fear of being sighted by "The Ogre of the Pool." Suddenly a well-grown young rabbit popped out of a burrow and commenced nibbling at the clover, offering me a very pretty broadside shot. Notwithstanding the foliage of the shallows amongst which I was seated on an old shooting seat, I had no difficulty

in getting a perfectly clear sight at the rabbit. Drawing, as I imagined, a beautiful "bead" just behind the shoulder, I pressed the trigger, quite expecting to see the bunny topple over instanter. Nothing of the kind occurred, however, for I distinctly saw the tiny projectile strike the ground a good three inches wide of the astonished rabbit's nose, and with a single bound he disappeared into a convenient bolt-hole. Now, right pleased should I have been could I have laid that rifle down and roundly anathematised it as a crooked-barrelled, obsolete gas-pipe. But this was impossible, for the little Churchill '250 was a beautiful specimen of the gunmaker's craft, and accurate to a hair's-breadth up to the range it was sighted for. No; it was not the fault of the rifle, but of the man behind it. Well, better luck next shot!

Slight though the report of the rifle was, it proved sufficient to cause a general stampede among the rabbits, and by the time I had reloaded there was not even a solitary "cotton-tail" to be seen above ground. I turned my attention to the rod, and very gently cast the minnow—which, by the way, appeared to have taken a fresh lease of life since vacating the bait-can for the rapid stream—into the swirl of a large submerged boulder. In almost less time than it takes to tell the fact, a sharp and unmistakable tug at the slack line I held between forefinger and thumb betokened a bite of some kind. "The Ogre of the Pool!" was my ejaculation to a matronly-looking shorthorn, who for some little time had been contemplating my movements from the opposite bank with a kind of pitying expression in her great black eyes. Springing to my feet I struck, and away

went the fish across the pool to the merry screech of the reel. The rush, though fierce, was short, and with a muttered, "He's sulking on the bottom," I essayed to put the fish into a more amiable frame of mind by gently tapping the butt. The captive ignored all such blandishments for some little time, but at length, giving way to the gentle strain put upon him, he came, lamb-like, over to my side of the stream and went into the landing-net. Alas! it was not "The Ogre of the Pool," but a plebeian chub of between three and four pounds weight, which had taken the bait so far into its maw that it was useless returning the fish to the stream. Hauling up the bait-can from the cool and limpid depths of the brook, I selected a second minnow and cast it into the pool, thereby rendering myself, I presume, liable to dual prosecution and heavy fine under the grandmotherly Protection of Animals Act (1911).

Then I again turned my attention to the rabbits. Looking towards their habitat, I saw no fewer than five sitting well within the range of the '250, amongst them the little chap which I had missed at my first attempt, and which, from being several shades lighter in colour than his brethren, was easily recognised. Three of the five bunnies in question were apparently full-grown; one was quite a baby. I therefore had no option but to try my luck a second time with my friend "Sandy." He offered by no means so easy a mark as before; indeed, at times only the tips of his lugs were visible above the tops of the clover. A sudden and unexpected jump on the part of "Sandy" landed him on a patch of ground which was well-nigh devoid of herbage. Thus did he once more offer to me a broadside shot such as the veriest

duffer ought not to have muffed. Raising my rifle to my shoulder I took careful aim at the small yellow mark, and pulled. "Snap! Ping!—Damn!" A tiny cloud of grey dust spurts up from under "Sandy's" snowy belly, while "Sandy," more scared than hurt, takes a header into a friendly burrow, and the rest of the bunny family very promptly follow his lead. I do not trouble to reload, knowing full well that neither "Sandy" nor any of "Sandy's" numerous relations will again venture above ground until the light, which is already on the wane, becomes too bad for me to shoot with any degree of certainty.

"But surely that was a tug at the bait?" Yes, begad! And it is "The Ogre of the Pool" this time, or I'm very much mistaken. Ah! he comes to the surface as though about to seek freedom by taking a mighty leap, and for a moment of time I catch a glimpse of his giant proportions. Then, with a wild rush, he runs up stream, and, to my infinite satisfaction, wide of the jagged boulder. Very quickly did "The Ogre" reel out twenty yards or so of line, leaving a swirl behind him like the wash of a miniature torpedo craft. Then he turned, put his helm hard to starboard, and rounded that infernal boulder, and—bade me "Good-bye!" Sadly I bunched together my paraphernalia and started on the homeward journey along the river bank through the rapidly gathering darkness. True, I might have taken a much shorter way across the meadows, but that footpath led past Farmer Perry's homestead, and I knew full well the worthy yeoman would be watching for my advent, and, incidentally, for the rabbits for the much-desired pie.

ROOKS AND ROOK-SHOOTING

THE noisy cawing of the rooks in March as they set to work repairing the great twig-nests, which, despite their wonderful construction, the fierce winter storms have rendered untenable as a nursery for the sable nestlings, is a sure indication of the approach of spring. But the nest once more repaired and made weather-proof, there is but little fear that either the green-blue olive-spotted eggs or the young ones will come to any harm; for, fearfully though the gale may rock the twig-built cradles placed amongst the very topmost branches of the grove of ancient timber trees which forms the site of the rookery, hardly a twig will be displaced.

Notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, notwithstanding *Corvus frugilegus* may do a great deal of good to the land in the way of destroying a multitude of grubs and insects noxious to the husbandman, he is a very great pest to the agriculturist, arboriculturist, and game preserver. He roots up grass and young corn, and plays havoc with growing crops generally; he breaks up the tender twigs of trees with his powerful beak with as much ease as a strong man will divide a match, while the most tolerant of game rearers even will assuredly tell you that as an egg thief and poacher of helpless pheasant and partridge chicks the rook is bad to beat. It is therefore absolutely essential that annual raids should be organised against large rookeries through-

out the country to keep the sable-feathered legions within bounds, and such raids can only be successfully carried out during early spring, when the "branchers," though, generally speaking, well able to use their wings, are still fed by the parent-birds. A week or so later one might almost as well walk down to the rookery armed with a broomstick as with a gun or rifle. Master Rook, when able to forage in the neighbouring fields and fend for himself, very soon acquires the sagacity of his progenitors, and what creature, feathered or furred, is quicker in sighting a man with a gun than an ancient and cunning old rook? His cousins, the carrion and hoodie crow might, perchance, be able to give him a point or two in this subject, but I "hae ma doots."

Cunning and suspicious though it be, the rook, unlike its near relative, the crow, is essentially a sociable bird, and will even nest in the centre of a large town or city if there be suitable trees available. But, as in the case of most species of birds which congregate in large numbers, very keen-sighted sentinels watch closely from the lofty positions in the highest tree-tops everything that occurs down below on Mother Earth.

It would be hard to find amongst the many feathered races a more devoted consort or more thoughtful parent than the rook. He feeds his mate assiduously while she sits on her clutch of from three to five eggs. He even assists her in the task of incubation, and when the young birds hatch off, both parents are kept pretty busy, from break of day until sundown, supplying their ever-hungry offspring with grubs, etc., and the small pebbles which are so essential to all species of birds that reduce their food by means of the gizzard.

And now, having touched upon the merits and demerits of the rook, let us pass on to the Manor Woods. That incessant chorus of hoarse and angry cawing emanating from the cloud of black spots gyrating and tumbling high over the tops of the giant timber trees is sufficient token that the inhabitants of the rookery have already sighted the unusually large company of men and boys—the former mostly armed with a shot-gun or small-bore rifle, while the latter carry the cartridge-bags, innocent-looking ash plants and blackthorn sticks culled from hedgerows and woodlands—who on this quiet, peaceful spring evening approach their sanctuary in laughing knots of twos and threes. Long enough before the first shot is fired, the majority of the old birds have sought the safe harbourage afforded by a neighbouring covert. True, a few of the hens, anxious regarding the fate of their respective families, remain in the vicinity of the nests until the commencement of shooting. Nevertheless, upon the slain being counted, a precious small percentage of the same are found to be in mature plumage.

The rookery, which is one of the largest in the county, is reputed to have been in existence well over a century, and this evening thirteen guns, including the squire, the sporting rector and his equally sporting curate, the local medico, the squire's agent, several yeomen, tenant farmers, and myself, are to take toll of the dusky, squarking inhabitants thereof; while a number of fustian-clad yokels have been recruited from the gardens, stables, and cow-byres to act as beaters, or rather rook-scarers.

The guns are now stationed at different points under the great elms; the rustics whoop and yell and thrash the gnarled trunks of the trees with their ash wands;

the rooks caw and scold incessantly, until a veritable pandemonium ensues. The sharp snap of "nitro" is replied to by the heavier and duller report of the good old-fashioned black powder, to which several of the worthy farmers present still swear as the most reliable explosive under the sun, and ever and anon the "crack" of a "pea-rifle" is heard above the yelling, cawing, and continuous "burning" of gunpowder, while a perfect shower of black forms fall to earth from high up amongst the topmost twigs of the timber trees, rebounding from bough to bough in their descent, like so many india-rubber balls. Here and there a dead bird may be seen suspended by one leg, its talons having closed upon a small branch in the death-throes, while the "nesters" and "branchers" which are either too scared or too weak to fly, squawk vociferously in their wind-rocked twig nurseries and upon the swaying boughs. At length all those of the stronger birds which were fortunate enough to escape the contents of the 12-, 16-, and 20-bores during the earlier stages of the shooting have flown to quieter and safer groves, and, as no sportsman worthy of the name would dream of potting off the "branchers" with a scatter-gun, the "rifle brigade" commence picking off the "tallest" and most difficult of the black dots, moving amidst the delicate green foliage high overhead.

Excellent practice is this, for, although a well-made rook-rifle is true "to a hair" up to the range it is sighted for, a very significant branch is sufficient to turn one of the tiny projectiles, which these beautiful little weapons throw, out of the true alignment.

Three of the party, including the curate, proved

themselves to be rattling good rifle-shots, and the rooks in the big woods being sufficiently thinned out, a move is made towards what is locally known as Gallows Hill Copse, owing to the fact that a gallows tree used, in years gone by, to stand on the hill under which the copse nestles.

The rookery here, which might be described as an off-shoot or suburb of the main rookery, is comparatively new, and boasts not one-eighth of the feathered population of the older colony. Nevertheless, the shooting is very much more difficult, for the tall beech and elm trees are more densely grouped than is the case in the big covert, and some really sporting shots are obtained at birds flying high between the intertwined branches.

The evening's shooting is now over, the henchmen gather and tie into bunches the "bag," while the guns troop up to the picturesque old Manor-house to refresh the inner man.

SHOOTING UNDER A KITE

HAVING upon more occasions than one shot English partridges under a hawk-kite late in the season or when the birds had become too wild to walk up, we determined to include a kite amongst our sporting equipment during a recent visit to South Africa. For the enlightenment of those of the readers who are unacquainted with the hawk-kite and the methods of flying it over game, it may be as well, perhaps, to give a short description of the invention.

As, of course, every sportsman is aware, all birds, and not a few of the smaller species of deer and antelopes, have a mortal fear of any winged creature that bears the slightest resemblance to a hawk or eagle, and will lie like so many stones while the feathered marauder remains in the neighbourhood, crouching close to the ground and with one eye turned upwards (all birds and many animals have to turn one side of their heads upwards when gazing at an object passing in mid-air).

The hawk-kite is made in either waterproof silk or a very strong kind of twill fashioned and coloured to represent a large peregrine-falcon. When flown in a good breeze of wind the kite bears a very striking resemblance to the bird it is supposed to represent, the tips of the wings being loose and the wings themselves placed at such an angle to the body of the kite as to lend the whole

contrivance a realistic appearance of a falcon hovering over its quarry preparatory to making a "stoop." The price of a hawk-kite in silk is £1 1s., in twill 15s., and it may be obtained through any London or provincial gunmaker.

And now for a brief description of a morning's sport on the veld under an artificial peregrine-falcon.

It was not until we had sojourned for several months in the neighbourhood of Maritzburg that we remembered one of the kites in question was packed away amongst a heterogeneous collection of fishing-tackle and other odds and ends. The district in which we happened to be staying was much overshot, and what little game remained was just about as wild as that which will be found on an English partridge manor in mid-December. In other words, one could seldom get within shot of francolin, korhaan, or quail on the veld, or of the duck, teal, and other kinds of wildfowl that inhabited the several pans of water in the neighbourhood. There was too little cover of any sort to shelter guns and make driving practicable, with the exception of here and there a boundary beacon placed at wide intervals, and although we erected several artificial butts, or rather blinds, with sage-bushed hurdles, and essayed to drive the birds over them, the game was not worth the proverbial candle, for however straight the driven birds might fly towards the hidden guns to start with, they almost invariably turned off long enough before they were within range, until our grouse-driving scheme was voted a fraud and a delusion by our Natalian friends and fellow gunners.

One day, however, when we were simply "wasting" for something more worthy to shoot at than clay birds, of which we must have "killed" several hundred "brace"

during our short visit to Maritzburg, we bethought us of our silken-peregrine which had not been "unhooded" since it passed through the hands of the astonished customs officers who overhauled the "predaceous" bird on its arrival at Durban some three months before.

Now we had frequently noticed the great disquiet and fear evinced by the feathered game and wildfowl of the veld at the appearance of a chanting-goshawk or some other bird of prey into their sanctuary. Indeed, the only decent bag of greywing francolin and duck had been made while one of the first-mentioned species of hawks was quartering the veld in search of a hare or bird from which to make its midday meal. The francolin lay so close in the long, rough veld cover that they allowed us to tread on them almost before condescending to rise, while the duck, teal and coot scuttled into the harbourage afforded them in the high dense reeds, nor did they venture forth until their mortal enemy had flown to other hunting grounds further aveld. But, as usual, we are digressing and must "hark forrard" to the gist of our sketch.

Bearing in mind the utter failure of our "butts," it was not without a feeling of uncertainty that we invited three Colonial friends to shoot under the kite, while we ourselves worked the kite, for although there is no great skill required on the part of the kite-flyer, we—being anxious to show our Colonial cousins how the trick should be done—did not care to trust the string to the clumsy fingers of Brer Kafir. As luck had it there happened to be a nice "slant" of wind blowing from a quarter that enabled us to walk in line with the guns and to manoeuvre the kite well ahead and over the best of the ground we had elected to shoot. For the purpose of steadying

the "hawk" when in "flight" a number of small "jelly-bags" are suspended from the tail thereof, in the same manner as the paper tail of the old-fashioned type of kite we were wont to fly in our boyhood days. In a high wind it is advisable to place a small stone or a few ounces of shot in the lowermost "jelly-bag," but on the morning in question it was unnecessary for our "peregrine" to carry any extra weight.

As the kite soared gracefully skywards a somewhat ironical cheer went up from our Afrikander friends, who doubtless imagined that the whole scheme was instituted for the sole purpose of "pulling their legs." For some little time nothing wearing fur or feather was moved, and severe and loud were the volleys of laughter fired at the head of the unfortunate kite-flyer and his "*verdomed* kid's toy." Suddenly five greywing rose from under the very feet of H—, the centre gun, skimming over the veld at a great pace. Six barrels rang out in quick succession, but never a bird dropped or even faltered in its flight, and so utterly amazed and crestfallen did the worthy sportsmen appear that out of sheer pity we refrained from piling on the agony too mountainous by casting back some of their own stock of sarcasm, or by congratulating them upon the "straightness" of their powder.

The unexpected appearance of the francolin put the guns very much on the *qui vive*, and no three men ever shot much better than did they on that eventful morning. The francolin, quail, and hares lay like stones under the kite, until in many cases they were literally kicked up by the guns, when, as often as not, they would pass clean over our heads, offering the most difficult shots imaginable.

Misses were very few and far between, however, for, as before stated, my companions shot brilliantly, and to tell the honest truth I was not altogether sorry at having left my old 12-bore behind. Good enough fellows though my friends were, they had an unhappy knack of "chipping" a man whenever he "muffed" a shot, and more especially was this the case if that man happened to be a *rooinek*. Between eighteen and twenty brace of francolin, together with several hares and a couple of thick-knees, were shot before a halt was called for tiffin. Later in the day the kite was flown over several small and shallow pans of water, and although the wildfowl did not appear to pay quite so much heed to the kite as did the greywings, they sat sufficiently close in the reed-covert to allow a very fair bag of duck, pink-billed teal and coot to be made by the guns who waded in line through the shallow water.

The foregoing brief description of shooting under a hawk-kite is chiefly given to illustrate the fact that an artificial falcon may be *occasionally* flown on the veld with good effect over birds that have become wild and difficult to approach from being constantly shot at or otherwise disturbed. We emphasise the word "occasionally" advisedly, for the constant flying use of a hawk-kite over the same ground will very soon drive the game therein to seek a fresh habitat. In any case shooting under a kite cannot by any stretch of imagination be termed a high form of sport, and where it is possible to obtain sport by the more orthodox methods of shooting over dogs, walking up, or driving, the hawk-kite should not be brought into use.

COOL AND CLEAR

OUR little craft—a 10-foot dinghy— is anchored under Teddington Weir, and so close to the foaming, tumbling overshoot that the spray flicks one's face from time to time most refreshingly, while the rush of water creates a breeze more cooling than that set up by many electric fans revolving simultaneously.

We heard it whispered in the smoking-room of a certain riverside hostelry last night that a lusty trout had been observed feeding in the weir pool, close by where we are moored, and over the stern of the boat a light spinning-rod bends to the strain of the current like a wind-swayed reed. To the silken line and gut-trace is attached a small silvery dace as a lure for the speckled denizens of the pool. Not that we are very hopeful of receiving a visit from his troutship, for despite the fact that we have fished for a Thames trout many a time and oft, we do not remember ever to have had a "run" from one even. Still it is the unexpected which so frequently happens to the angler, and who can tell but what we may land—or rather "boat"—the leviathan of the pool on this glorious June afternoon?

When we were here a few weeks ago, shoals of roach and dace were to be seen attempting to leap the weir in their anxiety to run up to suitable spawning beds on the gravelly shallows at Hampton and elsewhere. The

leaping fish appeared like nothing so much as atoms of animated silver flitting through a filigree of sunlit spray. But alas! the weir proved too great an obstacle for the little fish to negotiate; the rush of water hurled them back into the pool below, and never a dace or roach succeeded in gaining the main river.

Some of the readers may remember the salmon-ladder on old Molesey Weir by means of which, in years gone by, the lordly Thames salmon ascended to the "redds" on Hampton shallows, and other gravelly breeding grounds. The ancient salmon-ladder disappeared when the present Weir was built; there is no use for such appliances in Father Thames nowadays, for every attempt to re-introduce *Salmo salar* to our principal river has proved futile. We often wonder, however, why the experiment of introducing the Danubian species of salmon, which need not necessarily run down to the sea after spawning, has not been tried on a larger scale.

But we are wandering too far up stream. Let us return to the tidal water at Teddington!

As we watch the nodding point of our rod, the shadow of a large bird is distortedly reflected on the broken surface of the water. Looking skyward we observe a grey heron sailing over the pool on great fan-like wings, and to our joy the beautiful feathered fish-poacher settles under the high bank of a private lawn that runs down to the further end of the weir. Through a pair of battered but powerful old field-glasses, which have served us very faithfully for a number of years, we are enabled to watch every movement of the heron. Upon settling under the bank he, for the space of several minutes, stands motionless and, apparently, asleep, with

his long snake-like neck buried between his shoulders. But he is wide awake enough, for suddenly he plunges his stiletto-like bill into the shallows to capture a fair-sized dace. The fish is soon swallowed by the bird, but it will presently be digorged with others of its kind, to feed the heron's nestlings which are, no doubt, squawking vociferously for food amongst the tall timber-trees of Richmond Park, wherein still exists a heronry of some importance.

A propos of the heron—or rather of his feet—the old-fashioned, albeit fallacious, idea that paste, mixed with the liquor in which the feet of a heron have been stewed, is an absolutely infallible bait for all kinds of freshwater fish, is still implicitly believed in by some of the ancient school of fishermen. In point of fact it was but recently that an old Thames angler declared most solemnly that if he could but procure a frank hern's foot he would assuredly win all the principal "pegged down" fishing matches that are periodically held by his club during the coarse-fishing season.

"How do you account for heron paste being such a killing bait?" we inquired of the old piscator.

"Well," replied he, if so be as ever you've watched an old frank hern a-catchin' fish you'll have noticed that he keeps one foot always on the move. The foot contains a natural oil of some kind which the fish can't resist, especially roach. Therefore don't it stand to common sense and fair reasoning that hern paste be just as killin'." We told the worthy old roach-poler that his theory should receive all the consideration it deserved, when we had sufficient leisure to enter into the matter thoroughly and seriously.

While watching the movements of the heron a sharp tug at our trout line betokens a "run" or "bite" of some kind and striking smartly we hook our finny and thrice welcome visitor. A very few moments' play, however, suffices to tell us that whatever else the fish may be it is certainly not a trout, for after making one short rush down the weir pool he allows himself to be reeled in without showing further fight. Very soon an ill-conditioned pike of about two pounds weight is drawn over the landing-net and then returned to its natural element as expeditiously as possible.

The water all round is clear as crystal, and while gazing into the limpidness, we notice a cluster of small, eel-like creatures wriggling and squirming amongst some huge boulders lying at the foot of the weir.

It is a small shoal of very late lamperns, and one might imagine that their heads were glued to the boulders. Such is not the case, of course; but these queer looking species of fish possess the faculty of adhering to stones and other submerged bodies by means of their sucker-like lips.

Within comparatively recent years the catching of lamperns at Teddington Weir in what were called "wheels" (a kind of ell-buck) formed quite an important industry among the local professional fishermen. The fish were used as bait by the long-liners of the North Sea and great numbers were purchased by the Dutch fishermen who were often to be seen in the streets of old Teddington, garbed in the quaint and voluminous dress of their native country.

As many as 20,000 lamperns were frequently taken during one tide at Teddington, the market price being

£10 per thousand. Good catches of flounders were also made in the tidal waters of the Upper Thames a few years ago and many a dish of these small flat-fish freshly caught from the river and piping hot from the pan, used one to enjoy at the Angler's Hotel, Teddington, and the old King's Head, Twickenham, both of which hostelries were noted for flounders boiled and flounders fried. No doubt a few of these fish still find their way up to Teddington from the sea, but we are told by the local fishermen that since the lock and weir were erected at Richmond, punt-anglers very seldom take a dish of flounders.

A kingfisher now settles on the overhanging bough of a weeping-willow within half a dozen yards of the heron's pitch. As we study the movements of the brilliantly plumaged bird through the binoculars he suddenly darts, like a flash of blue lightning, into the foam-flecked water running over the shallows.

But unfortunately for the halcyon and his half-fledged family, who are waiting for his return to the malodorous retreat (the nest of the kingfisher is mainly composed of the disgorged remains of small fish, and the scent thereof is indescribable) which takes the form of a burrow in the river bank, the attempt proves fishless, and the gorgeous bird goes back to his point of vantage on the willow branch.

Another plunge and this time our brilliant little friend emerges with a tiny fish. He taps his scaly catch twice or thrice upon a bough and then with a flight as straight and well-nigh as swift as that of an arrow he passes out of sight.

A couple of very tame wild ducks next appear on the

scene and they lose no time in gobbling up sundry pieces of bread which have been left on the shingly shore of the pool by some boating party. Then a jolly little pied wagtail puts in an appearance and with flirting tail he trips daintily along the footboards of the weir searching every nook and corner for flies and other winged insects, which form his staple food.

With a great to-do the wild duck leave their banquet of wheaten bread and flight down stream; and the wagtail taking their cue flits away to the open fields bordering the Surrey side of the river. The heron remains with us a little longer, then he having captured his complement of fish, sails homeward and is soon lost to view behind the giant trees of Petersham Park.

It is time that we "reeled in" and put shoreward also, for the wind grows chill and the sinking of the great red sun beneath yonder clump of tall elms proclaims the advent of night.

A STOLEN MARCH

“WE sighted a wonderful gert pack o’ widgeon on the banks ’smarnin’, an’ I shall be after ’em well afore sun-up to-morrow. If so be as ye’d care to come along o’ me you’re welcome, maister.” Gaffer Gilson, professional wildfowler and fisherman, having delivered the foregoing unwonted flow of oratory, called somewhat boisterously for a “go of rum *in* water,” charged and lighted a very short and over-ripe-looking clay pipe with a wooden spill, and seated himself in a highly polished and particularly uncomfortable Windsor chair before a huge driftwood fire, which blazed and crackled ever so cheerfully on the wide, open hearth of the old-time wainscoted inn parlour that forms my headquarters during periodical visits to my favourite fowling-grounds.

Yes, of course, I would accompany the old big-gunner on the morrow, for although I had enjoyed some fairly good shore and flight shooting, never a shot had I fired from a gunning-punt during the fortnight’s sojourn in the “one hoss” little town of H., which stands on the fringe of a vast expanse of marshes, and overlooks a certain East Coast estuary, the sanctuary of legions of wildfowl in the winter months.

I was up betimes next morning, but ere I had finished my usually early breakfast I heard the clatter of Gilson’s heavy sea-boots on the cobble-stones outside, and a

minute later he entered the room with the news that "wind and tide wor jest right for settin' to the fowl on the banks." He also expressed some little surprise at finding a keen big-gunner devouring breakfast when he should have been fully equipped and ready to embark. I did not keep the old chap waiting long, however, and taking my eight-bore from a corner of the room, I accompanied him down the crooked, cobble-paved streets to a patch of shingly beach where a number of both double and single handed gunning-punts were hauled up high and dry, while a dozen or so antiquated, but nevertheless serviceable, stanchion-guns reposed on a wooden rack, exposed to the weather and open to the ravages of the prowling thief. But neither wind nor weather can damage these ancient duck-guns, for their barrels are coated with grey paint, their muzzles plugged against rain, snow and salt spray, and their locks and breech parts clothed in waterproof canvas. Anent the pilfering fraternity—well, old Gilson will tell you that a dishonest man may not be found in his native village. Let this be as it may, it would require an enterprising and herculean thief to bear off one of these great fowling-pieces. The launching of the punt and loading and rigging of the stanchion-gun in the bows of the shallow craft did not occupy very much time, although the work was done by the feeble light of a much-battered hurricane lamp.

"We be the first gunners afloat 'smarnin', an' they do say 'tis the y'urly bird as catches the wurrm," chuckled old Gilson, as he shoved into the narrow winding gully, which with the rising tide would carry us to the great banks of sea-wrack-covered ooze, the favourite feeding-ground of thousands of wildfowl.

The first grey tokens which herald the approach of day were beginning to appear on the eastern horizon as we set out for the open estuary, my companion negotiating the sinuosities of the gully with his setting-stick in that skilful manner born of life-long experience, which gives a professional punt-gunner such an immense advantage over the average amateur in the pursuit of fowl among the tortuous waterways that intersect the mud-flats. But the tide was making rapidly, the gully running half-bank high, while the outlying banks were well a-wash. Very soon the whistling of pinions and the merry "cackle" of a team of mallard passing overhead warned us that the flight of the fowl from their nocturnal feeding-grounds inland had already commenced, and through the uncertain light we caught a momentary glimpse of their shadowy forms winging seaward. Then our ears were treated to the hoarse "trumpeting" of a herd of pink-footed geese, which at the peep o' day deemed it wise to leave their favourite haunt on a treacherous sand-ridge and repair to the meal marshes and uplands.

"Drat they noisy ode varmints o' geeze," growls Gilson, under his breath; "they kick up as much fuss as a pack of 'ounds, but nary pull can a big-gunner get into 'em. They allus favours the shore-poppers, and be d——d to 'em."

Now, as to whether Gilson's vituperation was hurled at the heads of the "pink-foots" or at the shore-shooters, whom he somewhat slightly designates "shore-poppers," I know not; but one thing is very certain—by far the greater number of grey geese which are shot on our coasts during the winter months fall to the gun of the flight-shooter.

The heavens brighten perceptibly, and for our sport all too quickly. The broad belt of light cast by the pile lighthouse athwart the grey waters of the estuary waxes pale and sickly, and lights displayed by the fleet of smacks trawling out on the main flicker as dimly as glow-worms in a hedgerow on a hazy summer night. But we are drawing very close to the middle banks, and ever and anon the far-reaching "wheoh!" of a widgeon or the quacking of mallard is borne down to us on the light but piercingly cold north-easterly breeze, which, as luck has it, is well-nigh dead ahead, and therefore we have the satisfaction of knowing that the keen-scented fowl cannot possibly wind us.

"Do'ee y'ere they ode fowl a-talkin', maister? I doubt not there be a tidy lot under the Cockle Bank, so keep a bright look-out," whispered my companion, as he dexterously and silently propelled the low-sided, shallow-draft gunning craft near and nearer towards the seawrack-covered banks of slob.

Now, the side of the gully nearest the banks was flanked by a high ridge of sand, locally known as the Cockle Bank, and by hugging this we were well screened from the quick-sighted fowl, and would, unless some unforeseen incident occurred to set them a-wing, be able to approach to well-nigh within range of the big stanchion-gun under cover of the ridge. Foot by foot and fathom by fathom crept the punt towards the still invisible fowl, until one could distinctly hear the curious slopping kind of noise which surface-feeding ducks and geese make in tearing up the succulent grass-like weed which forms their staple food on the coast. A keen and ardent punt-gunner alone can imagine the intense excitement which takes possession

of the wildfowler afloat when, after a long and difficult set to a company of fowl, he finds himself gradually but surely approaching within shot of his quarry; and when through the uncertain light of early morning I sighted right ahead an indistinct, but nevertheless unmistakable, assembly of duck, numbering perhaps three hundred head, closely packed upon a comparatively small patch of tide-lapped slob, I tell you that the blood simply raced through my veins, while I longed to tug at the trigger-string and send a pound of shot pellets hurtling into the dense mass of the feathered ranks.

“Don't pull until they rise from the slob,” came the almost inaudible, and quite unnecessary order from the old gunner. Hardly had the command been given, and while the birds were still out of range, to my utter surprise and unspeakable disgust a bright flash spurted out of a small gut which drained into the main gully at a point about three hundred yards above us. Then came the deep report of a punt-gun. The fowl rose in a bunch and headed towards the open estuary. Then, giving vent to a mighty d—, the old gunner shipped the sculls and pulled slowly and silently up a salting-fringed creek in the forlorn hope of picking up a stray duck or curlew with the shoulder guns.

Half-an-hour later a sprightly young wildfowler came poling along the creek in a light, single-handed punt, the floor of which was richly decorated with widgeon, duck and teal. It was Gilson's youngest offspring, and roundly did the old man rate him as a “pesky, undutiable son” for having spoilt for us the best chance of the season.

THE PASSENGER-PIGEON

A WELL-KNOWN American naturalist offers the extraordinary reward of \$3000 to any one who captures alive or proves the existence of a true wild specimen of the passenger-pigeon. The reward has not yet been claimed, despite the fact that a long and strenuous search by expert ornithologists has been made in every part of the United States, and it would seem that this beautiful—and formerly most prolific—species of the great order *Columbæ* has, through indiscriminate and inveterate slaughter, become as extinct as the great auk and the dodo.

Yet within comparatively recent years passenger-pigeons were to be found in countless millions throughout the North American continent during the seasons of migration and nidification. The birds used to congregate in such prodigious numbers as to surpass belief, and had no parallel among any other feathered tribe on the face of the earth, not even excepting the common quail, hundreds of thousands of which delicious morsels are netted or otherwise captured on the shores of the Mediterranean and in other favoured countries during the spring and autumn migrations.

Very hardy must the passenger-pigeon have been, for it was often found lingering in the northern regions around Hudson's Bay so late as December, its appear-

ance in the more southerly territories being very irregular. As the beech-mast constituted the principal food of this species of wild pigeon, in seasons when the small brown nuts were abundant, corresponding multitudes of pigeons raided the beech forests. Their roosting-places were always in the woods, and frequently occupied a large extent of forest. Such areas exhibited a very strange and desolate appearance after harbouring a colony of "passengers" for some time. The ground would be covered with the droppings of the birds to a depth of several inches, all the grass and under-covert destroyed, the surface strewn with branches of trees broken down by the weight of the pigeons clustering upon them, and the trees themselves, for thousands of acres, killed as completely as though "girdled" with an axe. The marks of such desolation remained for many years, and no vegetation of any kind would grow upon ground so fouled.

The nesting-sites of the passenger-pigeon covered a far wider extent of woodland even than did the roosting-places. In the western portions of Canada and the United States these huge bird-nurseries were usually found in beech forests and frequently extended, in practically a straight line, across country for a great distance.

Wilson, in his celebrated work, *American Ornithology*, speaks of one of these nesting-sites which ran through the forests of Kentucky, in a nearly north and south direction, a distance of forty miles. The breadth of this extraordinary belt of nests extended to several miles. Practically every tree within this tract was furnished with nests wherever the branches could accommodate

them, a single tree frequently containing well over a hundred.

The nest of the passenger-pigeon, like that of the common wood-pigeon or stock-dove, was formed of a few dead twigs, placed carelessly together, and with so little concavity that the young were easily seen from below. It is, we believe, an accepted fact amongst ornithologists that, though a nest of one of these birds was never found to contain more than one "squab," the species would breed three, and sometimes four, times during a season. So exceedingly plump were the young "passengers" that both the whites and Indians were accustomed to melt down the fat for domestic purposes as a substitute for butter and lard.

Before the young pigeons were quite fully fledged, numerous parties of the inhabitants of the neighbouring country used to come with wagons, guns, axes, and camping outfit, to sojourn for several days amidst the immense avian nurseries. Fearful must have been the slaughter; and when a man spoke he found it difficult to make himself heard without howling to those whom he addressed. The ground below the nest was strewn with broken boughs, eggs, and young pigeons. Great numbers of birds of prey hovered over the tall forest-trees to take their toll of both young and old from the feathered multitude with the most daring effrontery. From twenty feet upwards to the tops of the trees the scene in the woods presented a perpetual crowding and fluttering amongst the pigeons. The noise of their pinions mingled with the crash of falling timber, for men armed with axes cut down such trees as seemed to be most crowded with nests, and contrived to fell them in such a manner

that in descent they brought down several other trees with them. The falling of one large tree sometimes produced two hundred squabs, well-nigh full-grown, and a mass of fat.

Although in the Atlantic States passenger-pigeons seldom appeared in such enormous companies as in the Western States, they were quite numerous enough, and great havoc was wrought among them with the gun, clap-net, and other implements of destruction. As soon as it became known in a city or township that the "passengers" had arrived in the neighbourhood, local gunners rose *en masse*; the clap-nets were laid in suitable situations, and, live decoys being made to flutter on a stick as birds just alighted, numbers of the passing flocks were induced to descend and feed on the corn, buckwheat, etc., which was strewn around the nets. By such means as many as thirty dozen pigeons have been taken at one sweep. Wagon-loads of the birds used to be poured into the markets, their price ranging from fifty cents to twelve cents per dozen. The price offered for one live passenger-pigeon to-day is \$3000.

THE PEEP O' DAY ON THE SALTINGS

“ WELL, Doctor, an yow care to come a-flightin' wi' I Noel-eve marnin', do yow be at the fall-gate, over the great dick, at half arter six. P'raps us may get a duck or two, and anyways an owd curloo,” said “ Long ” Perry, eel-catcher and professional wildfowler, as he bade Dr. Carter, the local surgeon, “ Good-night ! ” and then went clattering up the crooked High-street of the old-time fishing town of Oozeleigh, towards his reed-thatched cabin on the fringe of the neighbouring marshes.

“ Right you are, Perry. I'll be there, and won't forget to bring a flask of your favourite ague-killer,” replied the Doctor cheerily.

Then he went his way also—not to the warmth and comfort of his own house, but to the poor cot of an octogenarian fisherman, who, enfeebled by the weight of years and a severe attack of bronchitis, had begged the kind-hearted surgeon to “ patch up and keep t' owd craft afloat through Noel-tide. Me mawther [daughter, or young girl], Mary Jane, be a-comin' to see t' owd fayther, an' I du count on seein' her purty face once again, Doctor, won'erful.”

Thanks to the skill and care of the “ medical shipwright,” the world- and weather-beaten old craft was kept afloat until after the arrival of Mary Jane, and in lieu of a fee the Doctor received an orphan's blessing.

Despite his late vigil at the bedside of the sick fisherman, Dr. Carter turned up at the fall-gate fully ten minutes before the appointed time, to find his humble friend and tutor in matters appertaining to wildfowl and wildfowling awaiting his advent, and puffing away at a short black clay pipe.

“How du yew du, Doctor? Theer be nothin' o' the dodman [snail] about yew 'smarnin',” was the wildfowler's greeting. Then, having very carefully knocked the glowing ashes from the treasured “nose-warmer,” he flung his antiquated but trusty old 10-bore pin-fire across one broad shoulder, a hand-made canvas cartridge-bag over the other, and led the way along the bank of the great dyke until what is locally known as the Dole Stone [boundary-stone] was reached, when a high sea-wall had to be negotiated. The wall crossed, the gunners found themselves on a wide expanse of salt-marshes.

It was growing lighter as “Long” Perry piloted his companion across the gully intersected saltings as easily as though it had been broad daylight. Soon an old gunning-pit was arrived at, and a “Do 'ee hoad the shootin'-irons, Doctor, while I dydle out the sluss,” the fowler, armed with an old bucket, proceeded to bail out the superfluous water that remained in the pit from the last spring-tides. This work occupied not many minutes, and, without wasting words or time, Perry paid a visit to a convenient stack on the neighbouring marshes, and shortly returned, carrying well-nigh a truss of sweet-scented hay on his back.

“That owd duck-hole be as clean and comfortable as a little housen, danged if it bain't!” declared Perry.

Notwithstanding the worthy marshman's efforts to render the duck-hole "as clean and comfortable as a little housen," the Doctor inwardly voted his temporary retreat to be "demd damp and unpleasant," and longingly did he watch the eastern horizon and the tokens of dawn.

From out on the ooze-flats sounded the weird, far-reaching challenge of the curlew and redshank, the plaintive call of the ringed plover and lapwing, while a strange, goat-like bleating at no great distance from the pit told of the presence of a godwit or godwits amongst the deep and muddy runnels which intersected and drained the salts. Every now and again a "swish" of wings overhead betokened the passing of an early team of mallard from their nocturnal feeding-grounds inland to the tideway, and the tingling ears of the waiting gunner were once gladdened by the unmistakable hound-like music of a herd of pink-footed geese in flight. But never so much as the glimpse of a passing fowl did the watcher in that slimy gunning-pit catch.

Cold and hard was the wild nor'-easter which came howling in from the North Sea to search out every nook and corner of the unsheltered levels, and the thunder of the white-capped coamers breaking upon the sand-bar beyond the ooze-flats told its own tale of a heavy sea running in the fairway. But it is an ill wind that blows good to no man, and, though the solitary gunner in the old duck-hole pulled the collar of his heavy guernsey well up to the chin, he welcomed the brine-charged gale which struck him with such icy force, for would not the fowl flight low in the teeth of it?



"PEEP O' DAY ON THE SALTINGS"

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With eyes turned shorewards, the Doctor peers through the still uncertain light for the approach of something—he knows not of what species it may be—clothed in feathers. The rhythmical “swish, swish, swish!” of many pairs of wings cleaving the air is now heard, and he obtains a momentary glimpse of a number of hazy forms winging seawards at a speed approaching one hundred miles per hour. The double report of the 12-bore awakens the slumbering echoes of the morning. But there is no answering “thud” on the contiguous salt-marsh—the “thud” that betokens a successful shot—and the bunch of mallard continue on their flight to the tide unscathed, while the disappointed sportsman wonders how in the name of misfortune he managed to “muff” with both barrels, and, incidentally, whether “Long” Perry will chip him overmuch.

A second bunch of mallard glide over the salt-marshes, and, the old gunning-pit being immediately under the line of flight and the light having greatly improved, the Doctor manages to score a fat young mallard with the right barrel, while a duck, hard hit, after carrying on a short distance across the salts, drops with a sounding “plonk” into a shallow swidge. The first bird is dead as the proverbial mutton, but the second, although very hard hit, leads the Doctor a merry dance among the muddy runnels of the saltings ere he runs it to earth in a bed of glasswort. From time to time the report of “Long” Perry’s 10-bore comes booming across the salt-marshes. Nothing further worthy of powder and shot ventures to pass within range of the old gunning-pit, however, and the Doctor begins to think that his sport for this morning is finished.

But luck sometimes falls to the lot of the shore-shooter when he least expects it. In this case, luck is heralded by a long-drawn "cur-lee!" which puts the gunner on the alert. Keeping every portion of his anatomy well hidden in the pit, he awaits the coming of the curlew, which are flying over the contiguous marshes towards the shore, and may, perchance, pass within shot of the pit.

Cur-lee! cur-lee! cur-lee! What a row the cunning and keen-sighted birds make as they travel across the treeless marshes and come screeching over the head of the patient gunner. The Doctor springs to his feet, and, singling out a bird flying within the "brown" of the herd, he fires. A lead drop to the contents of the right barrel, while the left accounts for yet another bird ere the remainder of the herd fly scolding and shrieking to the outlying ooze-banks.

Splashes and streaks of liquid gold and scarlet now brighten the grey eastern heavens, and these, in turn, fade away and give place to a cloudless sky of turquoise blue. Stunted trees and bushes on the adjacent marshes lose the grotesque forms which they assume under the pale beams of the moon, and during the uncertain light of early morning; the outlines of the sea-walls are no longer leaden clouds upon the sky-line, but high, grassy escarpments of solid and unvarying structure. The dawn of Yuletide is here; the flight is over, and the two gunners wend their way homewards across the frosty marshes, one to attend to the bodily ills of his fisherfolk patients, the other to barter a leash of mallard and a curlew for a joint of tough "Chris'mas" beef and a bunch of evergreens.

AT FLIGHT TIME

THERE is a bite in the air and the amateur gunner shivers a little while fumbling at the "granny" with which he fastened the painter of his dinghy to a ring-bolt on the fish-wharf the preceding night.

"Don't 'ee cast off t'owd dinghy for a moment, maister! Oi be a-comin' flightin', too," is the stentorian hail of "Widgeon" Joe, the professional wildfowler and eel-catcher, as the man in the dinghy thumbs away at the unholy tangle.

"Widgeon" Joe clatters down the fish-reeking wharf in his heavy tuck-boots, and ere the amateur has solved the mystery of how to unravel a double-tied "granny" reef, he has lain his long-barrelled 8-bore 'cussion gun along the thwarts of the little craft and seated himself comfortably in the stern-sheets.

"What be t' matter with t'owd painter, maister? Got un granny tied agin, I doubt," says the professional, for although the darkness of early morning obscures the movements of the amateur, "Widgeon" Joe makes a very shrewd guess anent the cause of the delay in setting out for the Point salts. He has sailed with the amateur before to-day, and has learned that the latter does not excel in the art of knotting and splicing.

At length the painter is cleared, the small balance-lug-sail bellies to the brisk, off-shore breeze, and with

"Widgeon" Joe at the tiller the cockle-shell of a craft disappears into the darkness, her bluff-bows heading towards the Point salt marshes, which lie well across the little estuary. Far out, on the fringe of a high and treacherous sand-bank, known locally as "The Ridge," stands a pile-lighthouse, the lantern of which, at frequent intervals, casts a narrow but brilliant gleam of light athwart the dark tide-way and neighbouring mud-flats, while the riding-lights of a fleet of weather-bound coasting vessels, anchored in the fairway, dance and flicker like so many will-o'-the-wisps.

The incoming tide having only just commenced to flow, the ooze-flats are still uncovered, and the passage to the Point salt-marshes must, therefore, be made by way of a tidal-creek, which worms its sinuous course through a vast expanse of mud and glasswort clothed salts, between dyke-protected marshes and rich corn-growing lands, threading in and out amongst a cluster of tiny islets and then opening out into a small estuary, well sheltered from the fierce nor'-easters by a high ridge of sand which forms a natural breakwater during all but spring tides.

It is still quite dark as with sheet now free, now taut, the dinghy ploughs her way down the turbid creek, and though the sinuosities of the same are both frequent and abrupt, "Widgeon" Joe steers the little craft with that skill and precision which may only be acquired by life-long experience in the navigation of the water-way and fore and aft sailing. An inexperienced hand would have sent the boat ashore a dozen times during the passage of the creek, but "Widgeon" Joe touched ground not once.

A heron disturbed from its early morning breakfast of eels, or flat fish, as the case may be, rises on great fan-like wings and passes, with a weird and uncanny croak of alarm, into the darkness, while ever and anon the "whistling" of pinions overhead betokened the passage of a bunch of duck from their nocturnal habitats inland to the sanctuary of the open tide and outlying banks of ooze. The neighbouring flats form the feeding-grounds of great numbers of wading birds, and shrill and clear sounds the far-ranging challenge of that vigilant sentinel of the fore-shores, the curlew, and the "teuke!" of the ever-watchful redshank, above the plaintive call of the lapwing and ring-plover, and the pipe of the grey and golden plover, the dunlin, and many other species of shore-birds.

The first grey tokens of dawn now begin to gather on the eastern horizon, and as "Widgeon" Joe runs the head of the dinghy on to a shelving spit of salting, he mutters :

"Yere we be under the flight-line, and hinter be the daylight."

There is no time to lose, for at the peep o' dawn, the fowl will leave the stubbles and meadows inland to sleep out the day on the tide and banks. Ducks travel fast, more especially—as in the case this morning—with a stiff breeze of wind behind them, and "Widgeon" Joe, having drawn his tuck-boots well up, steps into the water, and bidding his companion, "Hold taut!" he hauls the nose of the boat well up on to the salts, and the amateur walks ashore dryshod.

To pull the dinghy high and dry, and safe from the rising tide, is but the work of a very few moments. Then

Joe takes his companion to an old gunning-pit—which, by the way, the recent spring tides have left in a decidedly moist and muddy condition—and bidding him keep low and hold straight, he moves off to another duck-hole lying at no great distance away.

Brighter and brighter grows the greyness in the eastern heavens, the stars begin to pale and fade, the lights of the shipping in the Roads wane dim and yellow at the coming of dawn, and surrounding objects take more definite form as the light improves.

Very soon the gladsome sound of pinions rapidly beating through the brine-charged air greets the ears of the amateur, who, very patiently, sits in the wet and muddy duck-hole, waiting for something to turn up.

“Swish-swish!—swish-swish!” here comes the first bunch of mallard. They fly wide of the gunning-pit, however; affording the amateur not so much as a fleeting glimpse as they wing their way seawards through the still dim and uncertain light.

A tongue of flame suddenly spurts up from the surface of the salting, and the boom of a heavy shoulder-gun awakens the slumbering echoes of marshland, creek and ooze-flat. “Widgeon” Joe’s ancient weapon has spoken, and to some effect, no doubt, for the worthy fowler is an adept in the art of flight-shooting.

Scarcely has the report died away, than a number of hazy forms flash past the amateur left-handed.

He sends the contents of a couple of 12-bore cartridges hurtling after the bunch of mallard, and the snap of “Amberite” is answered by a sounding splash in one of the many runnels which drain the saltings.

“ There is one down, anyway ! ” ejaculates the amateur, and having no dog, and somewhat fearful that the bird may have but a wing down, and so escape to the open creek by way of the runnel, he goes to gather it.

But the mallard is dead enough and lies floating, paddles upwards, in the water-course. As a truthful man the amateur was fain to confess—to himself—that it was a good deal more by luck than judgment he killed that fat mallard, for truth to tell, he shot more by sound than by sight.

While the amateur is in the act of gathering the duck from the runnel, the report of “ Widgeon ” Joe’s 8-bore again booms out, and a spring of teal come twisting and screwing over the saltings like a flight of erratic rockets. The 12-bore lies harmless on the bank of the runnel, however, and the little duck continue on their flight seawards, unscathed by the amateur who silently, albeit roundly, anathematises them for fighting so inopportunistly, forgetting, of course, he should not have vacated the duck-hole.

The flight of the fowl has now commenced in earnest, the light improves perceptibly each moment, and the amateur hastens back to his dank pit.

From time to time “ Widgeon ” Joe’s “ ode shootin’-iron ” belches forth its heavy charge of black powder and No. 3 shot, but though the amateur both hears and sees more than one bunch of duck pass his “ hide,” all are well out of range of a 12-bore gun.

The brief period of the fighting time draws rapidly to a close, for the daylight broadens, and a fiery red sky proclaims the birth of a wet and stormy day.

“ May as well walk over to Joe and compare notes,”

soliloquises the amateur while watching the ever-changing, kaleidoscopic effect of the rising sun upon sea and sky.

But even as he drops the mallard into the capacious inside pocket of his old jacket, a shrill "cur-lee!" causes him to grab up his gun and stoop low within the narrow confines of the duck-hole.

The far-reaching challenge rings out again, and from apparently close quarters.

Springing to his feet the amateur is just in time to get a couple of shots into a small herd of curlew as they swing along over the edge of the salt-marshes at a great racket.

Beyond sending the birds to the right-about the first barrel takes little or no effect. But as the herd turns, with the decision of a regiment of well drilled infantry, one drops from the ranks, pitching into a shallow pan of water.

"Widgeon" Joe now appears on the scene, and pointing to the great fiery sun, which is rapidly rising above the horizon, exclaims: "Theer be the sun, maister! Floight be over, tide be ebbin'. 'Tis time us got aboard t'owd foot-boat."

SPORT ON MARSH AND FORESHORE

I

NUMBERS of foreign fowl, including a good herd of pink-footed geese, had arrived in the estuary, and the owner of an extensive marsh abutting on the northern shore of the same had written inviting me to make one of a party of five guns to take toll of the duck inhabiting the fleets and dykes of the enclosed marshes, and to wait up for the geese as they flighted from the uplands to their nocturnal habitat on the shore. Having enjoyed but a few very indifferent days' partridge-shooting in early September, I was only too glad to accept E——'s invitation. Throwing a few necessary articles of clothing into a kit-bag and overhauling my somewhat battered—but nevertheless trusty—old long-chambered 12-bore gun, I was soon spinning through the congested London streets towards Liverpool-street Station in one of those most convenient and rapid of all public conveyances—a taxi-cab.

Within a couple of hours a fast train carried me through some of the flattest and most unpicturesque-looking country in Europe to the one-horse little railway station which formed my destination. Here I found my host awaiting my advent in a dog-cart, and a five-mile drive through twisting lanes, bordered by leafless hedges, brought us to the headland of M—— Marshes, under the sea-wall of which nestled a quaint old reed-

thatched homestead which was to form our headquarters during the next two days.

Assembled in the sparsely furnished sitting-room, the wainscoted walls of which were decorated with fearsome specimens of the taxidermist's art, were assembled my fellow guests in the shape of the vicar of the parish, the local doctor, and a brace of rosy-gilled, well-fed yeomen discussing the prospects of sport on the morrow over a pipe and a gouty-looking decanter of Scotch whisky.

Now, the sleeping accommodation at the homestead was decidedly limited, while Bailiff Toogood's family was, to say the least of it, numerous. The three younger members of our "stag party," including myself, were therefore "picqueted" on good Witney blankets and sweet wheat-straw, in a roomy octagonal granary, which the worthy bailiff warranted to be free from rats and other vermin, while our host, the parson, and one of the before-mentioned yeomen, being of more mature years, elected to shake down in the sitting-room.

By the time the improvised beds were prepared for occupation, the last fiery spears of the setting sun were beginning to disappear below the horizon, and, every man being eager to score his first pink-footed goose of the season, the guns (three 12's, one 10, and a single 8-bore) were put together, and we posted ourselves at intervals of about ninety yards along the high sea-wall, which faced the North Sea.

As luck had it, the piercing north-easterly wind not only came in direct from the main, but blew with half-gale strength, which augured well for both an easy and a low flight.

I had not long to wait, when the whistling sound of pinions gladdened my ears, and very soon a bunch of a dozen or so mallard passed between the doctor and myself, flying comparatively low and within easy shot of my stand. Holding, as I thought, well before the leading mallard, I pulled, but, to my surprise, he went on his way rejoicing, while the bird flying next him—a young duck of the year—dropped with a sounding splash into a sedgy dyke, and my second barrel accounted for a fine old drake in magnificent plumage.

The firing by this time had become pretty general along the line, for the evening flight of the duck had commenced. But, with the exception of a small spring of teal, which I missed clean with both barrels, nothing further came my way, and I was beginning to think that my sport, for that evening at least, was done, when the far-reaching and unmistakable trumpeting of pink-footed geese sounded above the muffled thunder of the white-capped coamers, breaking upon the treacherous sand-bar, and the calls of the waders assembled on the ooze-flats.

The hound-like music of the geese approached nearer and nearer every moment, and, although it was impossible to see any great distance ahead through the rapidly gathering darkness, one gazed instinctively towards the direction whence the music proceeded. At length a great fanning of wings to the left of my stand caused me to look skyward, when I saw a number of hazy forms passing seawards at a great racket.

Now, fighting between the lights is purely a case of snap-shooting; indeed, many old flight-shooters, guided entirely by sound, will often fire into a bunch of passing

fowl which are rendered quite invisible to the human eye by darkness. Successful shots in this manner, however, are very few and far between, and we cannot but think that there is a good deal more luck than judgment in shooting by sound.

But to hark back to our geese, the nearest of which appeared to be within range of my 12-bore "Magnum." Pulling at one of the hazy forms, I had the satisfaction of hearing a heavy thud on the contiguous marsh beyond, which told me that I had scored my first pink-foot of the season. My second attempt, taken more or less at random, proved a blank, and, although I obtained a couple of other shots at geese during the short fighting time, I failed to make an addition to my bag. Not so the man on my left, however, who grassed a leash of geese in as many shots, while the remaining three guns scored a couple between them.

Thoroughly well satisfied with the evening's sport, we returned to the homestead to dine, chat, and smoke, and it was well past midnight ere one of the older members of the party suggested it was time all respectable young men were in bed. Then we "juveniles" sought our couches of straw in the granary, while the "oldsters" retired to their respective corners in the wainscoted sitting-room.

"Rise with the sun" should be the motto of the wild-fowler, and the stars were still twinkling in the cloudless heavens when a loud banging on the door of the granary, followed by a raucous "Now then, maisters; the governor do say there be jest time to get a morsel o' wittles afore ye start a-shootin'," caused my companions and myself to jump up from our straw lairs and race to the

creek, which—the tide being at top flood—was running bank-high.

Phew! the first plunge into the icy-cold sea-water from the frosty deck of a leaky old eel-boat, moored off the island jetty, was a stinger; but a good rub-down and a brisk 500-yards sprint to the homestead sent the blood coursing through the veins until one seemed to have taken a new lease of life—nay, to have harked back to boyhood.

A few couple of mallard and a brace of teal were shot during the morning flight, and then arrangements were made for driving a big fleet (a small seed-fringed lagoon of water) which extended across the further end of the island and had an average width of, perhaps, seventy yards. Fringed on either shore by tall sedges and other aquatic plants, the fleet affords excellent harbourage to wildfowl of different kinds, and it is no unusual thing for several pairs of crested grebes to breed thereon, while great numbers of duck, coot, and moor-hens nest on the island during the season of incubation.

At intervals along the shores of the fleet, "blinds," had been erected for the purpose of sheltering the guns during the duck drives. Upon arriving at the head of the fleet, the guns drew lots for "stands," while the beaters (seven or eight of the farm hands) captained by the bailiff, started off to beat the reedy dykes which intersected the marshes like a network of miniature canals. Each shooter having taken up a stand amongst the tall sedges, our host signalled the beaters to start operations.

II

From my "blind" I was able to watch the movement of the marshmen working towards the fleet, and very soon I noticed a nice little spring of teal dart out from the sedgy pond-hole, and come twisting and screwing over the marshes like a flight of erratic rockets. The beautiful little duck, after wheeling round the farther end of the fleet, pitched in a little reed-fringed bay, and then mallard, pochard, and coot, in twos and threes and small bunches, came in before the beaters to seek the unsafe harbourage of the lagoon. At length the principal drains were worked out, and the duck drive commenced in earnest. Distributing themselves along the shores of the water, the marshmen brushed the sedges with their leaping-poles, and every now and again a whooping from the men warned us that something was a-wing.

In the majority of cases the duck, upon being disturbed from the reed-cover, would come stringing along the fleet and past the concealed guns at a great pace, affording them very sporting shots. Comparatively few returned to the fleet, however, and, after wheeling over the marshes, the duck would either fly seaward or to the neighbouring marshes lying beyond the creek. For perhaps twenty minutes the sport was fast and furious, and the "pop-popping" of the 12-bores amidst the sedges well-nigh incessant. My fellow-guns pulled down mallard after mallard, pochard after pochard, teal after teal, and coot after coot in excellent style; but, personally, I am bound to confess that the numbers of empty cartridge cases which lay strewn round my stand at the

finish of the drive greatly exceeded the sum total of my bag.

The mud-soiled beaters now approached, and, with their long thigh-boots pulled well up, they assisted the dogs in gathering the dead and cripples from the dense sedges. It was still quite early, and our host suggested that an extensive marsh, overgrown with rough ground cover in the shape of bents and dry rushes, should be tried for partridges and hares. Thinking it not improbable that I might fall in with a few duck and snipe among the drains of the saltings, I wandered off on my own account, and, taking a well broken old retriever bitch with me, crossed over the sea-wall and started to walk across the drain-intersected salt-marshes, up-wind, towards what is locally known as Broom Point.

I had not proceeded far on my solitary beat, when my four-footed companion flushed a full snipe from a deep gully, which wormed its way through the salts and down to a wide tidal creek. The snipe rose within easy shot of me, and went screwing and scaping marshwards. I missed clean with my first barrel, but managed to drop the bird with the left just as it topped the wall, and although, like many other dogs, old "Jet" was by no means fond of retrieving snipe, she brought the bird to hand with scarcely a feather ruffled. The report of my gun set a-wing a spring of eleven teal, which I marked down into a gully running at right angles to the sea-wall at a point about a quarter of a mile further along the saltings.

Carefully marking a stunted thornbush growing on a sea-wall, and from which I knew that I should be able to command full view of the gully wherein the teal had

harboured, I called the dog to heel, clambered over the embankment, and commenced what was to prove a successful stalk.

Although the marshes were white with frost of the preceding night, the long, rough grass growing along the base of the sea-wall deadened my footsteps, while the wind blew directly from the birds to myself, and, therefore, they would be unable to scent me. Upon approaching my landmark—the thorn clump—I proceeded more cautiously than before, while old “Jet,” who seemed to know instinctively what was afoot, crept close to heel. Pushing my gun before me, I crawled up between the straggling growers of the blackthorn until my head was level with the top of the sea-wall; then, shielding every portion of my anatomy behind the friendly bush, I peered down upon the gully below. Yes! the teal were there right enough, for I could see the “stern” of one projecting beyond the high spit of mud, behind which was, doubtless, resting the whole “spring.”

Now, as every gunner is aware, it is no easy matter to gauge distance across either mud or water, more especially if the weather be at all hazy, as was the case on that particular morning. I judged, however, the little duck to be not more than forty yards distant from my “hide,” and therefore well within range.

A shrill whistle was sufficient to set the teal a-wing instantly, and as they rose in a bunch, a couple dropped stone dead to the contents of my two barrels, while another, hard hit, struggled on gamely as far as the edge of the creek, into which he pitched with a splash, to be gathered a minute later by old “Jet.”

The next attempt was to stalk a flock of knots, assembled on a tongue of slob just beyond the saltings; but, despite a friendly gully, which should have taken me within range of them, the knots proved too many for me, and my crawl along the oozy channel brought me nothing but a goodly coating of particularly rich mud.

Leaving the salt marshes behind me, I arrived at the headland of the island, from which a grand view of the North Sea and a vast expanse of sand, ooze-flats, and black-ground was obtainable. Great numbers of waders were to be seen quartering the muds in search of food, the incoming tide driving them gradually shorewards. About half a mile out, a long line of tall stakes stretched away seaward, and these wave-battered remains of an old fish-weir afforded a shore-shooter excellent cover behind which to lay up for curlew and other wading birds, when they were flooded off the banks by the rising tide.

Now, I was desperately hungry, and I knew that by this time my host and fellow-guests would be sitting down to a rattling good breakfast. The question was: Should I return to the homestead and feed, or should I wade out to the old fish-weir on the off-chance of picking up a stray curlew, godwit, or plover?

"Heads breakfast, tails fish-weir!" The coin came down the reverse side uppermost, and, leaving my boots and stockings on the headland, I commenced to wade through the batter-like, greasy slob. It was thoroughly bad going, and more than once I scored my feet and legs against broken mussel and cockle shells. At length I arrived at the obsolete fish-weir, and, choosing as comfortable a stand as possible, and with old "Jet" snuggling her muddy but warm fur against my feet, I watched

through the wrack-matted stakes the movements of the various kinds of waders as they were driven towards me by the quickly flowing tide.

It proved a delightful study of bird-life. The long-billed curlews and godwits, quartering the flats like so many pointers; the knots, plovers, redshanks, and oystercatchers dodging nimbly here and there and everywhere; a huge flock of dunlins, wheeling over the banks; and a whole colony of herons standing like so many grey sentinels along the serrated margin of the flats.

But mark how quickly the hungry tide swallows up bank after bank, driving the restless fowl ever shorewards, until the advance guard of curlew is well-nigh within range of my stand under the old fish-weir.

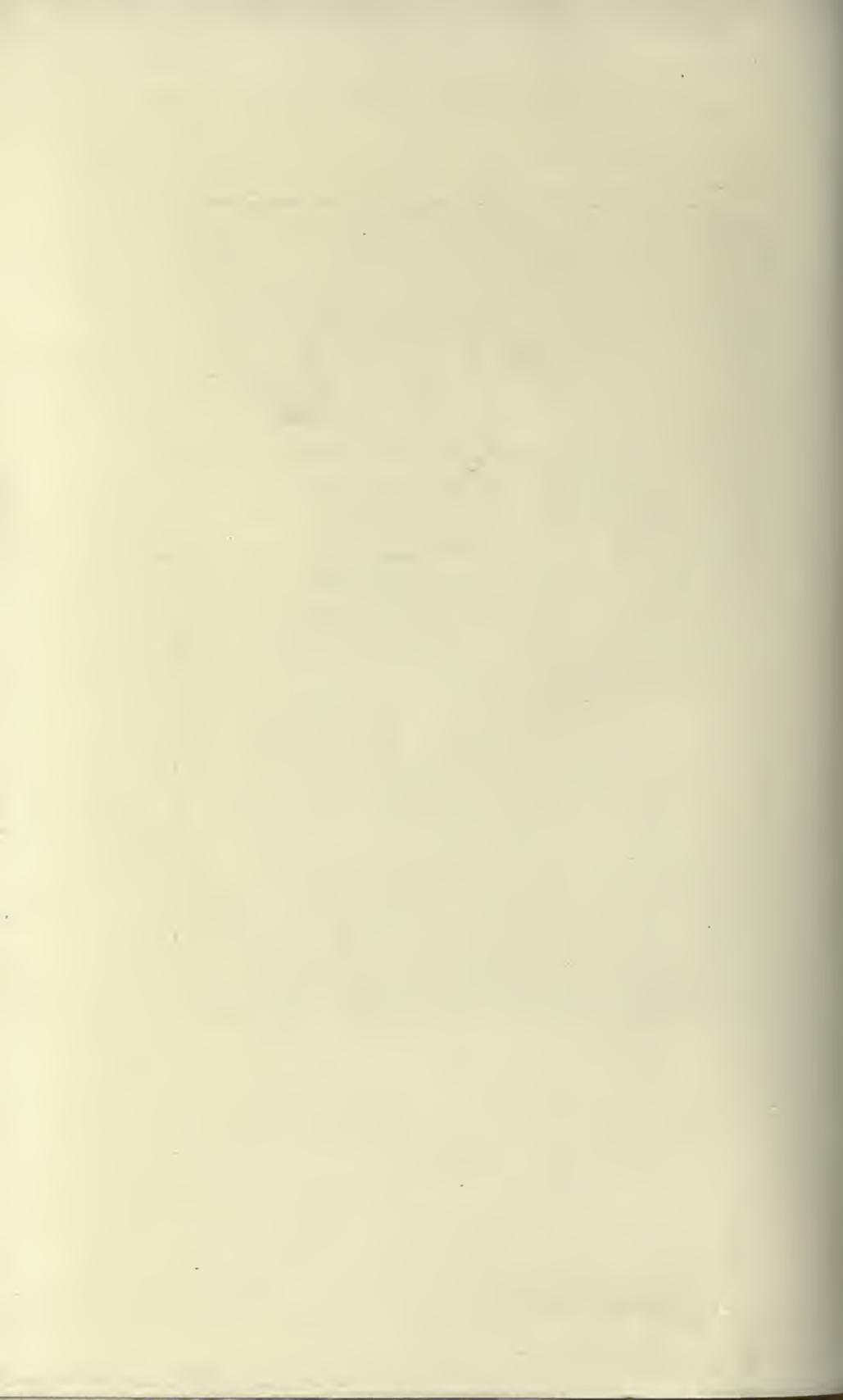
“Cur-lee! cur-lee!” shrieks out the leader of the herd, warning his fellows that danger lurks behind the weed-wreathed wooden piles. But the challenge comes too late, for not only does he bite the dust—or, rather, mud—to a charge of No. 5, but his consort also comes down with a broken wing, ere the remainder of the herd wheel sharp to the right-about and out of danger.

Next a little trip of five bar-tail godwits come within range, one of which is duly accounted for. Then a single curlew is shot at and missed, and then the incoming tide floods me out of my “lay-up” and causes me to beat a hasty retreat shorewards.



“KILLED IN THE OPEN”

[To face p. 268



KILLED IN THE OPEN

PULL 'im an' worry 'im ! *Poo-ll* 'im an' worry 'im !

Wanderer, Wisdom, an' Watchman an' all !—

Thowt 'e 'd a-beaten me over the plough :

Lifted 'em on to 'im, devil knows how :

I 'ad the run of 'im :

I 'ad the fun of 'im :

Lorst 'im an' coursed 'im an'—look at 'im now !

Eighty-five minnits, an' well it may be :

Biggest ole dog-fox what ever I see !

Ah, the ole plunderer !

Ah, the ole blunderer !

Nobody up but the Master an' me !—

Poo-ll 'im an' worry 'im !—*Talli-o* !—*Talli-o* !

Romulus, Rhymer, an' Ringwood an' all !

Pull 'im an' worry 'im ! *Poo'll* 'im an' worry 'im

Dancer 'an Dexter an' Dryden an' all !—

Think of 'is lordship be'ind in the drain :

Think of the tommy-tits ridin' the lane ;

We'll 'ave the laugh of 'em :

We'll 'ave the chaff of 'em :

Swankin' an' clankin' an'—not seen again !

Fourteen-mile point, Sir, as near as can be :

Pity the man that's gone 'ome to 'is tea !

Ah, the ole wheezy ones !

Ah, the ole greasy ones !

Nobody up but the Master an' me !—

Poo-ll 'im an' worry 'im !—Talli-'o !—Talli-'o !

Ganymede, Gamester, an' Guardsmen an' all !

Pull 'im an' worry 'im ! *Poo-ll* 'im an' worry 'im !

Paladin, Pilot, an' Pilgrim an' all !—

Think of 'em rowstin' 'im out by the mill :

Think of 'em screamin' up over the 'ill :

They 'd 'ave a seet of 'im :

They 'd 'ave the meat of 'im :

Stoopin' an' swoopin' an'—look at 'em still !

Runnin' like smoke since a quarter to three :

Gamiest gallopers ever I see !

Lor', 'ow they sung to it !

Lor', 'ow they clung to it !

Nobody up but the Master an' me !—

Poo-ll 'im an' worry 'im !—Talli-'o !—Talli-'o !

Rifleman, Roland, an' Raglan an' all !

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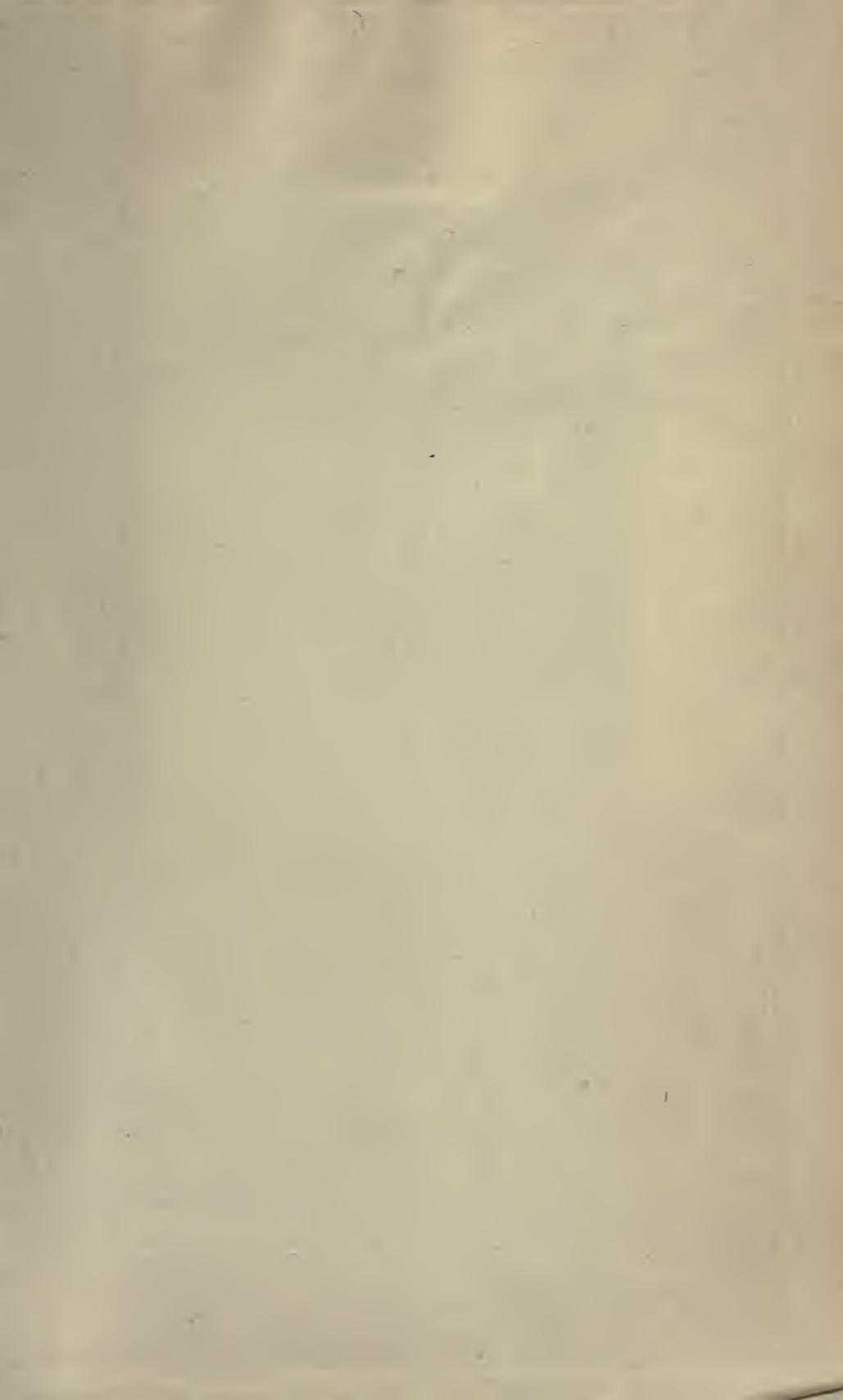
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