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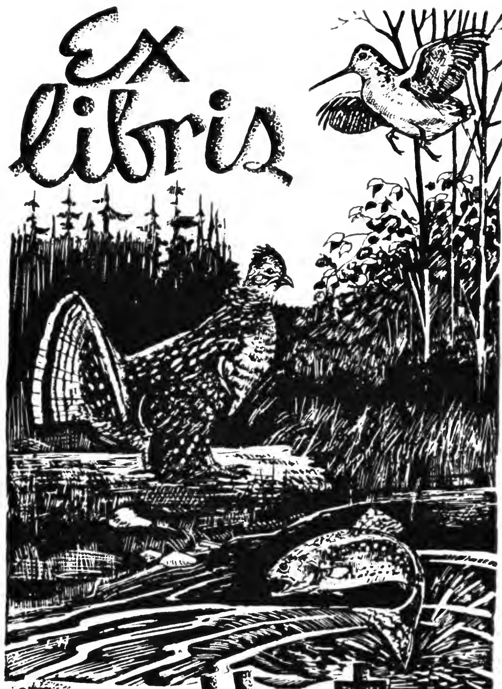

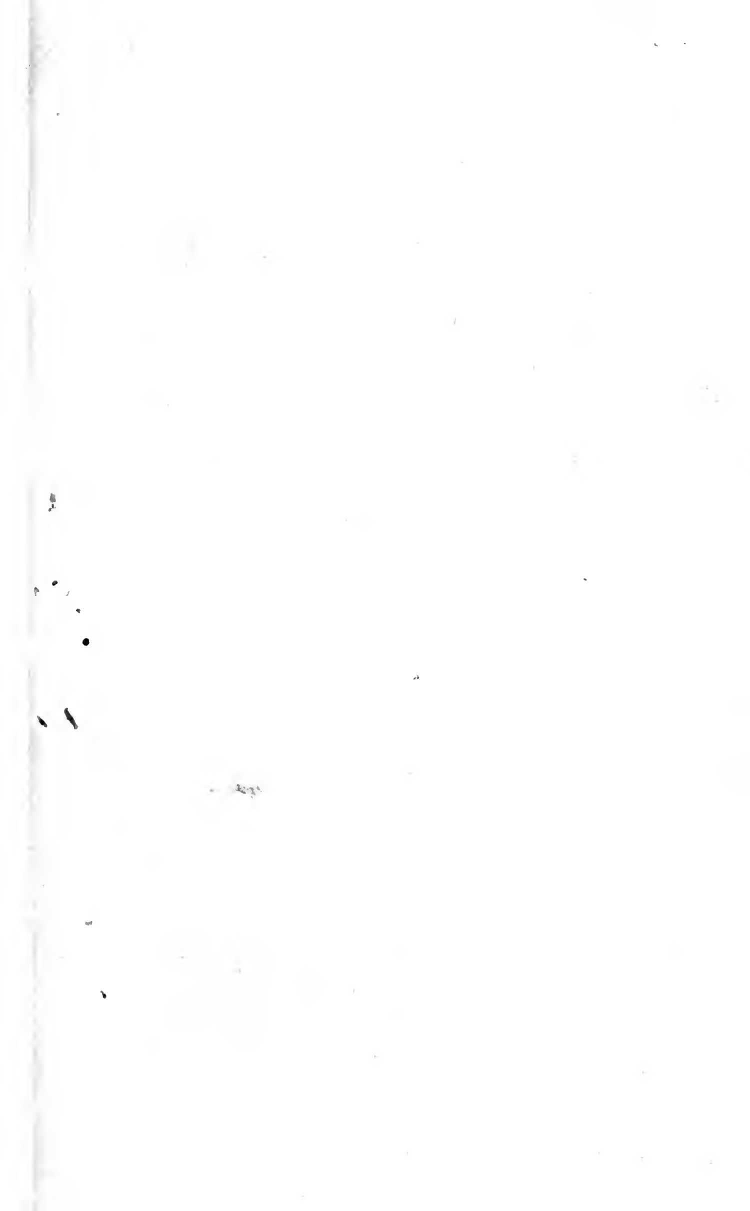

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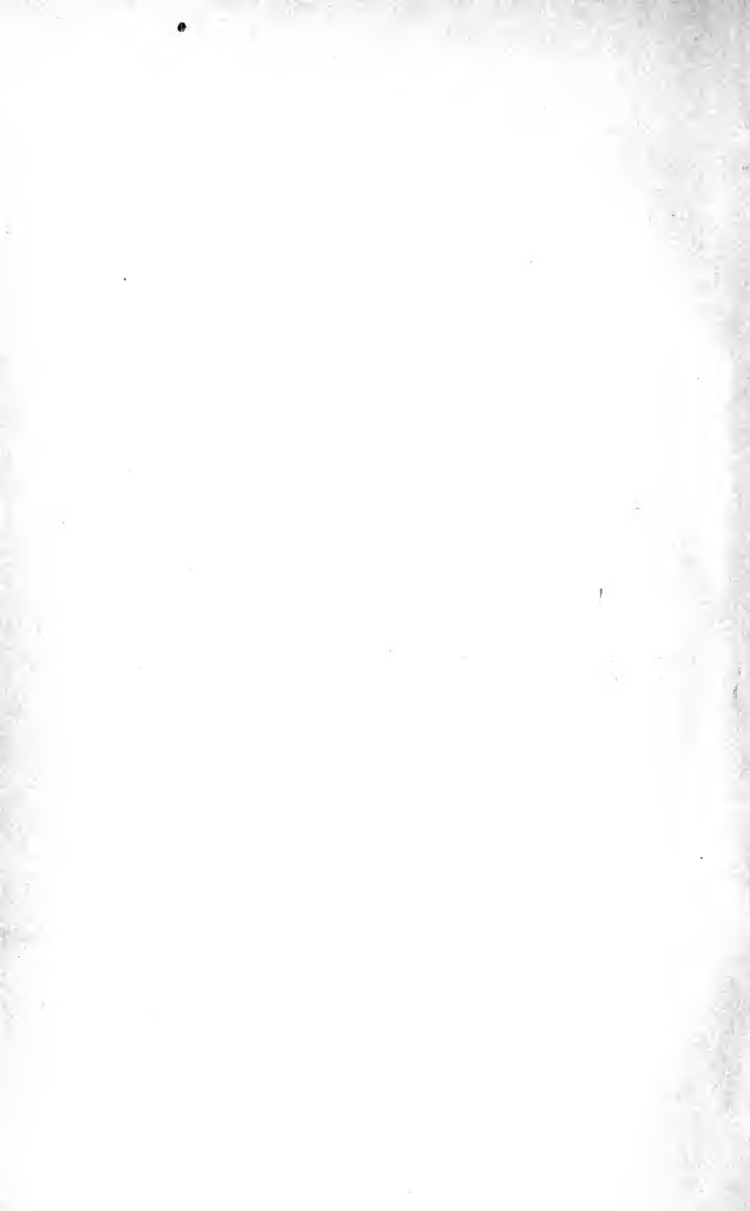
SALMON-CASTS AND STRAY SHOTS



SALMON-CASTS AND STRAY SHOTS

BEING

FLY-LEAVES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK

OF

JOHN COLQUHOUN

AUTHOR OF THE "MOOR AND THE LOCH," ETC.

SECOND EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

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PREFACE.

THE Author of the following pages has, in a former work, expressed his conviction that the more experienced and successful an Angler becomes, the more likely he is to discover arcana which he has constant opportunity of turning to account. Few first-rate fishers care to proclaim their secrets; and although, when under able guidance, a young enthusiast of the rod may have tolerable sport, he yet remains quite innocent of the means which procured it. He finds this out, vexatiously enough, the first time he trusts to his own resources, especially if change in weather or water should require a difference of tactics which his former guide would at once have foreseen. The

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same may be said of shooting, though in a far more modified sense.

Any hints for the Rod or Gun in this book have been gathered of late years, and never before published. Sporting works are often charged with throwing the long line, and drawing the long bow; but any such tendency must destroy both the pleasure and profit of reading them. So far as he is aware, no charge of the kind has ever been brought against the author of this treatise; and although he might easily have made it more interesting and exciting by indulging his fancy, he takes this opportunity of solemnly pledging his word, that neither in this, nor any of his former writings, has he exaggerated one sporting feat, or overcoloured one eccentric trait of human nature. The former are exactly as they happened—the latter as true to life as the Author had power to paint them. The concluding Essay was originally given to the public in form of a Lecture.

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PART I.

SALMON-CASTS AND STRAY SHOTS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

SALMON ANGLING.

WHEN living in the neighbourhood of the Border river some years ago, the proprietor of an estate on its banks once remarked to me, that salmon-fishing was "too *slow* work for him." He was a keen trouter, and in the constant habit of whipping the Ale, the Rule, the Leader, and the Gala. It is still more common to hear these fast trout gentlemen complain that trolling for the salmo-ferox is "tiresome work." A first-class fisher (for no one deserves the name who has not been thoroughly indoctrinated into the mysteries of the salmon, as well as the

various scientific methods of trolling for large fish) will quietly smile, perhaps *seem* to agree, and let it pass. He is quite willing to defer to the opinion, albeit dogmatically asserted, that a good yellow trout requires equal skill to capture as a 20-lb. salmon, and affords quite as much sport. Of course he is not careful to make proselytes who might turn into competitors, to jostle him on a favourite loch or river.

Trouting is, however, only the germ of salmon-angling. The best trouters, whenever they have opportunity, take to the salmon, and only a sparse sprinkling even of them attain to eminence at large fish. With a small rod and fly I have known dozens of excellent anglers, some even mere lads, who were pretty expert; but a true salmon-fisher is rare. It is pleasant to witness the enthusiasm of a trouting devotee, firmly intrenched in the conviction that his own is the most scientific department of the art. Let him be advised, however, to get out of this nursery fishing, to be a salmon-angler if he can, and he will be the first to acknowledge its vast superiority over yellow trout, in practice, science, and sport. I never yet met with a finished salmon-angler who

had not been an adept at trout, although I have known many excellent trouters who never could get beyond second or third rate salmon-fishers.

Many city anglers have some country guide whom they affirm to be the best fisher in the kingdom. This professional, making merchandise of his local knowledge, has most likely taught them all they know; hence their reverence for his skill. These "regular fishermen," by continually harassing all the unprotected water, from the opening to the close of the season, are the pests of the districts they haunt. Of course they know every mood of their own streams, and all the best flies and baits; but take one of these notables to a river he knows nothing of, and pit him against a few good average fishers, also ignorant of the water, and it will generally be found that there are many equal, some perhaps superior, to this "best fisher in the kingdom."

It is only in a stream of considerable bounds that the eminent angler can fully display his power. Those brawling brooks where salmon and grilse only ascend during floods, and which can be commanded by a grilse rod, are too much akin to trouting to suit his taste. Such being, I will venture to say, the

feeling of all our leading salmon-anglers, it follows that to command much water is a primary requisite. To give more power in this respect, I have for many years adopted the plan of what is called spinning the line. This consists in slowly pulling it through the rings with the left hand, at the same time you are playing the hook on the water. The advantages consist, first, in the more enticing movements of the fly ; next, in the greater command you have of the tackle, should a fish rise ; lastly, by enabling you to take fuller and freer casts, especially when trees or other obstacles are behind. Although not properly spinning, yet the line is pulled in exactly like underhand trolling ; with this difference, that in bait-trolling the whole line is drawn through the rings (except the yard at the rod-point with the appended bait), and lies coiled on the bank, preparatory to the next throw ; whereas in salmon-fishing you can only draw in line until it touches the ground. By also giving one or two turns of the line round the hand, there are about two yards and a half saved from the back cast, and added to the clean sweep of the river. Considerable knack is required ; but when a man is quite master of the cast, the line is delivered straight as a rule, and the fly lights soft and smooth at the

end of it Having thus fished with a long line to the foot of the pool or stream, most anglers would wind up, and proceed to new water. I am loth to do so (unless stinted by time), without giving the most likely spots another chance by winding over them. This is done by fishing backwards;—not *up* stream though—that would never do. Throw the line fairly over the water you expect a fish to lie in, then wind up *very slowly* over him; continue taking a step or two backwards, repeating your long throw and slow wind over these choice places until you are satisfied.

The angler, if he pleases, may cast and wind over alternately in going down the stream, and not fish it backwards at all; or he may reserve his wind-over for a favourite spot, where he is certain a salmon has taken post. But the man who knows the river best will always make the most of the wind-over; for even an able angler without this knowledge may waste too much time in winding over tempting places where fish seldom harbour. It is the exact perception of the seats of fish, and where they may shift about according to the varying moods of the river, that constitutes half the science of angling. As the late eminent Dr Monro used to say of medi-

cine, "it is but shrewd guessing, after all." Nevertheless, as in physic the shrewdest guesser is first physician, so in angling the shrewdest guesser, if not *always* the ablest, will go far to be the most successful fisher.

This winding over fish is most deadly. I have again and again moved them in my backward course, when they never stirred in the ordinary way. Often, also, having risen a fish several times, and fairly put him down, I have hooked him at the first wind-over, and that, too, with the very rejected fly. As to changing the fly, the angler must be guided by his own judgment, according to circumstances. For instance, if a fish bangs up keenly the first time, misses the fly, then comes up languidly the second time, it is a bad sign. A change and long rest may be as well. If, however, the salmon only bells up at first, and gives a fine bold dash the next time, give him a third trial with the same fly. He will be pretty likely to take hold the third rise. Should he not, but still continue his free offers, patience is your best course. Rest him, and renew the attack at intervals with any fly you fancy most enticing. I have sometimes fixed these playful fish after nearly a dozen rises, and as often as not with the original

fly that moved them. They are apt, however, to hook tenderly if they take hold at all. When a fish springs freely the first rise, I am apt to clap my fly instantly over him a second time. Very often he will come up wickedly and fix. Should he not stir, or only make a languid roll or a bell up, I should feel much disposed not to disturb him for some time; and when I did, it should be with a fresh fly.

Sometimes (but rarely), if the size of fly suits the stream, salmon will come up and fasten on any colours that may be thrown to them. They are oftener so very particular as to refuse all flies but those of the very same shade, dressed exactly alike. Both these moods of fish, however, are exceptional; and salmon or grilse, as a general rule, may be more or less tempted by several judiciously selected hooks. Although the second of these moods may, at first, try the ablest angler, yet, after the favoured fly is found out, it is all plain-sailing enough. If he is baffled in discovering it, the best fisher is pretty much on a par with the worst. The third and most common mood of fish will always afford fullest scope for the thorough salmon-fisher to prove his skill.

Every successful fly-angler for large fish knows what I have stated; but, as a help to the inexpe-

rienced, I will copy from my memorandum-book two days' practice, as fair examples of the first and second mentioned moods of fish. As the surest test, I have chosen both fishing days from thin, clear, summer water, when I had two flies on my cast.

First mood, when fish will rise at almost anything. Began to fish at six in the evening, leaving off at nine. A brightish body, though not gaudy, and light wing for trail, with a dark fly for bob. Killed five fish—three at the trail, and two at bob. All fastened at the first rise except the last fish. I touched it slightly the first time, gave it a long rest, when, in spite of being pricked, it came up again and fixed firmly.

The fastidious fishing day was from five to half-past eight in the morning. In second pool rose a fish at both bob and trail several times. At last, fairly put him down; gave the usual rest, and exchanged the trail fly for another deeper in colour and longer in shape; hooked and killed him with the change the second cast; landed three more fish with this trail fly; all hooked at the first rise, and not a fin would stir at the bob.

It must be owned that the caprice of salmon does

now and then set at nought all rules and calculations. When my son returned from Cambridge for a few days' fishing at Easter, I gave him the first of the water, and tied some killing flies. He rose a large fish twice in one of the lowest pools. In the centre of our fishing stretch another salmon belled up. As both showed signs of laziness, we left them till evening, when they were pretty certain to be more lively. Near the top of the water he landed a small fish of seven pounds. As it was getting late, I proposed we should try the centre fish, reserving the low one for the next morning. "To lose the chance of the large fish! rather lose *half-a-dozen* dinners." So off he trotted, leaving the smaller one to me. At the first cast I made, he plunged freely out of the water; but although I wasted near an hour trying every fly I possessed, and resting him between, he never moved a second time. When nearly dark, and dinner over, the Cantab arrived with a clean fish of twenty-one pounds. He had again started the morning salmon, at intervals, three times, and quite disgusted him; fly after fly had been *wound* over him in vain. My son had actually wound up his line, and, with rod on shoulder, walked a few

paces on his road home. All on a sudden he remembered having in his box one untried fly, which we had both proved thoroughly useless on our river. At the first free sweep of the before and *since* neglected lure, this large cautious salmon rose keenly, fastened firmly, and, after an exciting run of three quarters of an hour, was safely brought to land.

And here I would caution all good fishers never to brag of hooking "the largest fish they ever had on," unless they bring him home. They may safely leave that boast to the unsuccessful, who are really apt to fancy every salmon they lose a monster. I was much amused one morning to hear that a sedulous brother of the rod had hooked a tremendous salmon the evening before, and lost him after some hours' play. The story was simply this:—A short time before dusk he fixed his fish, which creeped down to a heavy pool below, and sulked. No doubt it succeeded in rubbing the hook out of its jaw into a sunk root or tree. The careful angler remained with his rod on full bend, till some of his anxious family found him near midnight in this interesting position: he then broke, not his fish, but his *fast*, which he ought to have done hours before.

The constant floating of trees is a serious objection to angling on the Dee; not so much from the rafts coming over the pools, as the constant scraping of the setting poles on the bottom, and stray stems of trees breaking away from the float, which often settle in the finest casts of the river and block them up. I always transpose the old adage,

> "A mile o' Don 's worth twa o' Dee,
> Except for salmon, trout, and tree"—

thus,—

> "For salmon's sport, a mile o' Dee
> Beats twa o' Don,—keep aff the tree."

In spite of every caution, I have, like the above patient fisher, often lost the first boast of the Dee by means of the third. Once, when a good salmon was playing freely, and the run at its height, the fish stopped suddenly in the throat of a rapid stream. The weight of water giving the line and rod's point a lively look, quite deceived my companion, who kept insisting that the fish would soon move. Having doubts, I gave him my rod, and, wading in, easily detected the sunk tree wedged across the current, with my fly stuck in the wood.

On the last day of the fishing season in 1853, the

river being too large, and fish stubborn, I raked all the water with my most deadly flies, from the top to the second lowest pool, without a single offer. In this pool was a "potted" fish, which I had risen and touched on two former occasions. That very morning, before breakfast, I had wandered down with my rod; but a heavy rime kept him down. After breakfast the sky had clouded over, and I felt confident that this pool was my best chance in the whole water. I therefore reserved it as a *bonne bouche* for the end of the day. It was growing dusk when I delivered my line over the very inch where I knew he lay. The rolling boil-up and stiffened rod-point instantly followed, and I played my fish with great content. He was in shallow water, and quite spent, when the line seemed glued to the bottom, although I distinctly felt the salmon at the end of it. On creeping forward, I saw he had sneaked under one of these disgusting trunks, and being out of reach of the gaff, my only chance was, if possible, to raise the shore-end of the tree. As I attempted this, he put out all his remaining spirit, and I broke, at the very close of it, the only fish I had risen on that last day. In spring the same year, when lead-

ing a clean salmon through a succession of rapids, I was arrested by a set-line, cunningly hung across the river by means of sunk stones. It was some time before I discovered the barrier, which was then easily disposed of. Even without these impediments, the length of time a salmon may baffle the rod-fisher is by no means a certain criterion of its dimensions. Some fish are far more game than others. The water also, or the banks, may so favour them, that a determined, plucky little fish may work fiercer, and even longer, than one twice its size. Others, again, have the generalship to avoid "spurts," and, by simply leaning their weight against the rod, to husband their strength. These cool-tempered ones, always wearing and rubbing the line on rocks and stones, are far more dangerous—especially to light tackle—than they seem.

One charming spring evening in March, when crossing Coilantogle Bridge, after minnow-trolling Loch Vennacher for trout, the fine trim of Garwhinnie water tempted me to try its best pool for a salmon. The stream of Garwhinnie takes its rise in Loch Vennacher, but soon joins Lennie water, nursed by Loch Lubnaig, when the junction forms the

stately river of Teith. The clean spring fish that lie in both these streams, although very scarce, are large in size—generally from fifteen to twenty-five pounds. They are chiefly taken by par-trolling. Having tied a couple of salmon-flies for Teith the day before, they were, by mere accident, stowed in my hat; but I was forced to be contented with the small two-handed loch-rod and fine trouting gut. I had, however, slight expectation that my toy tackling would be put to the proof, and sauntered down Bochastle Heath, more for the pleasure of the evening walk than from hope of a happening fish.

The common saying, that success comes when least expected, may not be true. The surprise impresses it more on the memory, when failure would scarcely have been disappointment. In the present case, when a salmon sucked down my fly at the eddy formed by the rock in the middle of this pool, and the web of his tail proved him no minnow, my satisfaction was somewhat damped to feel the very slight bond that united us. The narrow stream stopped all risk of the trouting reel being run out; but, though clear as silver, and fresh from the sea, the fish never attempted it. For two hours he only

scraped the bottom or sulked, and when persuaded out of one deep linn, he floated down to its neighbour below, only to repeat the weary round of every stock and stone against which he could rub my chafing line. Twice, when tumbling over shallows, I could easily have clipped him, but had no gaff. At last, without a struggle on the fish's part, or a strain on mine, the worn and ragged casting-line parted in two, and the little rod straightened in my hand. His weight was evidently from sixteen to twenty pounds.

When a boy, trolling Loch Lomond for yellow trout, I hooked a large clean salmon with materials as slender. He quietly followed my lead when I wound him up to the very stern of the boat, wondering what kind of accommodating creature I had got hold of. Under my very rod's point there was a sullen plunge on the top of the water, and that was all I saw of the first salmon I ever hooked. The practical lesson was worth far more than the fish—namely, never to come to such close quarters, *at first,* with so formidable a customer, especially when he seems much inclined to humour you: you are sure to have the worst of it.

CHAPTER II.

SALMON ANGLING.

In some of our Northern rivers, such as the Spey and the Ness, the underhanded up-stream throw is much in use. I have mentioned it in a former work.* But the whole style of fishing is so ungainly and unsportsmanlike, that few gentlemen would willingly adopt it. The one great advantage consists in being able to fish water thoroughly hemmed in by trees. A very strong clumsy rod is required to "pitch" (for that is the proper term) the line up the stream. It is not allowed to circle behind at all, but the strong rod is giving the underhand forward motion to half of the line before the other half leaves the water.

As to up-stream trouting, many will reject it on account of the perpetual lashing it entails. There

* *Rocks and Rivers.*

is this in its favour, though, that in trout-fishing, the more casts, the more rises. All good trouters are aware of this, and never put off time by leading their hooks, except in lochs and the still deeps of streams. When whipping for yellow trout, my advice is, to take a cast wherever you can get a good one, whether up, across, or down stream ; to repeat them as often as possible, and never to drag your flies except in still water. I will quote the words of a little work on Tweed Angling, by an old fisherman, written years ago, to show that this has been the adopted principle of trouting for many a day. "Throwing the line for trout does not require the same regularity of plan and manner as the casting for salmon, since it is often more necessary to throw *a slant upwards* or straight across, than downwards. And, indeed, in trout-angling, generally, it is very improper to hang the fly on the stream, far more so to pull it against it. In fishing either stream or pool, cast the fly across, or slanting considerably upwards, and *let it float down the current of its own accord.*" Although the unintermitted "wapping" is not pleasant at first, yet with a small one-handed trouting rod, few men of average

strength will mind this when the arm has become habituated.

If the river falls *rapidly*, salmon or grilse never take well. A shine on the water also makes them still. I have heard many fishers say that, on a dewy morning, salmon never rise well at the fly. I have now and then experienced the reverse, especially in hot July weather. After once going over thin dwindled water, it is useless to try again, as the fish are pretty certain to see you the first time. In some rivers which run chiefly through peat-mosses, fish seldom rise well when the water is of the highly-prized coffee-brown. This is worth attention; for whenever such rivers brighten up, they take famously. In July, when the days are sultry, fish are dull and sick with the tepid water, even in the late evening. Becoming very hungry after the cool of the night, morning fishing from five till nine is always most deadly then; earlier, is often too dull and grey. Before the weather grows so hot, the evenings are preferable, the day sun having warmed, but not heated the water, and his glare becoming mellowed or subdued. In decidedly cold stormy days, at the beginning of the year, they take

best, of course, in the middle of the day. When the air looks blue on a frosty evening, there is good chance of a fish rising; but when the mountains are veiled in their misty drapery, it is a very unpropitious sign. A brilliant day at the first of the season is not good, especially for red fish; a rough wind is best then. In spring, change from larger to smaller flies; in autumn, from less to larger. Always fish with larger flies in the evening than in the day-time; but do not apply this rule to the early morning. At the opening of the season, even clean fish much frequent quiet water at the tail of the pools.

In boat-fishing a salmon pool, begin at the foot; throw straight out across stream (not a point down, as from the bank); and by making the boatman row slightly aslant, and away from the pool, as it were sloping up stream, you have beautiful command of your tackle. The fly plays longer on the water, and by following the motion of the boat, rises the fish better, and, lastly, by keeping the line "stent," hooks more surely. In repeating each cast, always make the boatman work closer to the pool, starting away from it again as soon as the fly is delivered. When stream-fishing, especially if the current is

strong, you must begin at the top, and fish down as from the bank ; but in so doing the salmon can more easily detect the boat. Should the water be fine and clear, all river boat-fishing is apt to scare fish, if clean, into the pools above; and even red or grey fish will creep down into the pools below.

Hooked fish, fresh from the sea, however, are apt to turn down stream, and dash through rapids and cataracts. My two hardest races down the Dee were with salmon only a day or two out of the salt-water. They spun through a succession of torrents, and the footing on my side the river being nothing but ragged rocks, the sight of smooth water at the end of the rapids was very welcome. I have a pretty vivid recollection of having my fun for reward at the close of one of these bursts. When the fish was half out of the water, on the sloping bank, I desired a young companion to lift it ashore. In doing so, the salmon slipped through the small fingers. In defiance of me and my screams, the single gut was seized, of course snapped, and the fish, an eleven-pounder, lolloped back into the river. I barely saved him, for the moment my little girl clutched the line, I threw down the rod, stood

ready to cut off his retreat, and by a strong pitch of both hands heaved him ashore.

I was not so fortunate with a grilse a few months later. I had risen at four, and after killing three fish, hooked the grilse in the last pool I meant to try. As I never use a gaff if I can help it, I had led my victim over several shallows, stranding him at the end of a ready little creek. My rod was comfortably grounded, and I was within a yard of grasping the captive, when its hold broke. The moment the fish felt free, it seemed imbued with the spirit of half-a-dozen harlequins. Clearing the tiny bay, like quicksilver, carefully avoiding an inviting deep which would have insured its destruction, the wonderful instinct of the creature guided it through a succession of intricate shallows, and in spite of my kicks it gained the channel of the river. I had the curiosity twice to examine this place, and had I not proved it, could scarcely have believed that any fish had wit enough to extricate itself from such a dilemma. What chiefly excited my wonder, was that a fish *in such a peril* should have purposely avoided deep water for shallows which it was so unlikely ever to thread. The shallows, however,

led to the body of the river, and to freedom, while the tempting deeps, being enclosed on every side, were certain captivity and death.

In clear water, two flies on your cast, *unless small*, will often make salmon shy. There is no more killing bait for trolling than gold or silver fish ; but, from their gay look, if salmon do not bolt *at* them, they will bolt *from* them. The same may be said of salted herring-fry. When salmon get accustomed to their bright glare, they fly the parts of the river where they are used.

The wholesale net-murder, in some of our best rod-rivers, must have been noticed with disgust by all salmon-anglers. If a remedy is not found to this slaughter, the rod-fisher's occupation will soon be gone. The lower fishings suffer first, the dearth of fish gradually extending to the higher. As long as the run continues, of course the lower stations have the first chance. The sport is then often good ; but when the run ceases, the tables are turned. I have then seen the lower water nearly empty, when there was good sport twelve miles above. The reason is sufficiently plain. The first of "the run" rush to the top of the river, and occupy it ; those that fol-

low take possession of the next pools and streams; and so on, till the run is exhausted. In former years, at the proper season, nearly the whole river was tenanted by these "back fish." How stands the case now? When the run stops, scarcely the half of some of our finest salmon or grilse rivers have a fair complement of "back fish," while only a meagre sprinkling condescend to inhabit the lower water, how inviting soever both stream and pool may appear. I have often noted this on the Dee, where, at the end of a salmon or grilse run, the sport was good at Ballogie and Aboyne, while there was scarcely a fin near Banchory.

A scarcity of fish is a still greater drawback at the end of summer and beginning of autumn. At that season all the finest salmon take possession of their pools for the winter, and are called "potted fish." Of course they are always at home—may be easily risen—but are far more shy of taking hold than fresh-run fish. If they do fasten, they often hook slightly. An indifferent angler may move them day after day, and scarcely fix one. There is fine scope, however, for a scientific craftsman, who, by judiciously tying or selecting flies to suit the

varying moods of the water, and choosing the most propitious weather and time of day for fishing, generally secures a fair proportion of these, the largest salmon in the river. It is most tantalising to see an autumnal leviathan flounder up, tumble over the fly, and never even touch it.

At the end of August, when the Dee was dwindled to a thread, and the salmon fairly "set up" for some time, I rose an old fish about dusk, with a sombre small fly. After waiting till nearly dark, I fastened the same fly to the thinnest trout gut, and soon fixed him. Instead of turning down stream, as he would most likely have done if fresh-run, he bored up against a confined rapid current, the weight of which was too much for my slender tackle, and snapped it. Early next morning I was at my friend again, armed with the purest salmon-gut. The sky was cloudless; and, while deliberating whether to run the risk of disgusting him with the stronger tackle, he flapped his head and shoulder above water. This, with the bright sun and clear river, decided me. Discarding the salmon-gut, I whipped on a gossamer cast again—hooked and lost him in the same way! I never saw this fish again; and as he

had two hooks and gut-lengths attached to his jaw, no doubt he was frightened out of the pool.

When the water was in much better trim, I fixed another of these old fish in the middle of the day. Being but tenderly hooked, he soon slipped off. I tried him at five o'clock next morning—hooked him firmly—and, after some very spirited play, his hold broke when I was leading him unresistingly through the shallow. The day following, about two o'clock, I was at this pool, with little hope of success. To my surprise, I fairly hooked and landed the same salmon. Some, I know, will shake their heads, with, "A different fish, no doubt." My proofs to the contrary are strong. First, it was so early in the autumn that there were very few salmon much discoloured by the fresh water, and no potted ones that I had yet seen. At the very first rise I noted how much he was darkened by being long in the river, and saw at once he had chosen his winter pool. Next, when hooked both the former times, I calculated his weight between ten and twelve pounds; when I secured him, he almost touched the eleven pounds. Lastly, he never left the pool at all—was finally killed in it—and *no other fish supplied his place.*

This I made sure of by constantly throwing a cast over the pool in passing, and fishing it blank to the end of the season. Upon mentioning these facts shortly after to a Dee angler of thirty years' practice, he capped them by a feat of his own, well known to the old fishers of the place. He hooked a fifteen-pound fish at Banchory Bridge—worked him for half an hour—and lost him, when quite done up, by a piece of the gill giving way, which he found attached to the hook. Next day he again hooked a salmon in the same cast, and soon noticed a white mark on his lip. When brought to land, there was a hole corresponding exactly to the bit of gill on his hook the day before.

Another well-authenticated Dee-side story of former days was told me. An old General hooked a salmon, which ran out all his wheel-line. The important knot at the line-end had been neglected, so he helplessly witnessed its disappearance through the rings into the rapid current. Ruefully wandering back, he got a glimpse of some line floating in a quiet bay, about a mile below the place where he lost the fish. It was easily seized, brought through the rings again with great deliberation, and, of course,

well knotted. In winding up, to his surprise the salmon was still attached to the fly, and easily landed.

Instances like the above show the exciting character of autumn rod-fishing, as well as the advantage of finding out the exact stations of these "back-end" salmon. How many of these tempting pools are tenantless now, that yearly used to harbour one or two of these sporting harvest-fish, anglers of the lower stations of some of our best rivers know to their chagrin. And, what is worse, the dearth of finny inhabitants will increase until some stringent restrictions are laid on the angler's great foe—the net. In all those rivers where netting is encouraged to anything like the present extent, not only will the salmon-rod soon be useless, except to hang an idle ornament in the hall, but the needy or greedy proprietors of fisheries will find they have outwitted themselves—that their rents are growing less year by year, until they end in being merely nominal.

Salmon-anglers are regarding with much interest the artificial propagation of salmon in the Tay and other rivers where the experiment is being tried; but whether the increase will ever reward the trouble of raising them, has yet to be proved. Should the

plan fully succeed, it will no doubt be adopted in all our first-class salmon rivers. To stock a stream originally destitute of this fish would be a signal triumph ; and some people are even sanguine enough to attempt it. I rather think they are expecting too much, and that—like the effort of my late patriotic grandfather, Sir John Sinclair, to enliven the Caithness muirs with nightingale music—after the first migration the fish will come back no more to a stream which their previous neglect showed to be unsuitable to their habits. Sir John's plan was excellent, *had it only succeeded.* He employed London bird-fanciers to procure nightingale eggs, and Caithness shepherds to find the nests of the equally soft-billed robin-redbreast. The London eggs soon displaced the Caithness ones, and robin carefully hatched and reared the embryo melodists. In summer, numbers of young nightingales were seen about the bushes, but at the autumn migration they disappeared, never to return.

Before the Tay spawning-boxes had so thoroughly proved the identity of the par and salmon, I shut up three par in a spring-well in July. The summer following, two were alive, of a dark green shade.

Next April, when they cleaned out the well, only one fish remained. The par marks were still apparent; but it had grown much bigger, was large-headed, and very dark in colour. This last also disappeared soon after. Unlike burn-trout, which soon become quite familiar, and eat greedily any food thrown to them, these par generally hid at the bottom of the spring, and were very shy.

CHAPTER III.

NORTHWARD HO!

THERE are still some blue spots in the darkening horizon of old Scotia's fishing sport; but, although well worth the trouble, they are ill to seek. The county of Sutherland stands unrivalled in the variety of its angling capabilities, and the noble Duke has always insisted that these natural advantages shall have fair play. With his permission I enjoyed the luxury of exploring these romantic wilds, and certainly found the excitement of success in good keeping with the scenes which so often afford it.

The Granton steamboat to Burghead, where another conveys the passengers to Sutherland, is the readiest way of reaching this primitive land of the North. A few original traits of human nature will sometimes enliven the dull paddle-wheels; and even what appear trifles, may teach the lesson "Know

thyself." Although I was at first much amused by the following scenes, I suspect the feeling ought to have been pity rather than mirth. A very old hill-farmer tottered down one of the station quays, keeping as good guard over his barrowful of movables as dim eyes and shaky legs would permit; he was dogged by a thick-set undersized urchin, with a face that looked as if he had been born an old man. The octogenarian was several times dunned by this imp for "tippence" porterage, who at last insolently plucked the old hill-man's elbow, sternly demanding his rights. The dormant spark of pride instantly flared up when thus rudely poked. Planting his bent shrunken legs as firmly together as nature would allow, and lowering his withered face within an inch of the lad's: "Don't be so cruse, sir; don't be so cruse! Do ye think we're bankrupt?" Between every sentence there was an appalling nod and stare into the young rogue's callous features, backed always by a self-satisfied bow to the lookers-on in the boat. But the richest comedy was when the little rascal received the brazen bones of contention. Without moving a muscle of his stolid face, and watching his opportunity when the old man

was claiming our applause by a final most triumphant salaam, he imitated it so solemnly that the steamboat passengers were convulsed with laughter, while the hill-farmer, ignorant of the cause, stepped complacently on board. It was not banter that prompted the youngster's retaliation. Had he meant it for wit, half the fun would have failed. It was simply his homely method of letting *us* know that he thought himself as good as his aged antagonist, and that, in his own opinion, he had the best of it.

A very dirty mechanic and a sturdy Highland drover, who seemed for a time to get on famously, at last quarrelled over the "whuskey," and made such a row that they were threatened with "the pegs" if not instantly silent. We were about landing at one of the calling quays, and the moment the boat was alongside, out sprang the weaver, peeled to his shirt and trousers, and, fiercely gesticulating with horrid imprecations, dared Donald to the fight. The drover eyed him with firmly-shut mouth and stern glances. He was evidently calculating the chances of losing his passage, of the district police-office, and an *et-cetera* of horrors besides. When the weaver thought he had quite proved cotton superior to heather, he

donned his greasy toggery, and was soon seated in the midst of an applauding group. Poor Heather eyed Cotton's triumph with a swelling heart. At length, unable to bear it longer, and casting prudence to the waves, he twisted his plaid firmly round him, and, stalking majestically ashore, roared out in a voice of thunder, "Danie, Danie! come on noo!" Danie's frothy courage had "noo" evaporated; he was quite taken aback at having his laurels challenged, and peaceably kept his place; while Donald, having vindicated his honour, quietly uncoiled his plaid, reseating himself on its ample folds.

As the boat passed the little village of Findon, famous for its "Finnen haddies," a shopkeeper, who evidently dealt in these dainties, assured me that the haddock of that coast was much larger than others, as well as better shaped. This he ascribed to their feeding on a species of shell-fish deposited at the bottom of the sea there. He also insisted that the fisher's life was both long and healthy, from the sea air and fish diet. A rosy cattle-dealer, determined to uphold the dignity of flesh, denied the fish diet, and averred that they bought plenty "guid beef, an' liked it better." "They *may* buy beef noo an' than,"

said the haddie-man, "but they live much on the *offal* of the fish." He evidently meant the refuse, or worst fish taken. But as "offal" was a word familiar to the man of fat cattle, he took it literally, and making a motion of intense disgust—"Fish-guts, sir, is only fit for the cat."

We crossed the Moray, and skirted the Dornoch Firth, during a heavy swell, and were happy to set foot on the Land of the Salmon and the Deer. The Duke's keepers, however, assured us that the long drought had made the rivers quite useless for salmon ; and even the late rains, which I had endured with hopeful satisfaction, made little difference, being all drunk up by the thirsty ground. We, of course, at once determined to devote ourselves to the lochs.

In the evening we had the unexpected treat of going over the Duke's Museum of the Natural History of Sutherland. Only specimens killed on the estates are admitted, and, like the hieroglyphic histories of Mexico, a naturalist could from them surely discover the character of this large and interesting tract of country. The Golden Eagle stood for the mountain and deer forest ; the Erne for the savage

rock coast; the Phalaropes, Sandpipers, and Tringas told of sandy, gravelly creeks and harbours; the black and red throated Divers, and many fresh-water dabblers, of the lonely hill lochs; the Peregrine vouched for grouse moors, or rocks swarming with sea-birds;—in fact, there was no department of wild sport, belonging either to Highlands or sea-coast, that had not its representative in this Zoological Congress. One of the greatest curiosities was an Albino Sea-Eagle. There was also a white Jackdaw. The head keeper pointed out what he called the Black Eagle. This, however, was a male Golden one, rather darker in the feathers than usual. The late Professor MacGillivray, of Aberdeen, held sanguine belief of another small kind of Eagle which bred in the Highlands. He never was able to prove it; and, with the exception of one or two stragglers of the little Spotted Eagle, no third species has ever been detected.

The Museum beguiled us so long that it was dusk before we retraced our steps to Goldspey. The spectre Night-Jar flitted frequently past, and Landrails were craaking in the grass-fields—one so close that the ground seemed to vibrate. The migration

of this bird seems to me little short of a miracle. The Swallow tribe and the Woodcock are famed for their powers of flight; and other migrants, such as the Cuckoo and the Night-Jar, are at least buoyant and at home in the air; but what headway could the poor Corncrake make against the slightest breeze? If forced to take wing, its laboured and heavy motion seems scarcely able to clear a single field. When taking a walk the summer before last with a friend along the Gallenach shore, near Oban, my dog poked up one which appeared to make across the sea for the opposite island of Kerrera. She soon changed her course, and flew parallel with the shore, when, in a moment, strength and spirit failed, and she dropped into the water as if shot. I waited till, dripping and woe-begone, she paddled to land, which was about fifty yards of a swim. She allowed me to pick her up without an attempt to escape; so I placed her again beside her mate, who was calling lustily for her return.

At five next morning we stowed ourselves and luggage in the post-gig for Tongue, a distance of sixty-two miles, which only cost one sovereign! The first twenty miles brought us to Lairg, where

we took leave of the Cuckoo and Corncrake, soon after entering one of those solitary but enchanting moor-roads, where the silence was only broken by the lone cries of the creatures of nature, and the occasional bleating of sheep from the many "gatherings" on the hills.* For miles the road skirted the ancient forest of Reay, and the snug look of the few farm-houses and shepherd-shielings of this remote tract, proved that no part of his vast domain escaped the Chief's watchful eye; and a kind one it evidently is.

A large colony of Bean Geese rear their young annually on an island of Loch Layghal. The females were hatching, but the flock of ganders were at feed on the hill-side grass, and flew out a short distance on the loch. They were quite careless as our vehicle drove past. Soon after, when walking up a hill, our driver, "the Post," with great eagerness pointed

* Sutherland is entirely grazed by Cheviot sheep, and the sportsman's lament for the mischief they do to grouse may sometimes be answered by a patriarchal shepherd: "Well, sir, I mind when there was no a Cheviot sheep in a' the country." "What times for the game!" sighs the grouse-shooter, quite mistaking the old hill-man, who only meant to inform him that Cheviots had taken the place of the black-faced heath breed, or black cattle.

out an eagle perched on a crag. With my deer-glass I at once detected a sober buzzard, but looking so grand and imposing from his background of rock, that he might have stood for the picture even of the royal bird.

The superintendent of the Tongue district, now living in the old mansion of the Lords of Reay, kindly showed us the place; and among other curiosities, Lord Reay's coach-house. In those primitive times, a fine umbrageous tree was reckoned sufficient protection for the family carriage; but now every farmer has a comfortable shed for his market-cart. "Hech! what a change from these guid Hielan' times!"

We had come to Tongue on Thursday, the sacramental fast; and Friday being "the Men's day," Mr H., the superintendent, gave us a hint that perhaps the keeper might have some qualms about attending us to the Lochs. In Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, and part of Inverness-shire, these nondescript beings called "the Men," constitute themselves judges of their ministers. When they set their baleful mark on any clergyman, the people refuse to attend his services. They seem a linger-

ing remnant of Popery and superstition in the Highlands, having a separate department of their own, answering a little to some of the lay orders of monkish times. We must, however, do the old friars the justice to remember, that, ignorant though they were, they were rather in advance of their own day; while these authorities, even in this penny-reading age, have about as much general knowledge as they have divinity. On the death of George III., the leading "Man" of Caithness, when asked by his followers, "Fa was to be king noo?" oracularly answered, "Fa suld be king but oor ain Sir Shon!"* If old Ross, the keeper, felt disappointment at being deprived of the services of such sages, I certainly could not detect it in his paradoxical countenance, where mirth and seriousness seemed to struggle with doubtful result. To try him, we offered to witness "the Men's" performance ourselves. The right chord was touched; gravity conquered; and Ross, for all but the camlet, might have been a "*Man*" himself. A few questions about the Lochs, however, soon altered the case, and waggery prevailed again.

* The late Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster.

CHAPTER IV.

"A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT!"

THE tent was pitched in a secluded spot, beside a little brook among the hills. A large primitive congregation surrounded the young Highland minister, who, with violent gesture and defiant tone, was fiercely shouting a Gaelic exhortation. Before him sat "the Men," in full camlet canonicals. Only two had the cotton hood; the rest wore red or brown scratch-wigs, which so enhanced their natural or assumed gravity, as to be perfectly grotesque. They were considerably above middle age, though not very old. The most prominent was the best specimen. He concluded with a prayer in a low tone, and was really a prepossessing old man. His neighbour on the right was a truculent fellow, whose red swollen face too plainly intimated that neat whisky was the spirit that oftenest moved him; while he

on the left, with a fiery red wig and sharp-cut features, had that sinister expression of sly cunning, so especially repulsive, and most frequently found among the lower orders. They appeared to sit in judgment on the preacher; and you could almost read in their critical faces that they thought him "a fine lad, if he had exparience." The women were mostly dressed in cloak, hood, and coif, which added to the simple effect of the whole; and when the nasal Gaelic psalm rose from the heathery brae, it was, barring "the Men," almost sublime. After the congregation broke up and the three ministers descended from the tent, they, like good schoolboys, sheepishly shook hands with all their masters, "the Men," in turn.

None of the ministers under "the Men's" surveillance wear either gown or bands. Popish vestiges themselves, they call the gown and bands Popish in a minister, and are jealous, I suppose, of this infringement on the prerogative of camlet and scratch-wig! A northern presentee to a church took his revenge on going South, by mounting bands as a flag of triumph, and never doffing them till he reached the end of his journey at Dunkeld.

Another less fortunate aspirant for bands supplied their place at the "trial" sermon, by pinning his Crimean medal outside his gown, to enlist the sympathy of his audience. That the bands have some mysterious power, a late Free Church professor fully proved, and fairly owned: for, when preaching in the Isle of May, seeing the lighthouse-keeper's wife completely overcome, he asked what part of the discourse had touched her feelings. "It's the baands, sir—it's the baands; I hae na seen them sin' I was a lassie." Publish it not in the North—tell it not to "the Men!"

CHAPTER V.

FISHING IN THE FAR NORTH.

THE morning broke out fine and clear after a thick mist. "The Men," amidst admiring groups, were solemnly stalking to their homes in the distant straths or mountain-sides; and we, guided by Ross, wearing his merry face and a shooting-coat of portentous pouches, were wending our way to the lochs. When there is a spate in the Borgie, Loch Slam, the nearest, is excellent for salmon and grilse; but from the long drought, there was only hope of the "fly-trout," contemptuously so called by the fishing-guides, to distinguish them from large trout taken by the troll. My companion, therefore, took a cast or two of loch-flies, while I contented myself with a search for the black or red throated Divers' nests. I soon detected with my glass a splendid male of the latter species; the red bar perfect on its throat,

and the head and back so mottled grey, that we at first mistook him for the black-throat. He called loudly several times, and Ross assured me that he knew of the female's nest, on one of two moss-holes close at hand. We searched the first with care, and, when half round the other, I discovered the poor bird dead in the heather. No doubt some shepherds had wounded and lost her, hence the cries of the male on Loch Slam.

Meantime my young companion had landed twenty trout, most of them in excellent condition, and some upwards of a pound-weight. Although a good bait-fisher, he had never thrown a fly before, and the short time he had taken to capture the fish might well justify Ross's boast of the excellence of the lochs. Next day we took advantage of the Post's gig to drive to Loch Layghal after feroxes. In walking up the steep brae we were admiring the most natural scarecrow that ever defended a corn or potato field. It had two leaning staffs, a tattered hat, ragged coat and trousers, and a most imposing still-life attitude. "How natural," I muttered to myself. Ross's ear was quick. "Oh, sir, you'd be astonished to see some of them here. They make

them far more nat'ral than that." Scarcely was this unlucky assertion hazarded, when the scarecrow, which, like the Irish recruit, no doubt "stood up in the centre of its best wardrobe," began to walk. Ross looked extremely queer, and we moved quicker on. Upon a sandbank in the middle of Loch Layghal a solitary bird was resting. "What's that?"—"A gull, sir." "Are you sure?"—"Oh yes, it's one o' them gulls." I was fixing my telescope, when the gull spread wing, and proved herself. "An osprey," shouted I;—"An aigle," cries Ross in the same breath. These ornaments of the Highland lochs are now so rare, that Ross might well be excused for his careless look. Only a stray one at distant intervals appears on this loch, and the Duke has given strict orders to spare both them and the other eagles. Pity his Grace has so few imitators!

The landlord at Altnaharra had obligingly sent over a small coble, and after trolling from three till five, we landed three feroxes, two within a few ounces of seven pounds, and one of three and a half. This we reckoned good, considering that the lochs were at their lowest, and consequently very difficult to troll. There is only one state I consider worse—

viz., when very large. You may then succeed with fly-trout and very small feroxes, but the only ones worth hooking very seldom run till the loch clears and falls in a little. Then is the time to begin trolling with every chance of good success.

Ross's son attended us next day, when we slew a fourteen-pounder, and another of eight pounds. The last day was the only disappointing one. We had six runs, and only landed one small ferox. Two of the fastens were splendid fish ; one hooked at my companion's bait jumped clear of the water and set himself free—a ten or twelve pounder at least ; the other, which I was working from shore, we judged larger. When I had him in shallow water, his hold broke. The reason we lost so many was my having run short of three-hook tackle to fit the small bait suitable to Loch Layghal, and being forced to use two-hook tackle instead. I took care next time to be better prepared. What a lovely ferox-loch this must be when trolled about medium size, after decreasing from a heavy flood. Had we got it so, I have no doubt we could have killed three times the number in the same time.

One of the days we landed on the island; and I

shall not easily forget it. A sky of unbroken sunshine was reflected in the calm bright loch; and the bracken, the harebell, and the wild hyacinth, growing in rank luxuriance, fragrant and beautiful, made the little islet look like a sparkling gem in its setting of silver. Warned by the colony of lesser black-backed gulls, the whole fleet of geese had sailed out from the island, and were riding at anchor about a mile off. There seemed upwards of a hundred, and with the telescope I plainly saw a good many goslings. Four of these bean-geese have been reared from the egg at the inn. Every morning they strutted past with drowsy cackle, pompously guarding their solitary gosling. They cracked and chewed oat-cake or biscuit voraciously. By getting plenty of food without the trouble of seeking it, the enlarged power of digestion has so increased the size of their bodies that the wings are too weak to carry them. As Professor Lowe pithily says, they remain "captives without a chain."

Only one couple of the greater black-backed or giant gull haunted Loch Layghal. They were easily distinguished by their size and more sulky trumpet. This pair always met our boat half-way down the

loch, but the lesser ones seldom noticed us unless we approached the islet. Ross's "boy" is a fine active young fellow of two-and-twenty, with a keen eye for a deer, or any other shy creature; and I may say for his father, that it is quite refreshing to meet with a man who has taught himself so much of the practical part of natural history. His very errors are sharp ones; for instance, when we saw a common sandpiper, he told me they all passed the winter in flocks on the sea-shore. This mistake was very natural: he perceived that the summer snipes all left in winter, and also that the dunlins returned in larger trips at that season to the coast; he had therefore concluded that they were one and the same bird, and I have no doubt he does so still. We were both sorry to part with this kind old man. The last we saw of him was sitting watching our skiff from a rock until a headland suddenly intercepted the view.

CHAPTER VI.

FISHING IN THE FAR NORTH.

A RARE type of *sui generis* was our amphibious coachman, Hector Gordon, of Altnaharra. He thoroughly knew all the lochs and cross-roads for miles round, land or water being equally his element. He was at first a little shy, but when we gained his confidence, he seldom opened his mouth without saying something pungent, in a style peculiarly his own. Yet he had no idea of it himself. His face was as unmoved when we were in fits of laughter as before he had uttered a word. A more good-natured expression never set off very plain features. His dot of a nose had been so sunburnt the first day by wearing a Glengarry, that he appeared the second with a wide-awake grotesquely looped down to shade his nostrils. "The sun's got hould of your nose, and ears too, sir; mine's quite roasted; I

micht ait it whan I laike." Seeing him tie something round a cork, I asked what it was. "Trumps, sir (the Jews' harp); a pair o' them makes very pretty music when they's well played." On telling this to the landlord, he assured me they were very musical at Scourie, "whar Hector cam' frae." Our other boatman had been unwell, and Hector gave for explanation: "I was thinkin' what was the matter wi' him; he drank some ale and whisky in the morning *thegither;* one of them's best alane." Then, for fear of being unjust to the ale and whisky, he added, "And the warst o't was the cauld water on the tap o't." There was a poor maniac of Ross-shire, whom Hector affirmed fed for seven years on grass with the deer. "She was covered wi' lang hair, and could run as fast as themsels." He knew a very old woman in Tongue who remembered her, and "she was very wild when first catched."

The inns we visited on the Sutherland estates were remarkably comfortable, and the people most civil and obliging. There could not be a better-managed country inn than Altnaharra, where we stayed nearly a week; the house was so clean, the linen so white, the butter just out of the churn, the

oat-cakes just off the girdle, and it was the constant joke of my companion that, while dressing, he heard the hens cackle which layed the breakfast eggs. The charges, also, were so moderate that we both agreed they could have made small profit by us. Hector was loud in praise both of master and mistress. She was "the cleverest woman in Sutherland, and would be up and milk the kye before the lassies were oot o' their beds." The fact was, she had received a good education, and was brought up in superior circumstances. It was said she might have had her choice of the dashing young farmers around, but had the good sense to choose her present husband, who is a strong-minded man, if defective in cultivation. They fit each other well, and are a happy, contented couple. The inn was within reach of several of the lochs, and in going and returning through this mountain district, we generally sighted both deer and wild-geese at feed. On these occasions there was keen rivalry between Hector and young Ross which had the quickest eye, and, failing that, the sharpest wit.

Under Hector's pilotage we trolled Loch Naver. A five-pound trout, three two-pounders—in size,

shape, and colour exactly alike—and several near a pound, were the day's produce. The large one was ill-shaped and ugly; all the rest handsome trout. We saw nothing of the salmo-ferox in Loch Naver, but this was the only day we tried it. A solitary black-throated diver kept cruising about the wide bays, sometimes taking a long dive in the shallows between our boat and the shore. Through the deer-glass we had a good view of his finely-marked breeding plumage, and his mate, if she escaped the untimely end of cousin red-throat of Loch Slam, was no doubt hatching in some moss-hag close by. I have twice noticed an adult black-throated diver when fishing Loch-an-Dryan in Argyllshire, and the other muir-lochs near. Many years since, when partridge-shooting in December, I detected a flock of five on the Tweed, some distance above Ashiestiel. By careful stalking I got within reach, and killed one—the only instance I remember of this bird haunting a river.

Going out in haste, we asked Hector to get the landlord to direct a paper: "He can't read a word; no, nor yet write." After a pause: "Nor spall aither." And yet the schoolmaster was not far away,

for we passed a bothy on the banks of the loch, made entirely of turf, with a little window, a rustic chair of state for the master, and stones for the scholars to sit on. This extempore school-house was private property, being put up by a keeper of the tenant of the shootings, and the manager of the adjoining sheep-farm, for their respective large families. Of course the regular school-house is a very different affair. When I inquired whether this *al fresco* school was now in use: "No, sir, the school-maister's clippin'" (shearing sheep).

At four in the morning we left Altnaharra for Lairg, where we had secured places in the Post-gig for Assynt. My companion stipulated that Hector, who had been hinting for the job, should be our charioteer, and his comical sayings and vagaries shortened the way. The quiet early hour had enticed many of the wild creatures to the road-side, and our coachman let no chance slip of bringing them to our notice. A young golden plover was first pounced on ; the mother-bird shammed broken legs and wings, screaming in agony. Her quick eye at once perceived when we laid down her precious charge, and she convoyed us some way, piping her

moor-note, as if grateful for the little captive's release. A young curlew, squatted close to the turf, was next discovered. Its mother was flying at a distance, in mingled dread and hope. The moment we pulled up, the young one rose and tripped into the heather. Our driver thought we had let it off too cheap, and that the old bird had no right to complain if her nestling was treated with the same civility as the young plover. We were crossing a drain that cut under the road. At two bounds, Hector was at one end of it making signs to my companion to guard the other. I had meanwhile seen the blue hare slip out, but was too much amused by his antics to stop them. Like a Skye terrier, he was soon earthed, and by-and-by his droll round face appeared at our side of the hole. "She's been too quick for us," says he, a little chagrined. But when taking his seat and the ribands, he consoled us with the important information, that "there was a kind* o' dog could catch them noo," he believed. At Lairg, when with great assiduity he was fixing our luggage in the Post's gig, my young

* I fancy he meant the deer-hound; most likely he had never seen a greyhound.

companion asked him " where his sweetheart lived?" He doubted if she was born; " Ere she'll be ripe, I'll be rotten, I daur say." Giving utterance to this bachelor foreboding, and with a kindly smile on his quaint features, Hector Gordon doffed his Glengarry and waved a mountain farewell.

CHAPTER VII.

"TO THE WEST, TO THE WEST!"

THE drive from Lairg to Inchnadamph in Assynt was very sultry. Leaning over a rustic bridge, in the heat of the day, was a fat respectable English keeper. He had just arrived, and I thought looked despondingly at the steep frowning hills. Poor fellow! his red face and well-fed contour seemed ill-fitted to contend with more trying ground than the turnip and stubble fields, of which he was likely musing. Our driver thought the same, for, with an unmistakable sneer, he averred, "he's grand at feeding the dugs." We came through a fine sporting country, but heard only complaints of the deplorable state of young grouse from the long drought, and that the rivers had been useless for weeks.

The district of Assynt is unrivalled for loch-fishing. It is full of lakes, with variety of fishing

to tempt all tastes;—tarns teeming with yellow trout to suit *impatient* fishermen—and ladies, it would seem, for we actually saw two equipped with little shining fly-rods, ready to fill the creels, which no doubt they did. A gillaroo loch is only three miles from the inn, and in Loch Assynt larger feroxes are more frequently taken than from any other loch in the county. Although vexed to have only one day to spare for so fertile an angling-range, we determined to make the most of it, and throw no chance of a heavy fish away. We immediately set about catching baits of various sizes, and despatched a lad for John Sutherland, the Duke's watcher, asking him to accompany us next day.

There were no less than four fishing-parties at the inn, each choosing his own sport, and plenty of it to choose. All of them had tried the large loch for the big fish, but the inn people told us not one salmo-ferox had been extracted this year. A little enclosed pond was easily found, to keep the bait alive during the night, and we soon whipped out the necessary number to stock it.

We were early astir. Of course the live bait were first visited; and as some of the best had escaped,

the fly-rod was again put in commission. My comrade was about to empty our fresh supply into the enclosed pool, when, with eager gesture, he called to me that there was a black rat, with a white throat, walking at the bottom among the trout. I was soon by his side, and at the same moment the little black-and-white intruder sneaked out of his bath and took shelter in a hollow of the rock. He was easily dislodged and captured, when the prize turned out to be that rare species, the water-shrew. We were told that they are numerous in that quarter, although I never met with one in any other part of Scotland.

John Sutherland, our new fishing-guide, is a short, well-built man, able for any amount of work. The rugged, weather-beaten lines of his face, slow speech, and stern eye, are good warrant that "his heart is in the right place," or I'm much mistaken. When I had fastidiously baited my most approved trolling-tackle —for I was determined to kill a large fish—we cleared the harbour with him for "stroke," and a young lad as "bow." Of the many lochs I have fished, I never found one with so clear a channel as Assynt. Although I trolled deep—for the loch is

large, and requires it—we scarcely griped a weed, and only once or twice raked the bottom the whole time we were out. Some of the best fishing-ground was passed, however, before we had the first run, and landed a very handsome twelve-pound fish. We then trolled down to the island; only common gulls on it, and a pair of Mergansers. As the wind was favourable for the return, we came back over the same ground, which is decidedly better for heavy fish than the opposite side; killed another ferox between four and five pounds, and hooked, but lost, a third. No other offers, but we were only out from twelve till four, being obliged to be at Loch Inver in the evening.

We passed and repassed the ruin where the last Assynt osprey was massacred. It reminded me of my own juvenile deed of the same kind.* There was the excuse for me, that I was a thoughtless youth, and my poor ospreys had no eggs; whereas the

* About the end of last May, a solitary osprey appeared in Rossdhu Bay, Loch Lomond, and stayed two days. It was seen to capture a large fish, and was very tame. This is the first that has come there since I killed the pair in the small islet called "the Castle of Galbraith." They had their eyrie on the ruin, and constantly fed in Rossdhu Bay.

Assynt bird was actually hatching. Although this act is sometimes laid to the account of the late Mr St John, I am happy to vindicate him; he was sitting at breakfast in the Inchnadamph Inn when the murder was committed.

It was with great regret we took leave of Assynt and John Sutherland. All this wild tract was familiar to him as his ain kale-yard. Not a loch but he knew all its capabilities—not a rare bird or animal that his steady eye had not noted, and knew well where to find.

We hired the only craft in Loch Inver to cross the Minch to Stornoway, where the west-coast steamboat calls. A filthy little smack, and dirtier skipper, with a pair of squab cabin-boys for crew, were not inviting, but we had no choice. When they were weighing anchor and hoisting sail, we were accosted by the old fishing-guide, who had till then been unsuccessfully fishing for his "morning." A bottle of ale at once uncorked the full tide of his gasconading folly. He first boasted of a brother, a sergeant in a Highland regiment. One of the fishing gentlemen quietly asked if he had not deserted. Neil's fury knew no bounds. "He deserted his

wife, then?" suggested Mr ——, who thoroughly knew his man. "He was never merried," stuttered old hobnails, choking with passion. "Then how could he desert his wife?" was the adroit turn. Neil's muddled dilemma at this query was comical in the extreme. The stake-nets were in full view. The old fisherman, of course, was bragging of what he could do in that way. "Gie me a bag-net," quoth Neil. "I've none to give; and if I had, I would put your ugly head in it," retorts the salmon-angler, who hated the very name of the deadly tool that spoilt his sport. We left old Neil as mad as a bull in a net.

CHAPTER VIII.

"TO THE WEST, TO THE WEST!"

"WHERE'S her head?" roars the skipper from the bulk-head cabin. "She's east by waast!" shout the crew. With a few tacks we easily cleared the islands of Loch Inver, and, the breeze being light and fair, stood across for Stornoway harbour. What an enchanting sail! In full view were the rugged bluffs and headlands, with a background of heathery hills. In the distance the sun glanced on the bald tops of the rocky mountains, gradually fading out of sight until they mingled with the warm blue sky. At the end of Storehead, a high narrow stone rears itself so exactly like a lighthouse that few could discover the cheat. Often a hatch of Mother Carey's chickens were clustered on the curling water. Now and then a stray one would flit past our "bow," so like a swallow as to justify the sailors' other appel-

lation of the sea-swallow. I had never seen the Stormy Petrel in his native element, and much enjoyed a peep through my telescope at many a group of these birds of the tempest. Yet, spite of the Stormy Petrel, the ocean slept calmly that night—so calmly that I passed it pacing the deck, gazing at the radiant sunset and gorgeous rising, now so nearly blended—listening to the cries of the sea-birds, some so exquisitely plaintive, and others so wild and unearthly, as to seem voices of spirits from the depths below.

In Stornoway Bay a shoal of porpoises surrounded our smack. Under the clear water they were easily seen, darting rapidly after each other, sometimes rising within a few yards of our bow or stern. Most people only think of porpoises as ungainly tumbling monsters, and have no idea that, *under water*, they excel the salmon in elegance and agility. Porpoises have a great fancy for steamboat paddles, and their track may often be discerned, dashing in before the wheels, and as suddenly breaking away in strange vagaries. It is very interesting to watch them on a dark calm night. Every dart and curve is then detected by the line of phosphoric light; and when

they dash out before the paddle-wheels, one is instantly reminded of a comet.

In spite of the novel excitement of our night cruise, it certainly was a relief to escape from the greasy skipper and his nauseous boat. He had disgusted us by recklessly cutting through the herring-nets, treating the remonstrances of the fishermen with supreme contempt. On one poor fellow, who, in agony for his net-rope, ventured to call him "no gentleman," he fired such a volley of disgusting expletives, as seemed in his own opinion fully to vindicate his claim to the aristocratic title. I frequently checked him, but being half-seas-over, he forgot himself the next moment. We could not but wish him as prosperous and *speedy* a return voyage as two Loch-Lomond boatmen equally well primed with grog. In the dusk they hoisted sail from Inverbeg for the top of the Loch, but immediately ran aground on a sandbank. "Here she goes," says the steersman. "Spanking through it," adds his shipmate, passing the whisky-bottle. When day broke (feeling sure they must have made their port), they could only explain it by assuring each other that "the Loch had turned topsy-turvy in the nicht."

On casting anchor in Stornoway harbour, our tipsy captain volunteered to direct us to a comfortable lodging, set up by a freend o' his own, "express for the quality;" but we were too well acquainted with him to seek an introduction to his friends. After demanding an exorbitant fare, promising fairly to reach Stornoway in time for the Clansman steamer, *as he more than suspected,* she had gone the day before. The Irish cabman who answered, when a friend of mine left the amount of hire to his conscience, "I'd rather leave it to your honour's; for to tell you the truth, mine's not worth a farthin'," *had* a conscience, though a worn and battered one. This fellow evidently had none, so I saved myself the trouble of a useless appeal. We asked a fisherman in Stornoway which was the best inn. "Well, sir, the hottle's the best inn." The hottle! was easily found, where the first object that presented itself was a stag's head and antlers, such as could not easily be matched in the overcrowded forests of modern days. The landlord's grandfather had been forester to Lochiel, and this noble heirloom was preserved as a memento of his rifle.

The whole fishing-village—to borrow a phrase

from one of themselves—seemed "indulging in dirt." The herring-fishers bad enough; the women curers worse, if possible. They brought to my mind the predicament of an Edinburgh clergyman (always particularly neat and trim in his own attire), when an applicant for marriage presented himself in the most disgusting figure that ever darkened his study door. "When is it to take place?"—"Directly, sir." "You mean after you have cleaned yourself?"—(Looking down at himself with evident satisfaction): "Och, I'm weel enough." "You couldn't be married in such a dirty state."—"*Me* dirty! What if ye saw *hir!*" After breakfasting, and about to set out for a long walk, the waiteress inquired when we should like to dine? This was introductory to the announcement that there was a public table at four every day, and those who declined it would fare poorly enough afterwards. We agreed therefore, much to her satisfaction, to mess with the bagmen, farmers, and skippers.

There were only two commercial travellers the first day—quiet, civil, intelligent men. One was a teetotaller belonging to the United Presbyterians; the other, a Baptist, though not by pledge an ab-

stainer, would drink of nothing but the "crystal well." "Have you brought the water from the castle spring, Mar'on?" inquired the latter. "There's excellent beer in the house," was the pert reply. "Beer doesn't agree with me, I tell you."—"It's only sixpence a bottle," persisted Marion, with a malicious grin. "I'll tell you what, if you won't go for the water, I'll go to the Commercial directly." This threat soon exchanged the jug of yellow fluid filtered through the peat-moss for the clear water of the castle spring. The teetotaller was equally enthusiastic in favour of *his* beverage. He never forgot the lesson an old lady taught him in his youth. Going out in a hurry one evening, he told her he did not care for tea. "Young man, I never wish to hear the likes o' you say they don't care for tea. If they don't, they are pretty sure to care for something stronger."

We found the Baptist one day in close colloquy with a shabbily-dressed person, whom he seemed to treat with great respect. "That man owes our house twenty-six pounds, but a more honest creature does not exist. His brother died a few years ago, leaving six children. This poor fellow, to prevent them

from going to the workhouse, has supported them till he is nearly ruined. Although well-nigh penniless, instead of sneaking out of the way, he is one of the first to call on me, and I make it my rule to treat him with as much courtesy as if he came to give a large order."

My heart warmed to this commercial traveller, and I felt every inclination to treat him with the same respect that he felt for his poor customer.

Next day the party was augmented by a shrewd farmer. He was on his best behaviour, and amused my young companion by evidently pronouncing each word and framing every phrase to himself before daring to give them utterance. He did what we all should—thought before he spoke!——Hearing from our dinner company that there was a real live hermit in the neighbouring grounds of Sir James Matheson, we had the curiosity to visit his cell. He was a more favourable specimen than his better-known brother anchorite of the Holy Loch. At the cave among the rocks, a short distance from his house, with his sheep-dog "Lassie" at his foot, the gentle old man was seated. His white beard and contented expression harmonised exactly with

the stillness around. His only trouble appeared to be the mustache, which annoyed him when "supping his kale." Looking earnestly at mine, he inquired if his would grow out the same way when they were "lang." Upon my saying there was a kind of pomatum would set them right, he was eager to find out whether the doctors sold it. We had a sight of his little library of Gaelic books, and a draught out of his spring well. On returning to the town, Sir James's ferryman civilly offered to row us across the river, and when we told him the hermit's trouble—"He gets three shillings a-week* for that beard o' his; he may weel buy the sauve for his mistachies." That hermit is an excellent idea; he is such a perfect finish to the rocky scene, and a peep at his quiet life might calm for a moment the most turbulent votary of this noisy world.

On Sunday morning, at breakfast, there was a tap at the door, with a request that the Baptist would act as a precentor at the Free Kirk. He at once agreed, saying, that as there were none of his own "persuasion" here, there could be no objection

* We were informed this was the bribe for dispensing with the razor.

to his giving the Frees a helping hand, for he would be sorry to "put them aboot." From a conversation I had with him soon after, I was not surprised to find that religion was the basis of this worthy traveller's kindly feelings for his fellow-man.

As the minister of the Church of Scotland was absent for some missionary object, we accompanied the Baptist to the Free Church, and can testify that his vocal performance was excellent, except when the high notes got above him. In the evening we again went to the same church. Both sermons—from a celebrated Lowland minister—were impassioned and arresting, but wanted point and application; and I should much fear that such a man would soon preach any Highland audience into Antinomianism. The pro-precentor complained to us that he had spoiled his Sunday's black coat, by the showers of foam he profusely scattered over him in his paroxysms of —— animation.

CHAPTER IX.

"TO THE WEST, TO THE WEST!"

OUR precenting friend gave us a graphic description of the Glasgow bread-riots. His warehouses had the windows smashed; but he and the foreman guarded the doors, each armed with a lynch-pin, determined to defend their property to the last. The shop-lad, who closed the shutters, was seized with such terror that he hid himself among the stuff. The mettle of this ferocious rabble was most unexpectedly put to the proof. About twenty old pensioners were returning from drill on the Green, and most unwillingly encountered this mob of four thousand desperadoes. Of course the old men were assailed with stones and hooting. One of them, in his panic, gave the word "Fire!" The old bucks, remembering the Peninsula, mechanically brought their firelocks to the level, and let drive into the

middle of them. Three fell: one, with a loud cry, bounded into the air, and reached the earth a corpse. This was enough for the craven ruffians. The whole mass broke, scattered, and fled. Well did Napoleon know the character of these mobs, when he treated them with grape-shot in place of blank-cartridge. In such cases, severity at first is mercy in the end.—— I was gratified to hear this man, dissenter though he was, speak in the highest terms of the leading Established clergy both of Glasgow and Edinburgh. When we left by the steamboat, he and his friend expressed their cordial good wishes, and received our own.

The wind had freshened when we steered out of Stornoway Bay; the "Clansman" rolled heavily from a light cargo, and many of our fellow-voyagers were prostrate on the deck. With a very few exceptions, including ourselves, nothing but ludicrous anguish, above and below. After a few hours of this rough sailing, we got into smooth water by hugging the land, and soon after cast anchor in the *natural* harbour of Portree. An evening ramble in Skye completed the day, when we returned to our berths on board the vessel. At four next morning they hove

anchor; and the gale having completely lulled, we ploughed through a quiet sea. The islands of Rum, Muick, Eigg, and all the rest of them, were sighted and passed with careless apathy. We had a most commonplace company of cabin passengers, who, as usual, paced the deck or dozed on it, except when eating or drinking. At breakfast, two tall cadaverous scarecrows, who looked like pickled misery, with their thin mud-coloured mustaches, laid in such stores of fish, ham and eggs, cold fowl and tongue, with the usual adjuncts of tea and coffee, that we fancied they were disciples of Dr Fordyce and the lion, by feeding only once a-day. No such thing, as the four o'clock dinner-bell called them to partake as vigorously as ever; and, setting their bilious complexions at defiance, they ate and drank—verily, as *for their life.*

We found ample amusement in examining, through the telescope, numerous groups of sea-rock birds. From a hasty glance, I was proud of discovering what I felt pretty sure was a small flock of Brunnich's Guillemots. In the Sound of Mull we shipped the "Abbot of Iona." He informed us that his predecessor, St Columba, had first settled at Salen, in

Mull, but being dissatisfied with the water, removed to Iona. "The Abbot," so called by his co-presbyters, mentioned a little island on his territory of Icolmkill, which only keeps three sheep. Take off one, and the grass grows rank enough to entice the wild geese, who soon starve the pair of sheep. Put on four, and the islet can't support so many. The three sheep crop the grass just bare enough to keep off the geese, and not too bare to starve themselves. The island minister also described a large whale seen about ten days before. It made its way from Craignure to the lighthouse. Some time before, a fleet of three appeared at the head of the Sound; the largest, he thought, would measure thirty yards. The bull-whales are often dangerous, by following boats and upsetting them. In dark weather, especially about dusk, they might rise under a boat without seeing it; of course, a capsize must take place. "The Abbot" has seen them jump like a salmon, fifteen yards clear of the sea, and come down with such a splash that the motion would swamp a boat. He added gravely, "I would not like to be near them in a craft of forty tons."

At Tobermory a most pompous piper boarded the

"Clansman," but some queer groans and quavers made it somewhat suspicious that the pipes were "in the wind's eye." However, a rival started up from Oban, in the shape of a pale blind lad and his fiddle. I dare say his pale face and sightless orbs assisted, but he soon silenced the blustering piper. Duncan tied up his chanter, and, creeping to the top of the paddle-box, looked down in haughty disdain on the degenerate audience. The blind lad, happily ignorant of the savage eye glaring down on his performance, waxed his fiddlestick, scraped away at his masterpieces, and pocketed his pence in quiet content. Next morning, when we stepped ashore at Greenock, we found that *for once* the homely fiddle had fairly routed the great war bagpipe, the latter having taken advantage of the night to cover a retreat.

CHAPTER X.

TROLLING AND TROUTING RULES.

THE following directions on Trolling and Trout-fishing were all, like the previous ones on Salmon-angling, taken down when first observed, and afterwards subjected to the test of further experience.

The large salmo-feroxes never run freely when a loch is full or discoloured, although the smaller ones may. Fly-trout also often rise well in a flooded loch, if the sky is good and the wind fair. Small feroxes of five or six pounds frequently take the fly at such times. I never knew but one large ferox take the fly at all, and that was in the estuary of a river; it weighed seventeen pounds. August and the latter half of July, especially if very hot, I reckon the worst time for loch-fishing. East wind is always bad, even should the sun be powerful. When you are trolling with a northwind, or a still more unfortunate east-

erly breeze, pay most attention to those parts where hills and gullies make the wind strike as if from south or west. For years I imagined this could make no difference. Practice at length convinced me to the contrary; for when the wind was in such unpropitious quarters, if I hooked a fine fish, it was almost always by the help of those fictitious gales. I am well aware many will doubt and laugh. I don't pretend to account *for* it, but have often found my account in attending *to* it. When the wind scours the loch in frequent guests, and as suddenly dies away into a calm, the troller has a great advantage who knows all the straths and hollows where it comes down and first strikes any good water.

In the early part of the season the points keep most fish. As the year advances, the bays are the surest find. In autumn a heavy fish is often hooked about the mouths or estuaries of rivers and burns, which, earlier in the season, would have been trolled in vain. Of course the fish is making for the running water to spawn. "The Brander" at the head of the river Awe seldom harbours a good salmo-ferox except at such times. When one of these fish strikes, hooks,

and drops off, instantly let out some line with your hand from the reel, and he will sometimes follow and fasten firmly. This I have frequently proved.

In the smaller lochs the country people will often warn you that "the big fish don't begin to take" till a certain hour, and leave off at another. Pay attention to the stated times, but never grudge to begin your trolling earlier in the morning than they advise, and prolong it as late in the evening as you please. We were assured that there was little chance of a salmo-ferox in Loch Layghal after three o'clock. Most of those we hooked took greedily at least two hours later.

In fine calm summer nights, fish feed so well as to be rather lazy next day. This applies to fly-trout in particular. A rough night, succeeded by a calmer day, has of course the contrary effect, so the trouter should take advantage of it. In still sunny weather the salmo-ferox feeds nearer the top. Troll then with a finer wheel-line (if you have it), a much lighter casting-line, no lead, and smaller swivels. Often the best fish are taken in that sort of weather. By adopting this plan the first day I was out on Loch Awe one season, I slew a fifteen-pound fish,

and another of six pounds, with only a light breath of air. As a *general* rule, however, the nearer the bottom you troll for large fish the better.

In the smaller, shallower lochs, the feroxes are often collected in shoals. Should you hook or kill one, try them again over the same place until they stop running. In minnow-trolling for yellow trout, you may often have great success by attending to this rule. But when you happen upon a shoal of sea-trout, salmon, or grilses in a loch, be especially particular to come over them again and again, whether you are fishing with the troll or the fly. In *very shallow* lochs the fly-trout are often afraid to come within reach of the shores till evening. To know this, may often fill a creel that would otherwise come back empty.

Always, if possible, dry trolling-lines, by pulling them out along the shores when you have done fishing. If dried in a room, they twist, and give far more trouble. If not pulled out to dry every time after use, they soon rot.

Neither rules nor practice will make a man an angler, unless he has a turn for it, although love of scenery or love of "Father Izaak" sometimes induces

him to try. Such enthusiasts deserve better sport than they often obtain. A drunken fishing-guide of Loch Awe was piloting one of them, when he accidentally fixed a heavy fish. "He's running away with my line, I tell you." "Give him a turn round the thowel-pin," suggests little Joe. "He pulls it out still," complains the rod-handler. "Then, give him two," says Joe, with all the authority of experience. Of course the *two* broke the fish. Another was quite content if allowed to pitch his fly among the prisoners of the draught-net, arguing that, as the fish were there, and must of course see the fly, it was *their* fault, and not *his*, if they refused it. A "wit," residing on Loch Lomond, unlike these devotees (whose pardon I beg if implying they were no wits), at once detected his lack of gift for the rod, and was candid enough to give me solid reasons why his first day's fishing was also his *last*. "In those days white trout were very plentiful in the loch, and by mere chance, the first day I ever tried, I had the misfortune to hook a large one. Having no boatman, I pulled after it right across to the opposite shore. Upon taking up my rod when the fish seemed *quieter*, it gave a tug and broke my line. I then took out my watch

to see how long this fool's chase had lasted, when the coble gave a lurch, and my valuable gold watch and bunch of seals toppled over the side, and most likely found a fob in the soft mud at the bottom of the water. Can you wonder, then, that I shirk a rod as if it were a serpent, or that I decline another introduction to a sea-trout until all the spirit has been boiled out of him?"

Sometimes, spite of all odds, the bungler gains the day. One of the most accomplished fishers I ever knew moved a salmon three times in the first pool he tried. As it showed signs of laziness, instead of "waiting on," he judged it best to give an hour's law. Looking over his shoulder when preparing for the next pool, he saw the village tailor, who had scarcely ever thrown a line in his life, with his fish firm and fast, having fixed it at the first rise. He was standing aghast and helpless before the mighty spirit he had raised, and had no power to control. My friend had the good-nature to run back and save the fish, but always described the contest between Snip and the Salmon as the most aggravating sight that had ever stirred his spleen. In the summer of 1855, a tempting trout haunted a weir upon

the river Kennet, in Berkshire. It set at nought all the best anglers of the district, until the miller, seeing it gulp down a piece of potato, took the hint, and immediately hooked it. This fish weighed ten pounds, and its Irish taste gave rise to much speculation.

PART II.

SALMON-CASTS AND STRAY SHOTS.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

THE Island of Mull offers no great temptations to the sportsmen of August. Its streams are scarcely more than brooks, only worth a salmon-angler's attention after floods, during the short period when the white water has run out, and the brown current brawls down in volume to the sea. The fish are then pressing up to the moor-lochs which feed the streams; but should the angler miss these few fortunate hours, he must content himself with any sea-trout which may linger when the water is subsiding, if not too late even for them.

On no part of the Island does grouse-shooting come up to a fair average; and although one may often get a good day at black game in the beginning of the season, they are still far less plentiful than on the mainland, and soon seek shelter in the tangled woods, where most of the shots are unsatisfactory snaps. Towards the end of autumn these woods and covers are much frequented by old blackcocks. If there are many trees of any size among them, pretty fair chances may be obtained by means of a slow, steady dog. When scared by the dog, an old black-cock is very apt to take refuge in the first tall tree, making a kind of *coo*, which may easily betray his roost. The dog, meantime, patiently watches, and so engrosses the attention of the bird as often to procure a tolerable chance. It is a good deal like stalking capercailzie; and as morning and evening are the best times, one or two of these shy birds may be bagged before beginning or after finishing a regular day's range in open ground. You require a knowing dog, such as would make capital work *against wind* by footing the birds. I have had dogs so thoroughly up to it, as to make a steady point from the foot of the birds, then circle round

for the wind, and thus place the game between themselves and me. A fair shot is the probable result of these clever tactics.

In Mull, these rugged black-game copses are chosen retreats of the deer, which scarcely ever dare show themselves on the open hills; consequently the deer-sport is confined to wood-driving. Every strip of any size has its own complement, more or less, according to circumstances. They shift from covert to covert, of course, with high winds; so that a wood which contained scarcely any, one day, may be found to harbour twenty the next, from a change of weather. The first year I shot there, an old hind and her calf *never* left my largest covert. She was not disturbed; and next year, though another calf was added, the former one remained with her also. I could have found the three quite easily any day the whole year round. I noticed a still more rare instance of family affection among my flock of sheep in Aberdeenshire. One of the ewes had a jet-black lamb, which was reared on account of its beauty. Next season this lamb had another just like itself; but the grandmother, having none, seemed fonder of the little one than even its own mother, and the

three never separated from each other, but kept apart from all the rest of the flock.

In the large and more impervious woods of Mull, the best sport is generally secured by the Prussian mode of mixing shooters and beaters. In such places deer are very shy of leaving their shelter, even should the beaters be resolute enough to do their duty. This is too much to expect in dense thickets of briers and whin. Indeed, however well you may place them on entering the wood, when they get fairly out of sight, the greater part will be following each other Indian file. To keep along with them forces the hunt into better order, and also procures more shots in these wilderness mazes than if you were attempting to guard the outside passes, and drive the unwilling deer through them to the open ground. The account given by my eldest son of his first wood-hunt is a pretty fair sample of most of these German beats. I give it in his own words : "Started at six, and drew the near woods blank. Came in to breakfast at ten for twenty minutes, then off for the distant cover lying along the south coast. This wood, fully five miles long by three broad, sloped to the sea, thus giving

a view of the whole beat. The copse was young oak, reaching to the deers' shoulders, interspersed with frequent well-grown large clumps, by means of which they might easily cover their retreat; the brush very dense and tangled. The keeper and I were a mile apart, with two stout lads at regular intervals, whom we could quite overlook. The beat was up from the sea and down again alternately. When we had nearly ended the first course, I heard the rush of deer on my left, and a fine young hart was bounding through the thicket straight from me. I fired the first shot high, but heard the rap of the second ball on his hide. This deer was afterwards secured swimming a small creek, and the ball lodged in his haunch. After finishing this course and nearly two others, I caught a glance of a deer bounding down the wood towards the shore, whereupon we altered the plan, and made straight for the south-west corner. Arranged as before to beat up from the sea. The alarm was soon sounded by the watchers that five deer were immediately ahead. Two of them turned back, but three pushed on. I got to the top of a knoll, with a fine open pass at the foot for the game to break cover. The

three deer came down at a sharp gallop, one leading a short way before the others. I fired at him, and he rolled over. The pair then broke, and I fired my second barrel at one of them, dusting out some hair from his side. He immediately lagged behind his neighbour, and was sighted by a shepherd in the open hill, who sent to warn us of a wounded deer. After reloading, I walked up to the fallen hart. Suddenly he sprung up, dived into the thicket, but twice lay down when pressed by a collie. The third time he couched, the dog was called off, and we attempted a stalk. On getting close, the shouting of the markers to point out the exact spot where he lay again roused him. He crossed before—a very long shot—and was fired at by both of us, without any visible effect. It was now nearly dark, but we continued the search some time, knowing that the deer was down close at hand. Next day and the following the search was renewed; but the jungle being so rough and dense, a *dead* deer might be within a few yards of the sharpest eye, and yet remain undiscovered until it was useless. This deer, from the suddenness of its drop, was most likely hit in the neck."

When it is considered that this was the first effort with a rifle of so young a sportsman, and that all the chances were quick running ones, few experienced deer-stalkers will deny that he had good reason to be satisfied with his debut. He had, from his earliest days, that natural bent for shooting and fishing which made it a pleasure to teach him. When a mere lad, without any other lesson than watching me a few times, he taught himself to tie salmon-flies—rough enough productions, but often more enticing than the smart models of the tackle-shops. The two first flying shots he ever fired were at snipe; and, strange to say, he killed both. My keeper, an *indifferent* good hand at the gun, was very anxious to prove the snipe "luck;" so, shortly after, challenged him to shoot a swallow. The pupil stipulated for "turn about," fired immediately, and dropped his swallow; while the instructor, after one or two nervous shaky aims, cleanly missed his!

As deer in the more open woods keep far ahead of the beaters, there is generally little difficulty in sending them through one or other of the numerous passes. The day before leaving Mull last October, although I got no chance of a shot, and was early

stopped by heavy rain, we had as pretty a wood-drive as the island could show. My muster of twelve beaters under the old weaver were in full march for Garmony Wood by nine o'clock. "Shamish Weaver" boasts that for thirty years he has never been absent from a Scalastal Hunt, and enjoys one with perhaps even more zest than the Laird himself. He is a clannish man, loves his wild island, and has a stake in it as long as there are fish in the sea, or deer on the hill. I should like to introduce him to the drunken penniless "wabster" of the borough, who, upon being told that his principles would lead to a national bankruptcy, doggedly dived his fingers to the bottom of his pewter snuff-mull, and muttered between his teeth, "I'll staund the risk." Shamish probably would be unable to comprehend what national bankruptcy meant, but rather than stand the risk of the woods and the nets, and the cobles and the deer of Mull falling into other hands, he would sink "reform," and the "rights of man," and "social equality," and his borough brother of the loom along with them, to the bottom of the Sound.——Proud as a general, he is marshalling his troops for a new point of untried strategy,

namely, to reverse the usual course, and bring up the deer from the south to the north passes. We have a finer view of the hunt by this experiment of the weaver's, but it has the disadvantage of giving the deer far greater choice of passes; a decided objection when there are few guns, as in the present case, to guard them. I chose my stance by a rock that gave a bird's-eye view of the open passages where the game were most likely to cross when pressing in advance of the beaters, whose discordant yelling was heard now loud and clear, then suddenly dying away according to the inequalities of the ground. The hunt was still far back when I spied two deer picking their steps through a vista of the wood. Sometimes they would face about to listen, and again, with a dissatisfied shake of the head, resume their shambling trot. Couched among the heather, and screened by my granite rock, I was watching their wayward path, hoping they might choose a course within range of either of the two rifles guarding the upper passes. My speculations about them were abruptly ended by a glance at the moving legs of three deer stealing quietly among the tree-stems right up to my rock. When almost within

distant range they halted, faced the steep, and the leading hart, with arched neck and ears thrown forward, stood staring at some object on the heights above. It was "Shamish Weaver," who, by a masterly manœuvre, was trying to turn them back again into my pass. What a picture was before me!—the old grey man, like a wizard of the mountain, casting a charm over the spell-bound deer. There was the majestic leading stag still as a statue, but yet so graceful and life-like, petrified at the maniac figure stamping and raging before him. At length he decided on facing the seen danger, and spite of the raving and screaming, and the very peats which the weaver, in his frenzy, hurled down, crossed leisurely within pistol-shot, and gained the wide hill.

In so clear a wood as Garmony, a rough wind or the foot-prints of a beater will make them burst out anywhere. They will track a man by the foot long after he is gone. Two stalkers, at the close of an unsuccessful day, were resting behind a knoll close by a brook. Three harts came down from the hills to drink. Immediately detecting human footsteps, the three antlered heads lowered on the

scent in a direct line from the men. One of them raised his rifle, fired at the nearest head, which was the only part of the deer he could see, and, to his utter amazement, found he had killed the three, shooting them all fair through the head!

When I doubted the strength of the ball to penetrate three hard skulls, my informant assured me there was no doubt about the matter, and that it was easily proved if I wished.

CHAPTER II.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

ROE-DEER, being loth to quit the shelter of a good-sized wood, soon become so knowing, and hardened to beaters, that, rather than face open ground, they will turn on the hue and cry, and break through the line like sheep. In roe-shooting, therefore, I always prefer a stanch fox-hound, which exposes all their covert doubles and wiles, often amusing and exciting enough to study even should no shot be obtained. Beaters also make roes frisky and uncertain in taking the passes. You never can guess exactly where they may break cover. When pursued by a hound, they are much steadier in pace, and far truer to the usual ground. I have constantly noted that the chances, if fewer in number, are *far surer* when the roe is hunted by dogs than when driven by beaters, although more skill is

required to secure them. There is often a great prejudice against the voice of a fox-hound; and I have known men unobservant enough to fancy hares and all other game flying right and left at the sound. Yet it is nevertheless true, that a really good hound will scarcely disturb any quarry but what he is first laid on. An indifferent animal, with an inferior nose, may shift from the old track to a fresher often enough, but such should never be slipped in the coverts at all. A really useful fox-hound for roe or deer should stick to its first scent for hours. By watching narrowly, you will perceive it is not disturbing other game, and that the creatures it is not pursuing will show little alarm, often allowing the hunt to pass pretty near without moving from their ground.

In my early sporting days we had two hounds, so true and painstaking that, if their game was not killed, they rarely lost the first track till the close of the short winter day. When the moon was up, they have sometimes run the scent far into the night. One of them, after sticking to its track from twelve o'clock noon, and all through the following night, drove the roe into the loch about breakfast-time next

morning. The hound boldly took the water about forty yards behind the roe.

A few years ago, another stanch hound of mine fairly ran down an old fox. At breakfast-time one winter morning, the sly one, evidently on the look-out for poultry, was winded by grim Damper, who instantly broke away from the other dogs before the kennel. The game-watcher, fancying the hunt was a roe, tried several times to take up the hound. About three o'clock he heard him puzzling over some thick gorse, and when trying to couple him, a fox hobbled out in so distressed a state that he again laid on the hound, who ran into and worried him, after another half-mile's chase. The fox—a large dog, and in excellent condition—had lost two toes from the fore-foot by a trap, otherwise a single hound could never have run him down in six hours. This hound was by no means equal to the two former ones, either in nose or powers of endurance.

In the winter of 1854 we killed twenty-four roes at Blackhall in Aberdeenshire, nineteen falling to my own gun. Of the whole nineteen, only five were killed to beaters, thirteen were hunted out by dogs, and one I killed after stalking it by its tracks in

snow. The winter before, I traced another fine buck in the snow, and shot him. But snow-stalking is tedious and uncertain at best, and there are few days in a whole winter when it can be followed with any chance of success. It is useless to try when the snow is ever so slightly crisped with frost. They are sure to *hear you* before you *see them.* After snow has lain a day or two, even should there be no frost, the roe-tracks become so numerous and confused that a man, even with the eye of an Indian, would generally find himself following a circle, or lost in a labyrinth of roe-marks. The only time, therefore, for a snow-stalk, is directly after a fall of snow. A pure white dress and cap are indispensable.

The fox is even more shy of a driving hunt than red-deer, and is apt to take the guns unawares by cantering up to the passes before he is expected. Upon the most distant sound of the hue and cry, if there is a wily one in any part of the wood, he at once begins to retreat after his own peculiarly subtle and methodical style. On the morning of one of the roe-drives above mentioned, I had directed a strong company of beaters to the far end of our largest

wood, and could barely distinguish the first faint shouts, when I noticed a fox, with measured, swaggering pace, making for my ambush. His chuckling, self-confident air spoke contempt for the noisy and distanced enemy in the rear, but he had evidently never calculated on an ambuscade so far to the front. It was a fine cross-shot, and he fell dead. The drive was nearly two miles behind, and an hour elapsed before they brought up the roes.

In a wood, equally large and tangled, I well remember shooting just such another fox before a hound, but the red knave chose opposite tactics in dealing with his more able pursuer. This hound—the best of the famous pair before referred to, at least on a fox's track—no sooner entered the thicket than she dashed away on a warm scent. Expecting the quarry, whether roe or fox, soon to break, my two companions guarded the best passes on the outskirts; but I chose a well-used run, near a burn in the centre of the wood. Twice the hound rattled the chase round the whole ring of this covert without a single check. The first time the hunt crossed a little below, and the second about an equal distance above, my hiding-place. What a glorious pipe that stanch

hound sounded when the third time the deep mellow notes warned me to expect the "cannie chance." Soon it came, and with the most perfect self-possession, neither frightened nor flurried, the fox coolly picked his steps within fair distance of the muzzle of my gun. I gave him its contents in the shoulder, and he rolled over, unable to move. In about two minutes after the shot, the hound was at my side.

CHAPTER III.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

There are no roes in Mull, which is an advantage, for when deer and roe haunt the same woods, each frequently mars the sport of the other. The red hare has been imported, and is now pretty numerous. But blue or white hares, although the hills are admirably adapted to their habits, have never been introduced. A sprinkling of ptarmigan lingers on the crests of the higher mountains, but the packs are generally few in number, and difficult to find. Wishing to ascertain their winter food, we took advantage of a mild day last January, and wended our track to their desolate retreat of rock and snow. The only game-birds that cheered the steep ascent were a couple of woodcocks, flushed at our feet, and summarily cut down. A sharp frost had shortly before so concentrated these migrants on the lower

slopes, that ten or twelve couple was only an average good day's sport. The open weather had again completely scattered them, and a few stray birds were all we might now expect.

The labour of finding ptarmigan was much increased by a light coating of snow which capped the peaks of Dundeveuch, and we were warily questing the hollow which separates the sister heights, when my old pointer Bob pulled up to a point. He immediately began to "road," and my companion, who was near him, spied the pair of birds crouched among the snow. The moment he faced them, both ptarmigan started on their pins, eyeing him curiously. He shot one, and the other flew round the peak. It was easily found again by the dog, and killed by myself. When returning, we stumbled on three more at feed on a lower spur of the mountain, but, having already secured a pair of stuffed crops, left them for stock next season.

I inspected carefully the feeding of both these birds, and found that it consisted of the tiny leaves and stalks of an evergreen plant which only grows among the rocks on the hill-tops. The previous autumn I killed another ptarmigan after feed, and

its crop also was charged with the very same food. No doubt this rock-plant is as necessary to the ptarmigan as heather to the grouse; and although both may occasionally vary their diet, yet without this staple nourishment they would never thrive, or even live.

In the autumn of 1854 I shot a very lean grouse, with a crop stuffed almost to bursting with large soft grass-seed. It had access to abundance of heath, but evidently preferred this unwonted diet. As the seeds found in the crop were all of the same kind, I fancied that instinct had warned the bird to take them medicinally. On the other hand, it was pretty plain that the grouse which failed that year, were only from those districts where they had fed upon the stubble-fields of the previous winter; they were plentiful and healthy in the wilder and more remote moors. If the bird has wit enough to prescribe for itself when sick, it seems strange that it should not have the sense to eschew a corn diet: but whether from folly or frailty we cannot say. "Prevention is better than cure;" but however apparent the axiom, it is sometimes difficult to act upon, over a full table, to more than *grouse.*

The frost and snow seldom last long in Mull, but the winter tempests of the Sound are frequent and sublime. The following sketch from the "Mountain of the Two Winds" is not in the least overdrawn. "The wind was high yesterday, and the waterfalls of Morven, ascending and spreading in blue curled vapours, looked like the smoke of glowing subterranean furnaces all along the edges of the cliff. I never saw the like in any picture. On the sea, too, the effect was very fine. There was all the clear chill of the northern climates, the colour dark blue; and as the wind caught the surface, it was, as it were, shivered, and the spray, like pounded ice, blown along with a rattling noise, and whirled into shifting, spiral, waterspout columns, to fall when the gust that supported them sunk from exhaustion. When I got to the top of the hill, there was a most terrific gale and snow-storm. The clouds rolled furiously, and one felt as in a chariot of rolling vapour. I sat for ten minutes enjoying it, when all of a sudden the mist cleared away as quickly and majestically as it came. In the thick of it I heard Tom and his dogs a thousand feet below, although I could see nothing but vapour; literally, a voice from the

clouds. My dog put up two single ptarmigan, and, soon after, a pair, all of snow-white hue with black tips, but I only fired one very long shot with No. 7. So it sent out a few feathers, and I hope did little other harm. I then walked along the top to the head of Garmony Burn, which I followed down, and killed three cocks, letting off one, at which the first barrel snapped. To-day all is sunk in gloomy stillness, the reaction of yesterday's fury."

My next climb to the cairn-peaks of Dundeveuch was in fair contrast to this stern scene of savage magnificence. On one of those inspiring summer days, when a light breeze tempers the broiling sun, staff in hand, and coupled dogs by my side, I wound a devious track, after many a halt, to the retreat of the hardy ptarmigan. Comparison rules our feelings more than we are aware, or perhaps would allow. The man brought up among hills, when threading the bleak heather, has little of that lonely depression experienced by the inhabitant of cultivated plains, or the frequenter of courtly cities. He knows many of the mountain-flock by head-mark, is well acquainted with their shepherd, and has made friends with their shy collie. The grouse

rise naturally, as if accustomed to man, and dreading his power. The moss-cheeper darts from her hiding among the heath ; nor is the social swallow a rare visitor to the trackless moors. But let even this mountain child ascend to the higher regions, where the rock supplants the heather—where the sheep seldom feed, and the grouse are never seen—where the shepherd's whistle and his collie's bark are rarely heard, and the *wild tameness* of the ptarmigan is the certain pledge that destroying man is a stranger there, and even he will know their power, and feel that "this is solitude."

I stood on the crest of Dundeveuch, my eye sated, almost wearied ; nothing but mountain and ocean, brown hill and purple sea. On every side nothing but grandeur ; too still, too great for me, in my present littleness, to enjoy. My dogs stared round languidly ; no cover for grouse, this rough pavement, and the sharp points had already frayed their feet. I set them free to examine the ground, for the only game they perhaps had never seen ; but their heart was not in their work, and they picked their steps tenderly, heedless even of the glorious sea-eagle which bounded up towards the sky, and, cleaving

the air with steady wing, settled down on the opposite cairn : she soon rose again, and returned to her first resting-place. If the desolate splendour was but heightened by the opportune and lonesome flight of the savage bird, the spell was partly broken, for, pealing up from the abyss, but modulated by distance, and echo-like, came the iron voice of the raven. Far, far down the dizzy chasm, timing their wings to their croak, the parent birds seemed scenting prey in the distance, and were guiding their three young ones to the mid-day meal.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

THE birds and beasts of prey in Mull are scarce, with the exception of Royston crows. I have seen and destroyed a few stoats, but have never yet detected a weasel, or noticed their foot-marks on the snow. When snow is on the ground, however, they live much underneath it, among the rough grass, where they find abundance of mice, &c. I once saw a weasel bore through half a foot of snow to the ground below; it soon reappeared, making a fresh hole, but, on seeing me, slunk back again. I inspected the holes it had made, and they were so small as scarcely to admit my finger. No doubt it had a plentiful table, as well as a comfortable shelter from the blast, the warm coating of snow forming a roof as serviceable to the large family of rats and mice as to their destroyer. There are

neither foxes, wildcats, martens, nor foumarts on the island—at least I have never seen nor heard of them. When ranging the hills of my own shooting-ground, I have frequently started the erne, but only once the golden eagle. A few pairs of the former breed annually among the inaccessible cliffs of the western side of the island, and there is often *an eyrie* of the golden eagle on the cliffs of Morven, but I rather think no young ones of this species are hatched in Mull. The absence of blue hares, their favourite prey, may partly account for it.

Lambs and red-deer calves are safe from eagles, unless on steep hills, where they can throw themselves into the air with their heavy burden. On flat ground, instinct warns the eagle not to attempt what she cannot accomplish. In summer, when food is plentiful, eagles eat a little every day, without filling the crop. It is only in winter that they gorge themselves on dead carcasses. The sea-eagle especially is often put to great straits at that season, and will wander far to escape starvation. I examined one shot by a farmer in March 1857 at Hambledon, three miles below Henley-on-Thames. The bird, although large, seemed to be in its second

year, as the tail was mottled brown. Most likely it was weak from hunger, for the farmer, at first mistaking it for a boy! walked leisurely to the root of the tree, and knocked it down with small shot. From its brown tail, the Sassenachs thought it a fine golden eagle.

On the 14th of last February, two sea-eagles and their young one of the year kept coursing round my shooting-quarters in Mull for the greater part of the day. They chased and dived after each other in high glee. It being Sunday, they seemed aware of the day of safety, otherwise it is not unlikely that one of the white tails might have been added to our list of specimens for 1858.

A couple of hen-harriers always hatch on one of my lower moors, and both of them frequently give the stubble-fields a range in autumn. Sparrow-hawks and kestrils are common all over the island. One of the former had the coolness to strike down a thrush before our door, and was itself struck down by my son's gun, when carrying off the musical *morceau.* The peregrine, though numerous among the wilds of Morven, seldom crosses over to Mull. When swimming in the Sound early one

morning, I heard great commotion among the sea-birds. No wonder, for there was the peregrine with one of them in its talons, within a few yards of my head, which it most likely mistook for a seal! It flew with all speed to the mainland, and had evidently made a raid on Mull, returning home with the plunder like a true freebooter. A short time after, a peregrine, probably the same, dashed at a sly old mallard scared out of a ditch by my scringe-netters. With a loud screech the mallard dropt like a stone among the fishermen, when the falcon, foiled in the stoop, sheered off across the sea to Morven. The common buzzard I have sometimes seen in the more remote districts, and the great corby seems to thrive among the extensive sheep-walks of all the wilder hills.

The Royston or grey crow is, however, by far the most formidable foe to game, for one of these birds will destroy as many grouse in the egg as twenty golden eagles will after they are full-fledged. The other rapacious birds are thinly scattered over the island, but vast numbers of these crows occupy the woods and hills in spring and summer, crowding the shores during autumn and winter in large flocks.

They are nearly as destructive as the raven to young lambs, and their instinct at once detects the sickly sheep, whose eyes they scoop out in a moment with their wedge-bill. Of course the shepherds are mortal enemies to "the hoodachs," as they call them, and ably second our efforts for their destruction. The only effectual way to deal with such numbers is by poison. To prevent mischief, I gave orders that the poisoned baits should be laid chiefly on the islet-rocks along the coast, and, unless absolutely necessary, to place none on the mainland. As a general rule, the banks of either fresh or salt water are good places to plant traps. Winged vermin especially much frequent the shores for any deposits of carrion washed up by the waters. In rugged districts of sea-coast, where wildcats are not extinct, they prowl the shores nightly in search of dead fish cast up by the waves, and are easily trapped by a piece of stale fish, which they prefer to fresh. The shore supply, especially in winter, is considerable, which no doubt is one reason why the grey crows congregate there so much, neglecting their upland feeding-grounds. I have often tried to find out why so many dog-fish are left by the tide every autumn

and winter in a dead or dying state, but, like the dead shrew-mice which strew the paths at harvest time, it yet remains a mystery. Those ugly flat fish called by the villagers "clocking hens," sometimes grow to an immense size, and when turned on their back, the enormous circular mouth, armed with formidable tiers of teeth, looks not unlike a vermin trap—a very efficient one, too, to its owner! When grounded alive, the dog-fish loses strength gradually, until at last the only sign of life is a languid flap of the flippers at long intervals. It is very destructive to other fish, and so ravenous that a full-grown cormorant was taken out of the stomach of one entangled in the stake-nets of Tongue. The term cormorant is most appropriately applied to the greedy; for not only does that bird consume its own weight of fish per diem, but the large mouthful it can bolt seems like a feat of magic. In this case the biter was bit, and the stake-netters were in excellent humour with the sea-monster for having played so good a practical joke. Another curious instance of a fish having swallowed a large bird was told me by Sanderson the bird-stuffer, Edinburgh. He says that the only Sclavo-

nian grebe received by him, except the one I sent last winter, was taken out of the stomach of a cod !

Fish are certainly more voracious than either birds or animals, and are also more apt to prey upon their own species. I had ocular proof last summer that the fresh-water eel is as great a cannibal as the pike. One of my children set a line, baited with an earthworm, in the burn that runs past Scalastal, in Mull. A small eel took the bait, and was itself swallowed by a big one. Although untouched by the hook, the large eel was pulled ashore before disgorging its tiny neighbour. It was nearly as thick as a man's wrist, and weighed five pounds.

I have said before that the grey crows are keenly alive to any allurements left in their way. They ate greedily the poisoned baits spread for them in autumn and winter—some dying almost instantaneously, others flying to a distance before they dropped in the air. Two giant gulls were also victims : one lay dead beside its banquet, the other was found on the coast. None of the lesser gulls were tempted by the baits. Flushed with success, my keeper ventured to poison the carcass of a sheep found dead on a remote corner of the hill. An old

Scotch terrier, his constant companion, appeared to take no heed at the time, but, like other "cannie Scots," determined to turn his secret to further advantage. That evening a first-rate setter was missing. He had been noticed only a short time before, but then where was old Bah? On the instant the man was off to the carcass, but he had scarcely left the door, when Bah trotted soberly up, reeled dizzily round, and fell dead. His neighbour was stretched lifeless beside the bait. It seemed pretty clear that the setter, being the larger and stronger dog, after being hospitably guided to the repast by the terrier, had refused him a share until he was satisfied himself. Little Bah had thus only snatched a stray scrap, and on seeing his greedy comrade drop dead, was frightened off, having only eaten enough to prove fatal to him in the end.

For a short time at low water, one of the most appropriate islets for poisoning was accessible from the shore. After the above lesson, my watcher was deliberating whether or not to risk the bait. The shepherd settled the point by "the dog that crosses this wad be cheap o't." His own much-prized collie was "cheap o't" that very night. He felt he had

bespoken the death of his faithful servant, and no doubt traced his misfortune to the ill-luck of some evil omen. Had it been spring, the jovial gowk was likely to have had a finger in the pie. So convinced are the Highlanders of the baleful influence of the cuckoo's voice, if heard for the first time fasting, that one of my servants, when told that the cuckoo was calling, clapped his hands to his ears, ran into the house for a mouthful of bread, and, thus fortified, came out again to listen to the newly-arrived harbinger of spring, bold as brass. Hasty words, as the poor island-shepherd bitterly proved, like random arrows, often hit a mark they never were shot at; but even solemn slow ones, when shot at a venture, sometimes find the "joints of the harness." Last summer, a messenger having requested a London clergyman to announce "if Dr —— was among his audience he was urgently wanted," the clergyman added from sympathy, "And may God have mercy on the poor patient!" The doctor, in a rage, demanded and received a humble apology.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

THE tragical end of two sporting dogs was of small moment to our primitive neighbours of the Sound, but the poisoning of a collie *was* an event. My watcher was thought a second Palmer, some even going so far as to hint he would poison sheep next. To quiet their fears, I suggested raised platforms for the baits. But the hoary rogues were too knowing to mount this gallows; so there was nothing to be done but watch the poison. This plan succeeded; for, by removing the dead and dying, the fugitives quickly returned; otherwise, a dead crow was an effectual scarecrow. By the beginning of spring no less than forty were picked up, and probably as many more escaped to die. When I came to Mull in summer, although some strange ones arrived in autumn, I only noted one grey crow. As this wily bird had

refused poisoned eggs and every temptation we could devise, I suppose he lived chiefly on shell-fish and shore-refuse. He never quitted the coast, rising at long distance when disturbed, with a sarcastic "caw." I often hoped his toes might offend an oyster, and provoke the retaliation a moor-hen once received from a fresh-water mussel, for a like affront. The poor bird was picked up, struggling in a drain, and the mussel had nearly severed some of the toes by the firmness of its bite. This fact was told me by a well-known and highly-esteemed physician in Berkshire, who stopped his carriage to rescue the captive. These enormous mussels will travel forty or fifty yards up or down a river, leaving a groove on the sand like the tiny wheels of a cart.

Carrion and grey crows not only search out and devour vast numbers of eggs, but are able to destroy young birds of considerable size. Even jackdaws sometimes feed their nestlings with very young game, but only in parched summers, when the supply of slugs and worms fails. One very dry season, I remember two nides of pheasants nearly all devoured by a pair of daws. The pheasants, when hatched, were placed, with their bantam foster-

mothers, in coops under some large trees, in the hollow trunks of which the daws were also rearing their brood. Every day the keeper missed one or two young pheasants. Completely puzzled, he determined not to quit them till he had detected the thief. At last down hops the daw, peering about, until a young pheasant strayed a little farther than the others. It was instantly picked up like a grub, placed in a fork of the tree—a tap on the head, and then the young jacks breakfasted on pheasant. The keeper shot the old daws, and the remaining young pheasants were unmolested. All game above a week old are, however, safe from jackdaws, and they never attack birds when they can procure their more natural food. The same keeper told me that the most tempting bait for jackdaws, magpies, or jays, is a nest of small birds' eggs set in a trap; and another fruit of his experience was, that an unfailing lure for foxes was fried pig's liver and fat. Four or five traps are set, in a circular form, around the principal bait, and for half a mile on either side, a line of little bits, about a yard apart. As these English foxes seem to share so entirely the taste of their

countrymen, I suppose our own would be more attracted by baits of tobacco, oat-porridge, and whisky!

Huge Norway rats are very abundant in the stubble-fields that skirt the Sound of Mull. They leave their snug places of abode as soon as the corn ripens, and never quit the fields till driven away by the cold. Were they as thickly scattered over the ground in spring, they would no doubt do great injury to the young game; but at that time they live much more in colonies, and hide themselves in barns and outbuildings, where they rear their young. When shooting partridges on the banks of a stream, one of our dogs made a steady point into the pool. He had winded a Norway rat, which jumped into the water and dived. I saw the creature struggling to keep under, a few inches below the surface, until, disabled by a shot, it crept under the bank, where I picked it up dying. From first to last, this land-rat had been fully half a minute under water, and never put up its head for breath, except when striking ground to creep ashore.

The adder is also common in Mull, and of course destroys *very young* game; but as it preys

on vermin too, perhaps the good it does counterbalances the evil. A few years ago, a full-grown field-mouse was found in the stomach of an adder killed near me in Kincardineshire; while another had managed to catch and swallow a young bird. They must have the same power of extending the jaws as the boa-constrictors have; and it would be quite as wonderful, though less astounding, to see an adder seize and bolt a large field-mouse, as to witness the gigantic boa's performance with an antelope.

If proper remedies be used at once, the bite of an adder, however severe, is not generally fatal. Last July the child of a shepherd in Mull was bitten by one basking in the sun on the cottage doorstep. No doubt the creature struck in self-defence at the little hand attempting to catch it; for when the distracted mother flew to her child, the adder was luxuriously coiled up, enjoying the sunshine, and never tried to escape till she threw a stone, when it wriggled under the flags. In her terror, the poor woman magnified the adder into a horrible monster, covered with bright-coloured hair. The shepherd instantly killed a fowl, splitting open the body, and applying the

warm halves to the wound. The poison was thus sucked out, and, on the application of sweet oil well rubbed in, the black and swollen arm began to look more natural, and the pain subsided. In a few days it was quite well.

Unless forced to defend themselves, adders are quite as timid as mice or rats. If seized adroitly by the tail, and lifted off the ground, they have no power to turn on the hand that holds them. When they attempt to screw up the head, a gentle shake sets them straight again. I brought home three very fine ones for preservation in this way; and when I laid them down on the lawn, they were so cowed that, far from showing signs of fight, they had just spirit enough to attempt escape. The most defiant hisser I detected in early summer; the other two, taken in autumn, seemed a male and female. One of them had devoured a frog, mouse, or bird, and was corked up in whisky with the signs of its gluttony very apparent. The pair were discovered under the same fir-tree among the heather. Two days after securing the first, the same person warned me of its neighbour.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

THE autumn of 1857 brought a fair crop of grouse, black game, and partridges. The massacre of the hoodycrows was one reason for the increase, although the fine spring must have assisted. A good head of game, however, can never be raised in Mull, owing to the wetness of the climate and other causes; and the attraction of shooting there consists not in the abundance, but the diversity of sport. On my shooting-ground the varieties of game are so completely separated from each other, that, on our first grouse-day, my son and I shot twelve brace, and not one point at black game till we had left the moor: the dogs then found a small pack, and we killed three. On our first day after black game, we bagged ten brace and a half, and never even saw a grouse. The bag counted eight brace and a half the first

partridge-day. We could have increased it greatly, but declined some large, easily-protected coveys. There were no chances that day at other winged game, except a sprinkling of pheasants, also reprieved. The grouse and black game had ten days' law, and the partridges upwards of a month. Fine, strong-flying game rewarded our forbearance.

The ptarmigan, living under the sway of the eagle and the raven, and far above the jurisdiction of the grey crows, had not of course benefited by the war of extermination on the latter. One small pack of six alone preserved their name on the hills.

We hear many complaints from those who rent shootings about the scarcity of grouse. Plenty of absurd reasons are given for the decrease, and with some plausibility much blame is laid on the greed of stock-farmers. Having farmed the chief hill of my Mull shootings for the benefit of the game, I have some right to speak from experience. My conviction is, that though needy, ignorant creatures, *near the end of their lease,* may sometimes overstock their ground, no enterprising farmers would do so. They are well aware that fewer good stock pay better than a greater number of bad, besides having

the ground in finer order for next year. All animals, and fish too, either die or grow weedy when overstocked. Many of our modern deer-forests are ruined by overstocking, but sportsmen often care more for the number of shots than the quality of the deer. This won't suit the farmer's book on market-day, quality always paying better than quantity on the average.

When I rented the grouse-shooting of Kilmun Hills, it was a curious but well-established fact, that if ten sheep more than the ground could keep were put on, the supernumerary ten were sure to die. The general rule, however, is, that they grow weak and deteriorate year by year, until the farmer alters his system. Any really able hill-farmer would rather understock than overstock his hills. This has always been my own plan, and I find my account in it.

In former years, when there were more black cattle and fewer sheep, no doubt grouse were far less disturbed and injured by stock; but so long as these nurseries for grouse, the deer-forests, continue in such vogue, the superseding of black cattle by sheep is in part atoned for. Had the grouse-grumblers complained that Highland farmers now

keep more sheep, and fewer black cattle, than they formerly did, there would have been truth in the grievance.

If it is maintained that the increasing flocks of sheep, like locusts, consume the food formerly allowed to the grouse, and thereby starve them out, I must own I can hardly reconcile this view of the matter with the facts I am about to state: 1st, No one will deny that the heather on the west Highland coast of Scotland is quite as good and luxuriant as that of the north or centre. 2d, The average sheep-stock of the three districts is pretty much upon a par; that is to say, the complement of sheep upon every hill is what that hill will support without detriment to the stock. Now, every grouse sportsman knows that the grouse in the north or centre Highlands of Scotland are immensely more numerous than in the watery west. To put it in another form—a crack shot in the north, or in Perthshire, will sometimes bag from 150 to 200 brace. On our best-protected and best-managed moors in the west Highlands, an equally good shot will seldom score as high as fifty brace under every advantage. Now, may I ask what is the reason

that the birds are so much more numerous in one part of the kingdom than in the other? It is not the want of food in the west Highlands; there is abundance of heath to raise and support three times the head of game, if the climate would only allow it. Protect as strictly as possible, and kill every rapacious bird and beast on the ground, there never could be half as many grouse reared in the west as in the north or centre Highlands; and the reason is, the humid climate prevents it.

When I rented Sonachan moors (about 8000 acres of as beautiful heather as ever man stepped upon), I engaged a game-protector, who for many years had served two as experienced and persevering grouse-shooters as any in the north. This man came to me shortly before the 12th of August. He was amazingly charmed with the look of his new hills, and could not be persuaded that there were comparatively few birds on them. After the first day's shooting, his disgust was extreme. Standing on a commanding "knowe" at the close of our weary day, and sweeping his brawny arm in the direction of our well-travelled beat, "Weel, sir, if ye had sic fine feeding and breeding ground in the

north, ony gentleman that could shoot and walk as ye've done the day, wad kill his 150 brace, and no mistake."

Had the decrease of grouse commenced in the north and centre Highlands, and gradually found its way to the west, there might have been some show of reason for this theory—namely, that the sheep have eaten out the grouse. Unfortunately for the theorists, the grouse scarcity was simultaneous all over the kingdom.

Perhaps I may be fired at with my own weapons —viz. that as there is less heather-burning in the west, from the wet springs, than in the other districts, and, consequently, less young tender heath for food, there must be less sustenance for either sheep or grouse. I rather think, however, that I am safe from any twitting on that subject ! ! !

Excessive heather-burning is another cause, as I think, fallaciously given, for the falling-off of grouse. Lessees of shootings are loud in their complaints of this necessary evil—and with reason. Many of them paying high rents, and for short leases, their sport, during the whole term of their occupancy, may be quite ruined by reckless burning. Having rented

shootings for twenty-three years in all parts of Scotland, and been a frequent sufferer, I have no bias in favour of the heather-burners. Any good sportsman, however, ought to be aware that, if a moor was left to its natural unburnt luxuriance, the birds would be very apt to leave it for ground that had been burned. I once took a very good moor in Perthshire for five years. On my first arrival, one of the sheep-farmers had just consumed a long stretch of fine blooming heather. I forgave him, on promise of never burning again, except under my keeper's directions. For three seasons there were few birds on that part of my beat, but afterwards they gradually returned, and on the last "twelfth" of my lease I killed considerably more than the half of my day's bag on and about that very burnt spot. Grouse will never eat old heather if they can get young, rank heather being used by them chiefly for shelter. If heather-burning is advantageous to sheep, it is equally so to grouse. Heather should always be burned in small patches, under the eye of a person thoroughly acquainted with the habits of grouse. A moor treated in this judicious way will lose far fewer birds after a *dry* spring-burning; and when the heath sprouts

again, they will be much more regularly distributed over the hills.

As to the grouse disease,* when they are got up to the extent they were a few years since, an epidemic will be likely enough to thin them down, and may linger for years after. This, in a small way, often happens to hares, when they increase beyond a certain limit.

The worst enemy grouse have to contend with next to the disease, is the reclamation of waste lands. Black game, however, have multiplied from this very cause, and only displaced the former tenants. Capercailzie also are now spreading far and wide in spite of little encouragement. Last season, two Perthshire proprietors told me they had killed nine and five on their respective estates. The inroads of the cock of the wood are often not very welcome, as they drive off all other winged game.

By the advice of my very intelligent manager, I dip my sheep in the much-abused arsenical preparations, instead of smearing them, and drive

* All accomplished naturalists that I have talked to agree that tapeworm is the cause of the grouse disease. Not being an anatomist, I of course don't presume to give an opinion on the subject.

them at once to the hill. The stock thrive well upon it, fewer having died of braxy, and not one diseased grouse has been seen by my shepherds, in consequence.

If gentlemen will only shoot fairly, no danger of the grouse, as the cessation of the disease and a few good seasons will, I think, soon testify.

The ingenious devices of grouse-destroyers for the market are now met by equally able tactics on the part of modern moor-watchers. It is surprising how easily the least signs of netting, snaring, pinioning the poults, &c. &c., are detected by an energetic, conscientious head keeper and his subs. One sympathises with the wonder of the French sportsman, when he demanded of the burly game-protector, "How it was possible to pickle these mountains?" "We pickle naething but sawmon here," was the grinning reply. "I know better; you peekle your deer and your grouse as strongly as your salmon." Each walked off in dudgeon, thinking the other was laughing at him. A still more unlucky confounding of pickles and preserves was made by one of the foreign deputation to the Seceding Assembly, who prayed that "Dr Chalmers might long be pickled for

the Free Church." A keen opponent of that great man's ecclesiastical polity, who had often found his powerful appeals not very easy to stomach, musingly muttered, "Hech me! but a piece pickled Chammers wad be ill to disgeest."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

THE winter-shootings of "the Sound" amply compensate for the dearth of summer and autumn sport. The late Sir Fowell Buxton writes to a friend his "serious opinion that good woodcock-shooting was a preferable thing to glory." Few senators would sink self so low as to rank the flight of the woodcock higher than flights of oratory, and fewer still would even have the honesty to record it if they did. But in singling out the pursuit of this bird, the great anti-slavery advocate showed how much more exciting it was to him than any other shooting. With the exception of wildfowl, I quite agree with him, and these two sports are certainly the strength of the Sound of Mull.

The first hard frost generally brings the best flight of woodcocks. The succeeding frosts, even though

more severe, seldom produce so many birds. Wild-fowl, on the contrary, crowd the shores in exact proportion to the severity of the weather; and should the frost be more than usually intense, and the storm protracted, rare and curious specimens constantly turn up.

In variety both of shore-birds and waterfowl some coasts may equal, few excel, the Sound; and although, from the mask of sea-weed and shifting tides, the shots are more random and precarious than on fresh-water lochs, yet the sea-coast is always preferable to the wildfowl-shooter, as yielding more choice specimens, and far greater numbers of birds. For this reason, a hardy and intelligent sportsman-naturalist will uphold salt-water shooting as the most delightful, I may say instructive, of any.

From the dearth of shore insects, waders are rare in all fresh-water lochs; whereas, on one wild bit of coast flanking my Mull shooting, I have counted, even in autumn, red and green shanks, turn-stones, knots, dunlins, sanderlings, curlews, oyster-catchers, herons, and the common sandpiper.

Although in open weather the fishing-diver fares much better inland than the wader, still the supply

of small fish is vastly inferior to the sea. The majority of these divers, therefore, keep to the market where the supply is best, and only some stray ones of certain species find their way to fresh water. The more common edible ducks are as fond of the green food of fresh lochs as they are of salt-water feeding, and some species of diving dabblers even prefer it. These last, being seldom out of condition, and excellent food, are much sought after by all wildfowl sportsmen.

The staple supply of the inland lochs—such as dun-birds, tufted ducks, golden-eyes, teal, widgeon, and the common wild-duck—is to be found in still greater abundance on the salt-water. Perhaps the most lacuscular is the tuft. Although hard weather regularly sends a good many female scaups to Lochs Lomond and Vennachar, the males seldom accompany them.* This is curious, female scaups being so tame in fresh water as to be more easily stalked

* I never knew a male scaup killed on either loch except one, and that was a bird of the year, in immature plumage. The old males, however, sometimes frequent fresh water *close to the sea.* I shot for my collection an old drake, in the finest plumage, on Duddingston Loch, near Edinburgh.

than most wildfowl. Why, then, are their mates so shy of trusting themselves away from the sea?

The purely oceanic ducks, although flat-billed, are never good for the table, but most of them are beautiful creatures to stuff for a museum. As they can't rise *except against the wind,* when shooting them under canvass you must always beat to windward; they are thus forced to cross the bow or stern of your craft, and give a *side* shot. So intercepted, they are less willing to take wing out of reach.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

A CRAWL after huge seals, dozing and basking along the rocks, may be put at the head of the wild sea-sport of Mull. Only a few stragglers drop into the Sound now and then, when sea-trout are rife, and at low water they always take advantage of a quiet neuk to dry themselves in the sun. With the exception of one headland, their resting-places near me are safe even from ball. A very inexperienced shot had the hap to detect the only one that risked a siesta there last autumn. This young sportsman was looking after seafowl, and instead of returning for a rifle, fired his duck charge, which of course had no other effect than to warn off the seal for the rest of the season. The creature, only about fifty yards distant, appeared to him as large as a Lewis heifer while tumbling and rolling on the gravel. Had he kept

his presence of mind, there was plenty of time to run to the house and let me know before the seal would have moved.

The great depot of the Mull focæ is Loch-na-kael, on the opposite side of the island. This loch, besides being well protected by hills, and exposing, at low water, a fine reef of rocks for resting seals, is full of salmon and white trout for their subsistence. The consequence is, that as the tide recedes, and leaves bare rock after rock, the seals take possession of their favourite seats, until at low ebb, on a sultry July day, there are dozens squatted on every rock-islet of the group. The returning tide gradually dislodges them, to scatter over the waters in search of prey. In every direction, but especially at the foot of the Knock River, black heads keep popping up, sometimes chasing each other, or moaning in wild cadence with the waves.

Loch-na-kael was just near enough my island home to entice one over the hills with a rifle, but yet far enough to allow the slightest let or hindrance to put it off from day to day. July was wet and cold. The good days of August and September were bespoke for grouse, black game, or deer. It was the

middle of October, when most of the garrison had absconded, that I invaded the citadel. It was low water, and the calm sunny autumn day was perfect, still hot enough to tempt a fat seal to a noontide nap. We had rowed within half a mile of the rocks, and begun to fear a blank day, when the grey bodies and black heads of two seals were clearly made out among the thick sea-ware. I was perusing them through my telescope, when a third waddled out of the sea, fixing itself between the others. They were all of average size, but the worst would have been a prize worth coming for. We lay on our oars for some time, to make sure that no more seals meant to land this tide, and then pulled away from the rocks, until they intercepted our boat; next a noiseless slow stroke, till a landing was with some trouble effected. The stalk was very easy. I took off my shoes, to prevent the possibility of their hearing my approach, and was soon planted behind a slight ridge of the rock only forty yards from my game. Here the difficulty began; there was not a solitary tuft of sea-weed along the whole ridge of my concealment, and it was impossible to shoot from the side of the barrier, for it sloped to the sea. There

was nothing for it but to infringe one of my own fundamental rules, and fire over the top. This scarcely ever succeeds for a *sitting* shot; and although I raised my bare head by hairbreadths, the three pair of eyes were too many. A rattle among the weeds, three heavy plunges, and three widening circles on the glassy deep. In place of keeping snug, where I might still have obtained a very fair shot in the water, I floundered to the nearest point of rock, expecting the heads to bob up at long distance. To my dismay they rose within twenty yards of my feet, and instantly plunged down in greater fright than ever. I now felt my blunder. The seals came up in such a hurry to make sure of their crouching foe, and had I clapped the rifle to my shoulder when first they went down, and never moved from my concealment—above all, made no rapid movement when they rose, they would have cruised about, examining the head-and-shoulder apparition, thus giving time to fire as slow a shot *from the rest* as I chose to take.

A safe plan for a quiet shot at seals is to wait for them. The shooter ought to take possession of his shelter, as soon as the receding waters will permit.

By placing some sea-ware along the top of this ambush, he can easily conceal his head, and disguise the rifle when rising to fire. To those coming from a distance, such tedious proceedings will, no doubt, be often impracticable.

The instinct of these amphibious creatures seldom allows them to be surprised far from the sea. On rocky coasts, where the water deepens suddenly, only a few land-shuffles are required to enable them to take the plunge. Flat sandy beaches, where the tide ebbs rapidly, may sometimes deceive them ; but even there the look-out is too good to give any chance of a shot. I have watched them in the sandbanks of Sligo Bay, on the west coast of Ireland, and seldom saw *single* seals, except close to the water. Now and then the group allowed the sea to recede pretty far, but they never *all* slept ; one or two sentinels were always on the alert, and at the most distant approach of danger, there was a general scramble to the sea. Two of my friends and I tried them with deer-toils, but they always avoided the snare. Occasionally a very young one was left high and dry ; but this also

happens on rocky coasts, even within a few yards of the water.

A party of seal-shooters, last summer, placed one of their number on a narrow point of rock surrounded by deep water. As there was nothing to hide him, he stood bolt upright, expecting a stray chance at a passing seal. When his companions had rowed away, they were followed by a large seal, which all of a sudden spied the solitary being on the rock. Instantly wheeling about, it made for him at its utmost speed. His friends, suspecting the monster, shouted to warn him, but he thought they only meant to apprise him of a fine chance; he therefore allowed it to come quite close, and coolly shot it dead. It was a female in defence of her young, and had he failed in his aim, she would most likely have toppled him over the narrow ledge, and drowned him in the deep water. He said, that if he had known his risk, he would in all probability have missed.

Glass, the boatman who attends my wildfowl excursions on the Firth of Forth, at North Berwick, had an enormous blue Russian water-dog. He was

a very ferocious brute, and the most resolute dog in the water I ever saw. I have often admired his thirty-feet leap off the pier into the sea. He came as near to the amphibious as a dog well could. Point to any floating object, however distant, and he bounded out of the boat, and made for it like a shark. One of the smaller species of seal, called by fishermen the sea-dog, was watching the boat; Glass pointed to it, and out bounced rough Blue, determined on making a capture. Instead of sheering off or diving, the enemy met him half-way, when the dog seized like a vice. For a second or two the battle was fierce on the top of the water, but when the seal dived, nothing was to be seen but the stream of bubbles where the combat was raging below. This lasted so long that poor Jack Russ was given over for drowned. At last he came to the surface in so forlorn a plight, that he had to be lifted into the boat. So high was the courage of this dog, that he would have gone at another seal as readily the next day, and fought him as savagely too. Glass offered to sell him to me for £2, but as he was only a machine to fetch fowl out of the water, and not otherwise well trained

as a retriever, I declined him. He was soon after sold as a watch for a woodyard.

Of all shooting comforts a really useful water-retriever is most rare. Of late years I have discarded three dogs of this description, all pronounced first-rate and thoroughly broke, by their trainers—men who are considered no mean judges of the capabilities of a sporting dog. One of these swimming paragons was too off-hand to reflect; another, though cautious, was self-willed and sulky; while the third, being well endowed with common sense, and good temper to use it, now and then unfortunately carried his gift to the extreme of discretion, by refusing to face a cold or stormy sea.

When the days were, like the old Aberdeen sermons, "short and cauld and clear," my son went down to Mull for some winter shooting. He had only a knowing quiet-tempered old pointer, who had never either retrieved or taken the water in his life. One of the first-killed shots, a fine Merganser drake, was being rapidly floated away by the tides: disdaining to imitate the discreet retriever, he instantly plunged into the sea—no uncommon winter exploit—and brought the bird to land. The pointer,

whose aid he thought it useless to invoke, watched the whole proceeding from the rocks, and thoroughly comprehended it. Soon afterwards, on his master firing into a flock of turnstones as they flitted past, and dropping three in the water, he volunteered his unsought services, and brought them one by one to the shore. Since then, although he never attempts to mouth game on land, he duly recovers what falls into the water, and in approaching wildfowl is quite as careful not to spoil the shot as most "thorough-broke" retrievers.

About the beginning of February this useful creature died of inflammation, most likely consequent on the change of his profession. His master had again to do the work himself, and the last day he was out, the 7th of February, had two long swims after disabled widgeon, both of which he landed.

For courage and devotion to his chief, this pointer might have matched a Forty-five clansman; but, like the old Highlander, I once saw him show evident signs of superstition. When ranging a grass field, he pointed a hare, which soon moved from her form, rearing herself on hind-legs straight

as a small gate-post. The dog at once showed evident signs of uneasiness, by breaking his statuesque position, looking over his shoulder for advice, and twitching his tail most nervously. But when "puss," pursuing her advantage, actually paced ten yards towards him, erect as a drill-sergeant, he fairly turned tail, and, with every sign of terror, took shelter behind his master. There were several witnesses besides myself to this reversal of nature—viz. the hare pursuing the dog. Most likely her young were near.

The indispensable qualifications of a truly valuable retriever are, an exquisite nose, a very soft mouth, unflinching courage in water, perseverance on land, *never to lay down game, however heavy or far to carry,* and a mild tractable temper. A dog gifted with these requisites must be trained entirely by kindness. This rule should never be forgotten. Severity may sometimes be needed to restrain an impetuous, headstrong pointer or setter, but so much depends on a retriever's own will and willingness, that any dog requiring harsh breaking had better be at once dismissed.

Last shooting-season, a hasty gamekeeper near

Edinburgh got a practical lesson from his dog, which he would remember better than the soundest scolding his master could invent. He dropped a partridge with his first barrel, wounding another, which fell out of bounds, with his second. The dog retrieved the first bird, but not having perceived that the other was hit too, only wagged his tail, with an expressive look at the dead partridge, when ordered to fetch its neighbour. The keeper, losing patience, gave him a flogging! For weeks, although most willing and efficient in collecting the dead or wounded for any one else, the sagacious creature obstinately refused to recover game killed by one who so rewarded his efforts. The keeper, fully aware of his mistake, has been trying his utmost by kindness to regain the dog's confidence.

Fast retrievers are great favourites with all bad shots, as they quickly run down footed game, if ever so slightly struck. Winged game, but especially wildfowl, are far more satisfactorily retrieved by a slow dog.

To old Ross of Tongue, already mentioned, belongs the originality of training a dog to course seals. This mongrel, with a dash of the greyhound,

used to creep like a cat along the sandbanks of the Kyles of Tongue. Whenever he felt secure of overtaking his game before reaching the sea, he darted off at full speed, rarely miscalculating distance. If the seal was half-grown, the dog was often unable to detain it, but a very young one seldom pulled him to the water, until the keeper came up and knocked it on the head. Ross told me he had run down three of these in one day.

The old seals are as savage as deer, when contending for the females. A west-coast sportsman told me last spring, that he killed in Uist an old male, with his neck and shoulders one mass of sores from the battles he had been recently engaged in.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUND OF MULL.

All netting is poaching, not sporting: but this record of Mull recreations would not be complete without some notice of the scringe-net—perhaps the most picturesque among them all. The wild effect is heightened by its being only practised after nightfall, when advantage is always taken of quiet weather and an untroubled sea. My fishings in the Sound comprise two large bays, viz. Garmony and Scalastal, each having its complement of "shots" or clear places where the net can be dragged. At the turn of the tides, once a-month, the sea-trout rush up the Sound in great numbers. Garmony Bay, the furthest, being best fished at high water, or, as they say, with a full tide, and Scalastal at half-tide, there is always time to reach the latter at the most propitious moment, after scringing Garmony.

It was on a September evening, when the harvest moon rose queen-like from a bank of clouds, that we left the snug tea-table for Scalastal Bay, distant only a few hundred yards from the house. In crossing the little grass field which skirts the shore, knots of moor-plover were picking up the night-worms brought out by the heavy dew. They showed no alarm, although by the moonlight we distinctly saw them within a few yards, and heard their low murmur of content at the plentiful supply. The scream of the heron, disturbed from her night-feed by the fishermen, warned us that they were already shipping the net preparatory to a haul. A group of goblin figures on the beach were presided over by my manager, Sandy, who was summarily sending two farm lads home to their beds, as a punishment for keeping late hours in the morning. "Ou ay, plenty mens withoot them," says the old weaver, who always makes sure work of plural; thus deer are "deers," sheep "sheeps," &c. The yellow cheeks and meagre form of "Shemish Weaver" are strong enough warrant for his sedentary life. Who, therefore, could guess that this dried mummy was as hardy on the hills as a Highland stot, or that, in

the coldest scringing-night he was equally independent of salt water as a sea-otter?

In solitary, dry-shod dignity, Sandy holds the rope on the shore, while the weaver carelessly pays it out of the boat with his left hand; with his right he directs the boatmen, flourishing a huge pinch of snuff, with which he fortifies himself before beginning to toss out the net. Having been used to it from a boy, I rather plume myself on net-setting, but fairly succumb to old Shemish, whose smooth delivery and perfect semicircle of draught I always admire. In the present instance, from anxiety to cover the whole burn-mouth, he had miscalculated distance, and the last boat-rope did not reach the land. A few Gaelic grunts from the weaver, when Tom the shepherd, a fine young fellow of six feet two, with legs like stilts, jumps over the boat-side, nearly up to his armpits in water, and by a few sharp jerks gains rope-way enough to reach the shore. There was plenty strength at each rope-end, albeit some soft hands rather retarded than helped the drag. The corks come bobbing merrily in, as the circle narrows. "There's big fish in the net," shouts Tom, "I see'd him brek." "Keep yer hands low, wull

ye, and pull up the leeds," growls Sandy. "Be cashus, be cashus," shrieks Shemish, his apathy completely gone; "the net's full o' them." By a rapid smooth pull the bosom of the net is safely grounded, full of large and small fish, splashing, rattling, and flashing phosphoric light. Besides rock-cod, skate, flounders, and other salt-water fish, there were eighteen sea-trout, some of them four pounds weight. Three more hauls were taken, but less successful. There were, however, from eight to a dozen sea-trout in each. This was only an average night. A week earlier, no less than sixty trout were landed in Garmony Bay at one draught. No salmon were taken the whole season.

I seldom cared to join this sport myself, but my boys shared both its fatigues and pleasures every time the net was out. Often, as the season advanced, the nights growing darker and the winds higher, we watched for their return till two or three in the morning, and could not forget that on those wild seas and crossing tides many a boat has been watched for, that returned no more.

CHAPTER X.

MY MUSEUM.

FROM the commencement of my museum of British birds and animals, I made a rule only to admit specimens killed by myself. If my collection increased more slowly by this resolution, it gained immensely both in interest and value. When I look over my cases, I am transported in a moment from the rugged mountains or savage sea-rocks of Albyn to the stately lawns and forest-trees of "merrie England;" and in recalling many scenes of adventurous excitement, the beauty of the picture, to me, is only increased, as old Time takes his brush to shade and to soften the whole.

For the purpose of giving my sons a life-interest in the study of natural history, I have admitted all additions shot by them to equal rights and privileges with my own. The collection has, in consequence,

grown rapidly within the last year or two. Scarcely a season departs without some *rare* acquisition; and for beauty and variety, though of course not for size, few British collections can much excel it.

The year 1857-8 was rather fertile in rarities. My eldest son shot an albino corn-bunting at Fort George, and in the Sound of Mull a great northern diver, which, when landed, charged him and his dog, screaming like an Indian; five bar-tailed godwits, a Sclavonian grebe, some lovely little terns and skuas, and several giant gulls. One of these giants, directly on falling, disgorged a stoat-weasel. This prey might have been drifted dead on the Mull shore by the tides; but if a gull had the ferocity to kill and devour a full-grown stoat, there are few harriers, or even hawks, would care to profit by his example.

When a schoolboy, I had an adventure with one of these giant gulls, which my mind's eye sees more vividly through that long vista of years, than many fresher and more exciting exploits. During my mid-summer holidays on the banks of Loch Lomond, there was no more dignified game than sandpipers screaming along the shores. One sunny morning I rose early to shoot a few couple of these summer snipes before

breakfast. My brother lent me his new fowling-piece and shot-belt, as the only shooting-gear I could boast of was an old-fashioned powder-flask armed with iron rings, where the flaunty green cord was fastened which slung it over the shoulder. I had just loaded, and was pompously looking out for my sport, when I was surprised by two of these magnificent gulls flapping lazily over my head. I fired, and winged my bird. The powder-flask was instantly shorn of its gay trapping, and the poor gull bound wing and leg as safely as a felon. I then knotted him firmly several times to the branch of a fallen tree. For more than half a mile I strutted along in dreamy delight, ere I thought even of reloading; but then remembered I had thrown down the flask where I pinioned my captive. Heedlessly leaning the gun against one of the next saplings, I retraced my steps at a springy trot. No flask was to be seen. To make sure of the spot, I looked for the gull. Like another Jack Sheppard, he had untied knot after knot with his powerful bill, and fairly set himself free! There could be no mistake, as I was certain of the very twig to which I had bound him. A long, nervous, disheartening search, but no trace

of either gull or powder-flask. I now felt my morning sport was "up," so doggedly returned for my brother's gun. Gone too!! The other losses now seemed trifles swallowed up by the gun. With great care I at last succeeded in discovering it. My minor troubles were again seen through a microscope; and Crabbe's graphic description of outward objects taking their colour from the inward feelings, was truly my own experience. After bringing down my noble victim with boyish triumph, the sun shone so glorious on mountain, loch, and island, while the notes of the song-birds seemed to float on the fragrant air. During my walk home the sun was too hot and garish, and the birds, in their unconscious gaiety, singing louder than ever, did but annoy and vex me, as if mocking my chagrin. I savagely thought of bestowing my remaining charge on the most tuneful throat!

The recital, however, of my many mishaps, made a merry breakfast-table. But when I claimed for my slippery captive the full size of a goose (none of the party being naturalists), I was overwhelmed with shouts of laughter. All my "gulls were geese," and my "geese swans," &c. I met with more sympathy,

after breakfast, from the old cowherd. Without a sneer or banter, he listened to my long story, and then proposed we should have a look together for the powder-flask, which, at any rate, could not have run away. Under his methodical survey, I soon stumbled on my only bit of sporting property, and the marvel now was that I could have overlooked it before. Next day, when summer-sniping again, my brother and I detected a pair of black-backs on a long gravelly point, two miles below where mine was lost. I begged the stalk, but, ere I got within shot, one of them spread wing and made off, while its neighbour only waddled to the water. Throwing down my firearms, I made for the prize at full speed, when, splashing up to my middle into the loch, I managed to seize the end of my powder-flask string, which, like a tow-line, dragged in its wake, and safely brought my recaptured craft into port. My triumph was complete, when all my former banterers allowed that it was, at least, the size of an average goose.

This is an old story. I now return to the spring of 1857, when I added a fine male of the barred woodpecker to our list of that year. There is small

chance of either seeing or hearing this little bird after the trees are at all clothed with leaves. Its cry then ceases, and the keenest eye, though penetrating all their best-known haunts, may fail to detect a single specimen the whole summer and winter. About the end of March, when the morning sun grows powerful, these woodpeckers pair, and may be heard calling to each other, and boring the decayed branches of the forest trees. When looking at one of these dead boughs, all shattered and bared by this small bird, I have often stood amazed at the strength and perseverance of so tiny a bill.

A rough wind or a cold grey sky generally silences them, and even in propitious weather they are pretty still during the daytime. No wonder, then, that British examples are not very plentiful, when the chief time for securing them is limited to a few sunny mornings in the course of the whole year. The beautiful domain of Park Place,* in Berkshire, always harbours a pair of barred peckers.

* The music of the May songsters makes a different impression upon different auditors. The wife of one of the lodge-keepers at Park Place complained that she could not sleep a wink for the nightingales. Indeed, *they was so troublesome*, she had "to get up at twelve o'clock at night for to stop 'em!"

When staying there last March and beginning of April, the gamekeeper and his sons were kind enough to keep a look-out for them every morning during my visit. Often the weather was too cold for the birds to come forth, or the high winds drowned their call. At last one calm dewy morning (the fourth of my fruitless search), the under-keeper ran to me with the welcome news that the pair were at work among the tops of the adjoining elms. Although he had seen and heard both birds the instant before, when I got under the trees they were gone. While peering among the forest patriarchs, the keeper's whisper again hurried me to his side. A little bird was tripping from spray to spray; I instantly fired, but ere it fell to the ground, was vexed to perceive that I had shot—a nut-hatch! I must, however, do my helpmates the justice to say that their keen eyes are only matched by their quick ears; the faintest chirp of their victim, though smothered by a chorus of harsher or louder sounds, turns them at once into listening statues. Disappointments like this are therefore rare indeed.

Next morning was the 1st of April, calm and

sunny. In crossing the flower-garden, I noticed a group of figures all intent on a corner of the wood, and as I slipped over the mown grass I distinctly heard the little pecker bore several times. To see it baffled us all. At last it darted out of the wood, and chose a detached oak on the lawn. Bur-bur-bur from its gnarled branches. No sooner were we up than it glided through the tree, and took shelter in the woods again. Then, making game of us, the undulating flight once more passed over our heads back to the oak. This time I approached the tree cautiously, and fired a long shot. A tell-tale feather floated away, and the little borer sprung from the rotten stump on which it was at work, and clung to a thin branch. I allowed one of my boys, who was with me, to knock it over with my second barrel, and the barred woodpecker dropped dead. It was our good hap to fall in with the male, as his red crest plainly showed. Several times, soon after, the female both called and bored; but although watched for, she was never heard of nor seen after that morning.

The cry of this woodpecker is very like that of the wryneck, and both are dwarf imitations of the

kestrel hawk. There is a mournful pathos in the call, and yet it is pleasant too.

When we told of our prize on the 1st of April, the breakfast-party were too wide-awake to trust our word, and so were *made April fools* by their incredulity.

As the sharpness of the gamekeeper's youngest "lad" had been duly acknowledged in the woodpecker affair, he privately assured me, as a great secret, that the largest and "reddest" kingfisher frequenting that reach of the Thames, haunted a gravel-pit close to the boat-house. By a little watching he was sure I might provide her for the woodpecker's travelling companion on its journey to the bird stuffer's! I accordingly booked the kingfisher for a visit at the end of my evening walk. This peerless little beauty is quite conscious of the notice its gay attire must excite, and generally seems bent on hiding itself from curious or admiring gaze, while the scared uneasy chirp, partaking of the restless character of the bird, sounds as if keeping time to the rapid darting flight.

Secure in my hiding-place, I had not long to wait for this signal-note, coming from what appeared a

streak of blue crossing the pit, and stopping among the brushwood at its edge. Flit away, little heiress of many gems! but thou art fated to be a prize, after all.

With three exceptions (viz. the capercailzie, the quail, and the ger-falcon), when I delivered the concluding Essay as a lecture I illustrated it by examples taken from my own collection. Plain recitals of the capture of many of these creatures would imply pleasant stories, but perhaps enough have been already given.

CONCLUSION

ESSAY ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS

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ESSAY ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ISLANDS.

HAVING had more opportunities than most men of studying the habits of the wild birds and animals of the British Islands, I have gathered, perhaps, some fresh observations on their modes of life, though without laying claim to the title of a scientific naturalist.

When reading the works of eminent writers on this subject, and especially the graphic accounts they give of the wild creatures in their native fastnesses, it occurred to me that such materials *must* have been furnished by observers who had not been so faithful to their library—"that wild men of the field, those mighty hunters," must have acted as purveyors to the lion of the desk. Well, here was a track opened up for me, and I followed it with all my heart.

And here let me claim a distinction between what is generally called a sportsman, and a lover of wild sport. The former rushes down in August to his Highland shooting, his sole care to batter down the greatest head of game in the shortest given time —his keepers having busied themselves all the year through in pursuing with equal zest what they call vermin, by which means they have nearly exterminated many of our rare and most interesting beasts and birds of prey, so that the eagle, the peregrine, the kite and marten, the wild-cat and the mountain-fox, are fast receding into the remoter parts of the Scottish Highlands, to make way for such real vermin as rabbits and droves of pheasants, which afford no better sport than barndoor fowls.

The lover of wild sport has little pleasure in such easy prey; nay, even a grouse moor, which has been treated in this way, has small excitement for him, every difficulty having been smoothed away. Give him the wilder regions, and the wilder game, which can alone form the true hunter.

The first thing which excited my minute attention, was the protection afforded by the Creator, especially to gallinaceous birds, in assimilating their colour to

the shades of the ground on which they find their food. Now the Gallinæ are not only emphatically the objects of man's pursuit, but also the chief prey of rapacious birds and beasts. They begin at the cock of the wood, or capercailzie, down to the diminutive quail.

The cock of the wood is exactly the colour of the fir-trees on which it feeds and roosts. The shading on the breast is the most delicate dark green. So is the quail of the hay or grass field, where it is often found. Feeding much on oily grass-seeds, its hue is more sober and less yellow than that of the partridge. To exemplify my meaning, let us take the Highland mountain—the ptarmigan, in summer exactly the colour of the granite rock, and in winter changing to a white so pure that the test of the keenest eye is to detect it in its snowy retreat:—

> "Trained to the chase, his eagle eye
> The ptarmigan in snow could spy."

Descend the first shoulder of the hill—the red grouse-cock is precisely the shade of the red brown heather, while the partridge at the foot adapts himself to the patch of corn on the moor-edge: but this partridge equally haunts the heather, so his hue is darker

than the true stubble-bird of Norfolk and the Lothians ; while the grouse of Renfrewshire, which feed all the autumn on the corn-stooks, are at that time so light in colour as to be easily distinguished from their Highland kinsmen, who never leave the heather. The blackcock, indeed, may seem to be an exception, but his very shyness protects him ; for it is well known to all sportsmen that, except in the rankest cover, he is the wildest of game-birds.

Wild doves would seem to contrast with the Gallinæ. Feeding on ground so various, they must be chameleons if they would adapt themselves to all. Sometimes among the yellow corn, then in the dark bean-field, now under the spreading beech, devouring the kernels, or among the branches of an oak, cropping the acorns, and, as winter wears on, forced to poach on the green turnip-tops. But notice how their very nature is a still better protection than any change of colour could be. Of timid heart and wary habit, the keenest eye and strongest wing, doves are the first to foresee danger, to "*flee away*, and be at rest." Their swift pinions are also needed to bear them to their different and distant feeding-grounds.

In this case are the four varieties of our wild dove. The large one, the common ring or cushat dove, is familiar to every one ; next it, the turtle, whose melodious voice and lovely form have been celebrated from the earliest ages. It is chiefly confined to England, although, like all migrants, a few of the younger birds extend their geographical range as far as Scotland, where I have known several shot in autumn. The remaining pair are so much alike in appearance, and yet so much unlike in habits, that I must say a word about both—the stock-dove, a southern, roosting in the branches, and building in the stocks of old trees (whence his name), and the rock-dove, a tenant of the lone caves on the northern coast of Scotland, nature's own dovecot. The Ducat Cave described by Hugh Miller, among the rocks of Cromarty, is a fine specimen of these natural pigeon-houses. There, with the rolling ocean for the flooring, and a cleft of the rock for a nestling-box, relays of these blue rock-pigeons are reared the whole spring and summer. I had, last summer, the great and rare enough pleasure of hearing three of these doves, in a wild state—viz. the ring-dove, the stock-dove, and the turtle-dove, and the tame pigeon, lineal

descendant of the rock-dove—all cooing at the same time. The pigeons that nightly nestle under the eaves of the Assembly Rooms, and the pillars of St George's Church, have exactly the same habits and nature as the blue rock of the ocean cave.

The same explanation as that given for doves may account for the bright colouring of male water-fowl, which are also very independent of hidling protection; while the females, who generally hatch their eggs on the bare ground, are excellent examples of my theory. When the mallard moults his wing-feathers, he is unable to fly for about a fortnight. At that time his plumage is precisely the sober brown of the female. As if aware of this fact, and also of his helpless condition on the water, he seeks to conceal himself inland among thick cover, and, until his wings are grown enough to fly, is as completely a hidling bird as the Gallinæ. So with the animals. If the mountain-deer were white, like a sheep, how difficult would it be for him to escape the hunter's ken! but his red-brown beautifully harmonises with the distant hill, when a little sered in autumn; while the ash-coloured roe, fre-

quenting woods, fits in exactly with the boles and stems of trees. The same rule applies to the white or mountain hare as to the ptarmigan, in summer so exactly the colour of the blue-grey rock that English sportsmen call them blue hares. Every one knows how difficult it is to find the common hare sitting in a stubble or lea field. Here I may make a passing remark, that whenever you meet the eye of any wild creature, that moment it makes off, instinct warning it that concealment is *now* vain.

Beasts of prey need this protection more than birds of prey, whose swift wings soon carry them beyond the reach of danger. The mountain-fox is much the colour of the red-deer, frequenting the same open ground; the poultry-fox of the Lowlands is generally of a brighter red, but then he has the advantage of being able to conceal himself in thick cover, where, without showing himself, he is in the midst of his larder. Both these foxes were shot within a week of Christmas; so the time of year could have nothing to do with the difference of colour. The wildcat, which lives and rears her young in the rocky cairns of the mountain-top, har-

monises so exactly both with rock and hill, that the best mask of a shooting-dress is to copy a wildcat's skin. The dark coat of the marten is the perfect shade of the dark pine-trees, among whose branches it passes the chief part of its life, often rearing its young in the magpie's nest; hence it is called the pine-weasel.

The same merciful law descends to the fish of the waters. Every trout-angler knows that the fish taken from a loch, where the bank is a peat-moss, are very dark; those where the bottom is yellow sand, are quite gold-coloured; and those from a grassy shore, a rich green.

Let me beg you to examine this salmon of twenty-one pounds weight, his back fenced with tiny blue slates like the miniature roof of a house. Could any colour match more exactly the blue stones with which our rapid streams abound? We will suppose a lover of nature, but not an angler, wandering along the banks of one of our most picturesque rivers: an old seer is intently gazing over the moving waters; he asks, Why? The old man looks briskly up, and says it is "a fish." No fish can the tourist spy, although shown the very spot where it rests. At

last he thinks he has him, and points out a black stump, as large as a grampus. The old fisherman darts up his quick grey eye, with an expression of contempt; he sees further instruction useless. The stranger walks off, convinced the old man has been hoaxing him. And yet there, all the while, is the spectre-fish, so completely the counterpart of the stone on which it has taken its stance, as to look like its shadow.

A most curious fact was communicated to me the other day by one of Edinburgh's brightest ornaments, and who, like many men of true genius, has a strong natural turn for angling. A question was proposed to a party of mathematicians: "Of what shape a solid body ought to be to pass through a fluid with the least possible resistance?" By application of the strictest mathematical principles it was solved, and the form discovered coincided exactly with that of a fish's head!

I would now turn your attention to the salmo-ferox. He is not formed for cutting through the rapids like the arrow-shaped salmon, but his clumsy figure is well adapted for his still life of leisure among the weeds of Loch Awe, from which his

colour, a greenish brown, renders him scarcely distinguishable.

One more, and a very remarkable instance, of this assimilation of colour. About twelve years ago, there was a trout taken in the small stream Ury, very nearly two pounds in weight, one side of which was black and the other yellow. The cause was evident. There had been a long drought, and the fish was forced into one small pool, close to the opposite bank of black soil, where the only deep current ran. The consequence was, that the exposed side was light, like the channel of the stream; the other black, the colour of the bank.

Let us, lastly, come down to the Reptiles, and see the same kind provision for them; and I am sure they need it. You will observe the difference between these two adders—the one in its green summer dress, the colour of the bracken and the grass; the other, taken in autumn, shaded like the withered bent among which it glides. Notice next this large lizard. He never changes, summer or autumn—and why? Because *his* feeding-ground cannot change. His colour, though taken in early spring, is sober brown; for it is not among grass

and leaves that *he* watches for his food, but upon planks and paling, where he basks through the long warm day to entrap the flies that light on them. The green lizard was caught among the grass, stealing through it, bright as an emerald. Last of all, look at the slow-worm. It is mostly found on stony banks or gravel paths, and no hue could match them better.

We will now endeavour to trace the bodily adaptation of each creature to its own peculiar mode of life. Of course it will not be possible now to notice more than some of the most prominent points, for the theme is so fruitful that I should be afraid of far overstepping the time allowed. I shall, therefore, select those groups which, from their remote or hidling habits, are least easily seen and studied—water-birds first, passing over the whole family of cormorants and gulls. They are divided into Grallidæ, or waders—those who find their subsistence on the bank; and swimmers, which again admit of many subdivisions, each with its separate generic name.

The curlew lives on the sea-shore at low water; but as the supply of soft food is too small, it has two strings to its bow, and at high tide it flies to

the first swampy field, and sucks up worms like the woodcock. He seems to know the time of the ebb and flow by instinct, and, let him be ever so far inland, pounces down upon the shore at the right moment. It rears its young on the moors, where its wild cry and long bill have made it a bird of evil omen. The Scotch name, whaup, signifies a warlock or wizard, and the prayer, to be delivered from "lang-nebbed things" (witches being associated with long thin arched noses), invidiously points out the harmless curlew. From haunting fens and morasses, they are also unfortunately connected with the "Will-o'-the-wisp."

The oyster-catcher is also a coast bird, but many of them in summer come up our rivers to rear their young. If possible, it always secures a bit of ground where the river divides, forming an islet, instinct warning that it is thus less likely to be disturbed. Its whistle, equally shrill and wild as the curlew's, is a harbinger of spring. The wedge-shaped bill can detach shellfish from the rock, and open them with great ease. Its supply, unless in the most telling frosts, is therefore very abundant on the shore.

The little summer-snipe you all know as the con-

stant visitant of our lochs and rivers, where, with his slender bill, he picks up insects among the gravel. The greenshanks and redshanks, also sandpipers, feed much in gravel, as their bills are harder than those of the knot, the dunlin, and sanderling. These last come a little nearer the water, and their bills, being softer and more flexible, are better adapted to the sand. Their bills, however, are not so sentient as those of the snipe ; so they feed a good deal by sight, and not entirely by suction, like these birds. The snipe comes nearer the water still, and feeds entirely by suction in the mud ; while the godwit goes beyond the snipe, feeding also by suction in soft mire, sometimes even in the water itself. Those birds which live entirely by suction—*i. e.*, seek food by touch, and not by sight—are always night-feeders. Most of this group are inland breeders, and there are no more finished actors when their nests are invaded. The Gallinæ are far too fussy and demonstrative. I was completely taken in by a sandpiper, when salmon-fishing last spring. It flew out from the bank, apparently so disabled as to drop in the middle of the Dee ; with difficulty it struggled across among the weeds on the opposite bank. One

of our party, however, found the nest, with four eggs. Next day the little creature was quietly seated on them, quite prepared for another sham. The woodcock, alone of the tribe, has no guile. I found a nest with four eggs last year, close to our avenue. She allowed us to look at her within a few yards, and in flying off never attempted deceit. She hatched three chicks, which ran from the nest as soon as they were out of the egg. You will notice one here with a bill different from the rest. It is short and thick, and therefore not fitted, like their sharp slender soft ones, for poking into clefts and crevices for its food. It has, however, the advantage in being able with its stout bill to turn up the stones, which they cannot: hence its name—"Turnstone." When a storm drives these coast-birds from the shore, they return as quickly as possible, expecting from the troubled waters an abundant supply.

The bittern and common heron are the only resident waders that feed *in* the water (for the godwit sucks food from the ground under the water), and their bills, especially that of the heron, approximate to the fishing diver's. The long bare shanks and fag-end of a tail allow of the deepest wading; while

her neck, folded between her wings, and bill held straight over the water, enable her to strike with the greatest force and quickness. For hours she can remain in this posture, looking just like a point of grey rock, until a fish, attracted by her shining legs, ventures within reach. Quick as light, and with as much knowledge of refraction as the most finished leisterer, she never misses her aim, and is never taken unawares. When on wing, she rigs out a jury-tail with her stilts, thus preserving the balance her long neck requires. The bittern is now rare in Scotland, though one or two have lately been killed there. It is emphatically a bird of desolation, and subsists on fish or reptiles ; its favourite resting-place a dingy fen, where the sun seldom shines. Unlike the heron, which is one of the wildest of birds, and only uses the mask of its grey cloak to delude its prey, the bittern trusts for its safety entirely to concealment. Well may it do so, being the very colour of the swampy bogs it inhabits ; although so large a bird, it may be within a yard of your feet without your seeing it. I have hitherto been unable to shoot a specimen.

We have now brought the Grallidæ from the high

gravel down to the water-edge, and even into the water, where the swimmers begin. The same harmonious law obtains with regard to them ; the surface ducks beginning at the margin, where the waders leave off, to the deep diver, plying his vocation at the bottom of the waters.

The swimming-birds are divided into divers and dabblers. The former live by fishing, and have long sharp bills ; the latter are those flat-billed ducks which subsist on grassy substances and aquatic insects : many of these, however, feed at the bottom, and are consequently divers too. Compare now a fishing diver and a diving dabbler — the round lumpy body of the dabbler, made to sink to the bottom like a stone, and graze there, and the arrow-shaped diver, formed to pursue its prey as deftly as if it were a fish itself.

Compare now the finest specimens of both, which are purely ocean feeders, — viz., the eider-duck and the great northern diver. The former often feeds at an immense depth, while the latter can travel for nearly a quarter of a mile under water without coming to the surface, and his swimming there equals the speed of many birds on wing. In-

deed, his action in the deep is more like flying than swimming, for he uses his wings with the strength of an eagle.

The surface-feeding dabblers have bodies shaped like canoes. They are far lighter in weight, in proportion to their size, than diving dabblers. This is an advantage to both. I was much amused, when lately visiting a very ingenious friend, to find that he had taken as models for a boat the breast-bones of the mallard and teal, our most common surface-feeders. They feed on the margin, and trust to the waters washing up their supply. When the margins of the lochs are frozen, they are often indebted for food to their flat-billed diving cousins. This compact suits well, if the surface-feeders have only patience, as the dun-birds and tufts nip off the root, neglecting the grass, which despised fare is quite sufficient for the surface-feeder. The long neck of the wild swan enables him to reach the grassy bottom at a considerable depth, and to feed as if he were a diving dabbler. By turning up his tail, and balancing with his feet, he can reach the bottom at a depth of four feet. He is a constant fresh-water visitor. The whole tribe of geese keep much more

to the sea; when they do come inland, they feed chiefly at the margin of our lochs as surface-feeders. Those diving dabblers, such as dun-birds and tufts, which prefer the fresh water in winter, are generally pretty good for eating; but the flesh of the purely ocean ducks, such as the eider and the northern herald, is rank and useless. The reason appears to be that they feed so much on crustacea, small fry of fish, and sea-weeds.

I will pass over the omnivorous birds very slightly. They are a mean, cruel, pilfering set,—nature's scavengers. The raven, at their head, has certainly some fine points. He is bolder in his attack, and chooses generally a grand solitude for his hunting-ground, with a magnificent rock for his nest.

The raven is so early a builder, that I once saw a kestrel hatch its brood in the same nest after the young ravens had flown. Rooks, although living in colonies, are very jealous of any such interference. The justice they inflict on each other is very summary. If any pair steal a stick from the nest of another, the community immediately pull the nest of the offenders to pieces. This exposition of rook-law was furnished me by an eminent member of the

legal profession. I have often watched since, but have never seen a thief receive his due, although another friend assured me he had.

The first group of the Omnivoræ are the crows, ending with the jackdaw. Next come the magpie, the jay, the chough, and the starling; to which may be added some rare stragglers of beautiful plumage—such are the roller, the golden oriole, and the wax-wing. The last is the only one I have had the pleasure of noticing. Three were shot in my own garden. They fed upon the berries of the sweet-briar rose, coming morning and evening with an undulating flight like the woodpecker.

It is now high time to introduce that noble group, the birds of prey. The largest is the white-tailed sea-eagle, which a good deal resembles the vulture both in taste and habits, often retiring far to the southward in winter when food is scarce. He is the bog-eagle of Ireland, and the erne of Scotland, and is far better known than the golden, which never leaves his castle in the rocks. Foreseeing the coming storm, he so gorges himself with any prey he can lay hold of—say the carcass of a sheep or deer—that he is absolutely unable to move from the

spot for some time after. He then betakes himself to his "own grey tower," the skies darken, and soon there is nothing but a weary waste of snows. A week may pass—there he sits, defying the hurricane and despising the storm. A fortnight—still no change in him. For five long weeks will he keep his castle, never having tasted food. His wing may droop, and his motion be more loose and languid, but his eye is keen as ever. Like one of Napoleon's famished veterans forcing the snow-girt Beresina, although his step may totter, his fierce and savage eye still shows the unquenched fire within.

And here, in contrast with the mighty eagle, allow me to introduce its equal in endurance—the little gold-crest, the tiniest and most delicate of the British fauna, which the sternest storm cannot subdue. When the robin, the hedge-sparrow, and other soft-billed birds, have long been sheltering in the outhouses—when the hard-billed finches and buntings have sought the protection of the farmyard—when the wild duck is dying of starvation, and the woodcock driven to the sea-shore for a precarious subsistence—when the very divers are put to their shifts by the freezing up of their feeding-bays—I

have seen this fragile bird alert and active, flitting from one forest-tree to another, with its little cheerful chirp, a note of gratitude in evil times. When we consider that the gold-crest is so delicate,—that, like the humming-bird, if captured by the hand of man, it never lives more than two days beneath his care,—its winter preservation is the more remarkable, as displaying the Divine tenderness to such as need it most. The snows can never stop its supply, which is garnered up in the bark of those forest-trees, and consists of the eggs of gnats and smaller insects. By night they keep themselves warm, as instinct leads them to cling together. One of my boys last winter discovered, by moonlight, a ball which seemed fastened to the branch of a spruce-fir. On taking hold of it, he was rather startled to find it warm, and still more so when it fell to pieces and flew away in different directions. This proved to be a bunch of long-tailed tits; but I have little doubt other small birds have the same cosy habit.

Next in importance to the golden-eagle, as a bird of prey, is the ger-falcon. Inferior only in size and muscular strength, fully his equal in courage, far his

superior in dash, this splendid bird is the very model of grace, symmetry, and power. There is no grander sight of its kind, than the stoop of the ger-falcon on its prey. On the coasts of our northern islands, where a few still linger, there are numbers of the swift-winged blue-rock. The shadow of the falcon comes over these doves. They take wing with a crash. The falcon keeps the sky of them. His flight appears so light and easy, compared to the rapid rush of the pigeons, that they seem to be distancing him. But in truth he is passing them fast. Soon he gains headway enough—when, shivering his wings, and doubling up into the smallest compass, he comes down prone like a cannon-ball. You hear the thunder of his wings through the air. You see him emerge with his burden from the scared group, which now pursue their scattered and random flight.

Although the peregrine is not so terrible a falcon as the last, it is more easily tamed, and indeed the most docile of the race. He takes up the ground where the ger-falcon leaves off, and loves uninhabited moors and wild morasses. A pair will sometimes build their nest on the coast rocks, and I see them

every year either on the Bass or neighbouring islets. Grouse form their principal prey on the moors, but on the coast they live entirely on the guillemots and puffins. Their flight is most elegant, and their stoop exactly the same as the ger-falcon's. Another beautiful little falcon, the hobby, is the only bird of passage in the group.* It never comes further north than the middle of England. Unlike the peregrine, the hobby prefers cultivated fields and woody dells—larks are its chief prey. There are few more beautiful sights in falconry than the flight of the peregrine at a woodcock, or the hobby at a snipe. Woodcocks, however, trust to speed and doubling in the woods to outstrip their pursuer: hence the flight is often so long and intricate, that the falcon cannot find his way back to his master; and except in open ground, the falconer is cautious of flying his bird at the woodcock. The snipe, on the contrary, being a high-flyer, as soon as the falcon is cast off, darts into the air, and there is a splendid struggle for the sky. Bound after bound they climb the air, until sometimes both are lost in the blue. *Wiser than man*, the little bird is well aware

* The hobby is precisely a peregrine in miniature.

that the moment it takes the downward course, it is on the way to certain ruin. The little merlin, last of the tribe, is inferior to none either in pluck or dexterity. He is a perfect beauty, and may be constantly seen in the fields round this city. He has been often described as a winter migrant. Numbers, however, build in our wilder moors, and I procured this female specimen from Argyllshire, where the only prey in its nest were meadow-pippets or moss-cheepers, then most abundant on the moors.

There are only two British species of the true hawk. One, the goshawk, is occasionally to be met with in the south of England. It is large and powerful. The other is the common sparrow-hawk. Both are very active for a little while, but having short wings, they are low-flighted, and often strike their prey even on the ground. They are quite unequal to the magnificent stoop of the falcons, nor have they their far-seeing eye; but for a short range their sight is quicker.* How admirably

* The shorter wings of the hawk are compensated by his longer legs, which enable him to lift prey from the ground. The sparrow-hawk is like a dwarf goshawk.

adapted is each for its own beat! A young friend of mine saw a sparrow-hawk lately come in upon some sparrows feeding in George Street, and lift one from the middle of the flock. So great a poltroon was the sparrow-hawk, that, when they shouted, it let go the quarry, which flew much wounded into St Andrew's steeple. A falcon would not have been so easily scared from its prey. A few months ago a black-cock and grey-hen flew into a cottage on my shooting-ground in Mull, pursued by a peregrine. The tenant has them now tame. Mr M'Laine of Lochbuy, the laird, wished to have the birds for a friend, but as it was Hallowe'en night when they sought the old Highlander's protection, he thought it most unlucky to give them up, and dared not do so!

The harriers, next in the group, are beautiful creatures, and being continually on wing, are easily seen. They have, however, neither the grandeur of the falcons nor the activity of the hawks. They take prey only on the ground, for which their long thin legs give them a great advantage. They are very low flyers, and do much mischief, especially before the young game-birds are able to take wing.

My next on the list is what I call the connecting link between the owls and hawks. Who has not seen the kestrel, hovering for minutes at a time, as if moored in the air?—a motion which her name of windhover indicates. She is looking out for mice, and with her telescopic eye can at once detect them even from that far height. She rarely attacks birds of any kind, and the good she does to the farmer no one can calculate. Of all the tribe, they are the most numerous, and of course fine game for a lazy keeper to gull his master with. Once looking at a string of vermin, among which the poor kestrels were the most conspicuous, I remarked to the keeper, that he might have spared these useful birds, which did no harm whatever. With a knowing wink, he gave me what he thought a settler: "If they eat mice, they wad eat birds tae, like the cats!"

Most keepers have the same indiscriminating destructive mania for all carnivorous birds. If they have only a hooked beak and sharp talons, the evidence is conclusive—verdict "death." Seldom troubling their heads to find out the nature or habits of a bird of prey, they constantly massacre those that are positively useful. My game-watcher once

hailed me with the important news that he had found a nest of "the great hunting-hawk." Before we reached the rock I heard the buzzard's whistle, and pointed her out. "That's the hawk, sir." I explained to him that I would not shoot the bird on any account, for she did great good, all the open weather of winter and early spring, by devouring quantities of moles; that buzzards were lazy inactive creatures, quite unfitted to do much mischief to old game, subsisting in a great measure on reptiles and vermin. I must own I was about as much astonished as he, when we scaled the nest, and found no other prey than *three moles, and the remains of two others,* beside the young buzzards. How the old birds could have collected this mole supply so late in the season as the third week in June, it would be difficult to conjecture. I, however, had great pleasure in granting the future mole-catchers a passport to fly from the nest, sore against the watcher's will.

The buzzard's nest is a perfect imitation, on a small scale, of a golden-eagle's eyrie. It is always fixed in a romantic, lonely, rocky neuk among the moors. At nesting-time the parent birds may sometimes leap down from the perch on a young grouse or a

leveret, after a weary hungry watch ; but the sportsman who spares them may console himself by reflecting, that they also consume many a young weasel or rat—*creatures more destructive to game than themselves.*

As the kestrel is the connecting link between the hawks and owls, the short-eared owl is the connecting link between the owls and hawks. It is sometimes called the woodcock owl, coming and going with that migrant. Like the woodcock, however, some remain to breed on our moors. One was shot in August by a friend of mine on the Arrochar moors, pointed by his dog. They are often so alert in the daytime as even to hunt for prey.

I have, for the sake of contrast, put up the most common of our owls in one case, as there is much difference in their nature and habits, which may easily be seen by a glance at their points. These are the smaller head and eyes, lighter body, and longer wings of the white owl. The reason of this difference is, that the white owl lives entirely on mice, while the brown is very promiscuous in its food.*

* As proof of the immense good the white owl does to the barn and farmyard, a gamekeeper on whom I can rely assured

Since the white owl is so dainty, it must work for it, and to procure an adequate supply has to beat a great extent of country on wing: hence its light body and stronger pinions. It is obliged to come out earlier and hunt later in the morning than the brown owl, and its eyes are therefore less, which enable it to see in clearer light. The latter keeps very late hours, so its large eyes are required. It takes prey from the perch, and not being at all particular whether flesh, fowl, or even fish come to hand, it seldom long wants a meal. A tame one of mine was very fond of earthworms and frogs. One sunny day I tried to cheat it with a toad. With great alacrity it half bolted the loathsome morsel, but immediately on tasting, threw it up with every appearance of intense disgust—shaking its head, and wiping the bill. I have had excellent opportunities of watching the nesting habits of both. In one of my shooting-quarters, the white owl reared

me he had once counted fifty-three fresh mice in one of their hoards for the nestlings.

Owls begin to sit when they begin to lay, hence the difference in size often observable in the young ones, especially when there are more than three in the brood. I have twice seen five in an owl's nest.

its young in the roof every year; and in another, the brown owl was equally constant to a turret of the old tower. Almost before dusk the white owl regularly emerged from its attic, returning at longer or shorter intervals with a common field-mouse. It then perched on one of the chimneys within five yards of the drawing-room window where I was watching. It always paused for a few seconds, peering round to see that all was safe. It then changed the mouse from the talons to the bill, so as to leave the claws free to clutch the wall; otherwise, it could hardly have entered the narrow hole. I watched it constantly, and never saw any prey but mice, except once, when I clearly distinguished a small mole. The brown owl used to leave her turret when it was too dark to watch her, but as soon as the young were hatched, I looked at them almost every day. When they were old enough to be left by themselves in the daytime, a plentiful supply was deposited by the old birds. They always gave a sharp scream, to warn the young before diving down the turret with food: mice and young birds of different kinds, never old birds, once a half-grown partridge, another time two

missel-thrushes nearly able to fly, very often a rat —not the disgusting Norseman, but the old Scotch black rat, one of which I had stuffed, as they are now extremely rare. For the first two years of my stay these black rats had infested the place, but in *one* night they disappeared, being driven out by a colony of Norway rats as hideous as ever sheltered in a London or Paris drain. Not one Scotch rat having been seen since, I suppose the owls must be content with the coarser Norway species for supper.

I now come to a class of birds, familiar visitants of every lawn and garden, and yet, from their unobtrusive habits, as difficult to observe as either the remote wader or the wild bird of prey. On a summer's day we see on all sides numbers of little birds, some on the ground, some perched on twigs, and some in the air, each amply supplied with its own proper food, whether that consists of winged insects, grass-seeds, or berries. In the boles and stems of the trees, however, are lodged the chrysalises and larvæ of many large and small insects, which not only injure the trees, but would be very noxious and troublesome if allowed to take wing.

These it is the work of the woodpecker to seek out and devour. The peckers are divided into several kinds, all performing their allotted tasks. The greater-spotted and green woodpecker are chiefly for the boles and stems of trees. The form of their feet being like the parrot, and thrown very far back, only fits them for going up the tree, and over the tops of the branches. Their plan is to begin at the foot, and work their way, spirally, to the top, searching every crevice. If the green woodpecker detect an unsound part, betraying the grubs beneath, it immediately begins hammering, until there is an opening wide enough for its long tongue, armed with reverse bristles, which enable it to bring out its prey as if with a hook. The spotted pecker has a different mode of setting to work; it bores with its bill like an awl, and so distinct is the sound from that of the green, that any one accustomed to them can distinguish it in a moment. We secured the spotted woodpecker, last summer, in Euston Park. My son, who had been looking out for one for more than a week, was trolling for pike; a fine eight or nine pounder had run twice at his spinning bait, and was grimly waiting behind a

weed for the third cast, when the burr of the woodpecker sounded almost overhead. Down went the rod, and away he bolted for the keeper's gun. It was more than half an hour ere the bird bored again. But at last it did, and by patient dodging he got a distant chance and dropped it. The green one he killed a few weeks before, tracking it by its loud laugh from tree to tree.

There is another woodpecker, no larger than a lark, to whose special care the branches are committed, with the nut-hatch for its colleague. They both detect the eggs of small insects, which would be overlooked by the larger peckers; and the nut-hatch has feet so admirably formed for tree life, that it can hop up, down, round, and about both stems and branches. So powerful are its claws, the hind-toes especially, than it can keep hold on the underside of a branch, like a fly on the ceiling, and, raising itself to the full stretch of its legs, hammer away, throwing the whole weight of its body into every blow. As the woodpeckers only strike with the head and neck, they have stiff tail-feathers to steady them to the tree; but to the nut-hatch, from its mode of working, this support would be useless,

so its tail is short and flexible. But what becomes of our trees in Scotland, where there are no woodpeckers? The answer is quite as obvious as the question. We have here but few of the larger insects, except in those parts where the climate is more like that of England, such as Morayshire and some parts of Aberdeenshire. I have seen two specimens of the great spotted woodpecker on the banks of Dee, in the latter county. This leads me to speak of the little tree-creeper, perhaps the most useful of the whole race, and common all over our Islands. It searches all the trees, young as well as old, with its slender bill, and can pick the eggs of insects even from the buds without injuring them. We are indebted for many a healthy blossom to the efforts of this little artificer. As the tree-creeper only requires to use its head and neck when feeding, it has, like the woodpecker, stiff-pointed tail-feathers, to assist it in climbing. Its motions, when at work, are more like those of a mouse than a bird.

There is still one more tree-bird, the wryneck, a beautifully pencilled migrant, which, from arriving a short time before the cuckoo, is commonly called the cuckoo's mate. It, like the woodpecker, is con-

fined to the southern and midland counties of England. Winged insects, which buzz around trees, especially those summer plagues, the flying ants, are its chief object. It will also storm the ant-hillock, picking up the ants and their eggs with its long glutinous tongue faster than the eye can follow. Neither its bill nor its tail is fitted for woodpecker's work, therefore it has a different task assigned. The name of wryneck is acquired from its having the power of twisting its head further round than any other bird, which no doubt facilitates the capture of many a flying insect. And here, in connection with insect-eating birds, I wish to mention a curious experiment I made last spring. Wishing to find out whether a hard-billed bird would rear the young of a soft-billed bird, and the reverse, I selected the spotted fly-catcher and the chaffinch, changing their eggs; and to make more certain proof, I also put an egg of the willow-wren into the fly-catcher's nest. The result was, that both the young chaffinches and the young fly-catchers died when they were a week old, while the willow-wren was reared by the fly-catcher. Following up my experiment, I put a robin's eggs into a fly-catcher's nest; they were all reared, and flew.

We can only notice one more group—the halcyons; and as there are only two of the family, they will not detain us long. They consist of the bee-eater and the kingfisher, both inhabitants of the river's bank, and their plumage is quite tropical. The kingfisher's is the most gaudy, but the bee-eater's is the richest. The latter has a long slender bill, and feeds much on water dragon-flies, although, as its name imports, bees are a favourite morsel. It is rarely seen, and is only a summer straggler.

The bill of the kingfisher, both long and powerful, can easily secure small fish as well as every kind of water insect. It has the power of casting up the indigestible parts of food in pellets, as owls do, which often betray the nest. I found several last summer on the banks of the Thames, curiously dug into a chalk-bank, about a yard deep, exactly after the martin-swallow's manner in the sand. There is a popular notion, that the kingfisher turns its little back of brilliant plumage to the water, for the purpose of attracting fish. If so, Shenstone, who boasted of his Nanny's eyes, that "the little halcyon's azure plume was never half so blue," might have dispensed with the torch when spearing salmon in

her company. The kingfisher can only pursue its vocation in those glorious days when sky, air, and water are equally calm and clear—Halcyon days.

It may then be seen flitting past like the gleam of a rainbow, sometimes hovering over the water, to take unerring aim at the busy shoal beneath. It more often, however, watches the still deep pool from a bush or rail, and darts upon the passing prey. Hence the beautiful allusion in the "Fall of Jerusalem," "Sits o'er the gulf a halcyon bird of calm."

I have now given a very rough and imperfect sketch of various creatures that find subsistence on the ground, in the waters, in the air, and on the trees, and the fitness of each for its own particular work. In presuming to recommend the study to those that have leisure, I have only to tell them how good and how pleasant they will find it to observe these things. I have already mentioned how fascinating it was to me from my earliest days; I have now a happier interest in looking from the creatures of His hand, to the Power who fashioned them with such surpassing skill, who sustains them with such constant care, and without whose will not even a sparrow falls to the ground.

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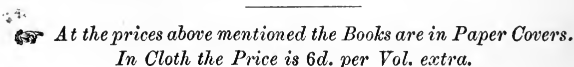
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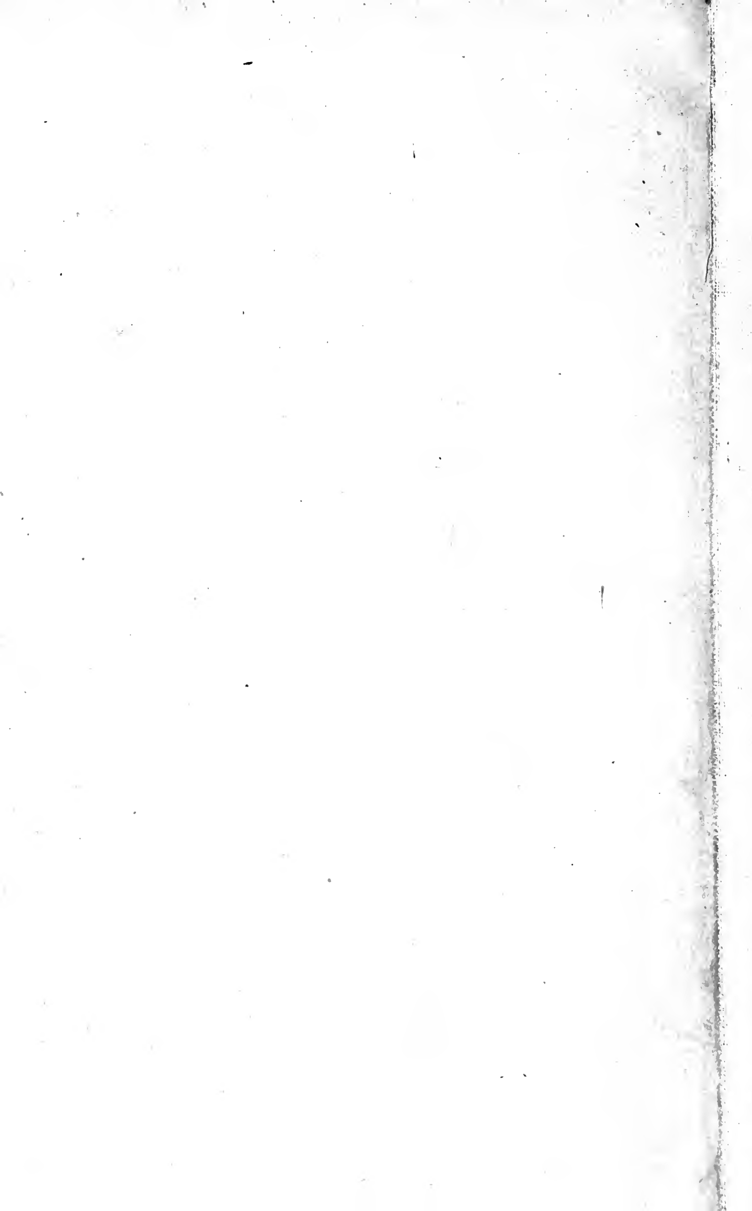

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