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A SPORTSMAN OF LIMITED INCOME







*Rock of the Saracen's Head*  
James Walton

*St. Nicholas Church*



# A SPORTSMAN OF LIMITED INCOME

RECOLLECTIONS OF FIFTY YEARS

BY

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“REMINISCENCES OF A COUNTRY POLITICIAN”

“IDYLLS OF A LOST VILLAGE”

“WET DAYS” ETC.

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# A SPORTSMAN OF LIMITED INCOME



## CHAPTER I.

### SPORT FOR LIMITED INCOMES.

A GREAT deal of objectionable matter has lately been printed on "sport for limited incomes," and the doubtless well-meaning writers may have overlooked the fact that every time they put pen to paper, with the intention of showing that there are still a few gleanings to be appropriated by the active and enthusiastic sportsman who is without a superabundance of coin, they are depriving their unfortunate clients of the very goods with which they are professedly endowing them. There is already close competition between millionaires and semi-millionaires on the look out for the best available sport, and with a preference, if possible, to get it for little money. Some of these have to put up with the leavings of their shrewder or more fortunate rivals, while the remainder hasten, by motor-car, to annex the little remnant which, in default of advertising, might still have been available for sportsmen with limited incomes. Moreover, in these days of rapidly acquired fortunes, it appears to me rude and impertinent to suggest that there is any one who could not if he chose rent a deer forest in Scotland or

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a river in Norway. The very paupers are competing for luxuries until recently reserved for the wealthy, and it is hard to say where the competition will stop. In a few years we may find the Guardians of West Ham or Hammersmith renting "shootings" for themselves and their charges, which would surely be preferable to spending the ratepayer's money on the palatial workhouses of which we have recently been reading.

Even if the few remaining chances had not been advertised to death by the well-intentioned writers—when, I wonder, will the proverbial pavement be completed?—sport for the man of limited income would soon have been a thing of the past. The man who could once live fairly comfortably in the country on his few hundreds a year is now between the devil and the deep sea, and being squeezed out of existence between the paupers to whose luxurious idleness he contributes, and the millionaires from South Africa and elsewhere for whose motor-cars he has to provide roads, of the use of which he is day by day being more completely deprived. It is his income that is ear-marked as the first spoil of the Socialist, of whose speedy advent Lord Rosebery has declared himself to be assured. There will soon be nothing left for him but to find a substitute for sport in the more or less monotonous duties in which he may happen to be engaged. And this attempt for some happily constituted natures may not be so utterly hopeless as at first sight it may appear. No doubt there are many men true sportsmen at heart, who never pulled trigger or crossed a horse, and who are yet not discontented with their lot; lawyers whose joy, when they have succeeded in fleecing the client with whom they were quite recently on friendly terms, may be supposed to equal that of a

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bookie on "skinning the lamb," though the latter may show his satisfaction more uproariously; money-lenders whose delight on landing a big fish may exceed that of the successful angler, inasmuch as the latter is under the disadvantage of paying for his amusement. Though I am neither a lawyer nor a "bookie" I have had occasionally to content myself with sport picked up in places where there seemed very little possibility of finding any, and I have even found a County Council meeting preferable to nothing at all. This frame of mind should be the easier since a man may own a favourite for the Derby, or the winner of the Eclipse Stakes, and yet be a miserable hound.

A true sportsman, directly he gets to a place, will set to work at something, if only at clearing out the rats. Wherever he goes he will make the best of things, and by following Horace's advice to this effect he will not only find some measure of happiness himself, but will also help those who, but for his example, might have found their lives unbearable burdens. He will be a staunch friend, but should friends fail him, his enemies should be made to contribute to his enjoyment, and the more the meaner they are.

With regard to shooting, it must be acknowledged that a good deal of what in my youthful days was considered sport would now be despised by those who, never having experienced the joy of the old-fashioned sportsman when making his moderate bag over pointers or setters, consider a big bag and the consequent humiliation of the neighbouring magnate the only desideratum. Talking to a largish landowner the other day, I chanced to inquire how his young pheasants were doing. "Fairly well," he replied; "but I haven't enough; no one will come and

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shoot with me." He looked quite unhappy. I suppose he meant that the crack shots who go about from battue to battue would not give him the benefit of their skill.

Of old the sportsman of limited income used to distribute his spare game amongst his friends and neighbours even less amply endowed. Some of these may have been already provided for, when they would pass on the gift to another, and it was wonderful of how much pleasure a few brace of birds would be the cause, sometimes visiting several houses before being finally domesticated. Now, after his enormous expenses, the successful pheasant-breeder naturally sends his game to the dealers. But little of it, however cheap it may be, reaches the class by whom it was formerly so appreciated, and, except perhaps at some suburban workhouse, the poorer classes do not benefit at all, and doubtless a few flocks of sheep would be better for the country at large than all the pheasants.

Our family had for about 200 years inhabited the village of St. Nicholas at Wade in the Isle of Thanet, where my grandfather prospered during the Peninsular War. A miniature recalls my grandmother, a thread between her finger and thumb, seated at a little table to which is attached a mahogany spinning-wheel. Neither she nor my grandfather were of the order of beings since become celebrated who toiled not neither did they spin. My father married after leaving Oxford, and, having no taste for farming, settled at Walmer, then a small amphibious village, which, though anything but a sporting locality in the usual acceptation of the term, was yet not without its claims to distinction. Its fleet of luggers, manned by the bravest sailors in the world, earned for it and its neighbour Deal undying fame. In the days before steam,



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wrecks were far more frequent on that coast than is the case now. I have watched from our house, when I was a boy, a line of twenty or more luggers towing a wreck off the Goodwins. One or two of these famous boats may still be seen drawn up high and dry, for what purpose it is hard to say, since they never go to sea—to recall, may be, the ancient glories, or continue a futile protest against steam. The descendants of the old sailors for whom no sea was too rough, or wind too wild, still utilise the ocean in the only way left to them, by providing pleasure boats for the visitors whom they entertain with tales of other and more glorious days.

Our house was near Walmer Castle, then the official residence of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, in those days no less a person than the Great Duke of Wellington. My parents were occasional visitors at the castle. Once my father was present at an entertainment in honour of some foreign notables. We had a favourite black and tan terrier who had arrived at a great age, not without being afflicted with the mange. After luncheon the party adjourned to the ramparts, where my father was not greatly pleased to be joined by the old dog, who had somehow gained admission, and who showed his appreciation of the foreigners by utilising them, somewhat to their annoyance, as rubbing posts.

In the summer-time the Cockney visitors used to attend church to stare at the duke. They would sit in rows on the steps leading up from the old chancel, which was on a lower level than the rest of the building; the local gentry, as a rule, declining to admit them into their pews. The duke was then very deaf, and used politely to fix a patent arrangement in his ear when the parson took up his position beneath the sounding board; this

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done he would go quietly off to sleep. He used to wear white trousers and a spencer. A spencer was a sort of grown-up Eton jacket worn over a long coat. Spencers have been long out of fashion, which is perhaps as well, since there are no men like the duke left to wear them. If there had been, the recent attack on dukes would have had fewer supporters. He was then considered, rightly, I think, the greatest man in the world. Had he not beaten Boney? There must, however, have been a few who were surprised at his rising to such eminence. I remember a friend of my father relating how he saw him, when a young man, standing on the steps of one of the few then existent clubs with a vacant look on his face, playing with a bandelore, the winding up and unwinding of which seemed to engage all his attention; and there are no doubt quite a number of young men to-day to whom the resuscitation of this once fashionable toy would be a boon and blessing.

Salutes continued to be fired from the ancient guns on the battlements of Walmer Castle till late in the fifties. I remember riding out of Deal on my pony one morning when I overtook Captain Watts (seneschal, or something, of the three castles, Walmer, Deal, and Sandown—like the more celebrated King of Bohemia) hurrying on foot to the castle to fire a salute in honour of some foreign potentate whose vessel was disappearing in the distance. I jumped off my pony, rather a sorry animal, when he mounted it, and was soon blazing away. The pony came down with me a few days afterwards, taking all the buttons off my waistcoat. Later the saluting was stopped, as it was the cause of breaking the castle windows.

Our nearest neighbour for some time was the then famous novelist, G. P. R. James, who, after a brief popularity, was remembered chiefly to be laughed at for the two

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“lonely mounted horsemen” with whom he was said always to commence business. Over the shoulders of the younger of the two “the rich chestnut hair curled in thick profusion.” When people had done laughing at the two horsemen—who were less ubiquitous than was imagined—they forgot G. P. R. James. Yet I am not sure that some of his work is not worthy of being remembered. A novelist at that date had but few competitors, and no doubt a little more competition would have been good for James. Some of his novels (which used to arrive at our house immediately after publication) were poor enough stuff, while others had the germs of something better. Whatever his novels may have been, G. P. R. James was in private life a most entertaining man. Evidently Charles Lever, a capable judge of literary merit, thought highly of him; witness the correspondence inserted between the two parts of *Harry Lorrequer*. James’s elder son was a playmate of mine, and an original, whatever his father may have been. He was up to all sorts of mischief, one of his pranks being the erection of a flagstaff in a big holly tree in the grounds, on which he used to run up signals which were clearly visible to the ships waiting for orders in the Downs. Old Green, the head of a great shipping firm, had also a flagstaff opposite his house on the beach, and our supplementary signals were the cause of some friction, till one day they were put an end to “by order.”

Our church had originally been a tiny building, whose chief claim to notice was the quaint Saxon porch, under which strange-looking beings, supposed to be antiquarians, might occasionally be seen uncouthly gesticulating. In anticipation of an enlargement of the little watering-place, the churchwardens had run out a square brick building,

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crowned with a slate roof, at the back of the old church. From our pew in the new building, which was on a higher level than the old one, and was reached by a flight of steps, we children used to peep over the boundary fence—save at Christmas-time, when the sprigs of holly, with which it was temporarily adorned, converted it into a prickly hedge—and watch the little squire and his big family at their devotions far below us, as if at the bottom of a well. The old chancel ran on by itself, and formed a sort of cave, whence the minister's voice used to issue with a strangely muffled sound. We had to wait for its tardy arrival round the corner before we could "respond." The remainder of the old church was given up to an enormous "churching" pew, and the foundation of a "three-decker," whose exceptional height enabled it to make quite a respectable show, though it had got up to the knees—so to speak—before arriving at the level of the new building.

The congregation, like the church, was rather mixed. We began, of course, with "the duke" then dropped to half a score or so of admirals, and about an equal number of post-captains—so called, I imagine, from having no posts—then a military official with red nose and collar to match, and after him the smaller fry. The sailors used to crowd the gallery in the new building; when they stood up, their heads almost touched the ceiling, or upper deck, which I suppose suited them to a "T." They seemed to bring with them the murmur of the sea, as sea-shells do. The bees in summer came through the open windows, and, altogether, the effect was decidedly drowsy. It was on one of those afternoons that I, home from school for the holidays, instead of yielding to the influence of the place and hour, sat up straight on my seat, having

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suddenly discovered that I was in love. Amelia, the object of my youthful affections, was the daughter of a neighbouring squire who attended service at our church, where she assisted in the choir. She used frequently to dine at our house between the services. I have outlived my illusions, but I still believe her to have been the most charming girl in the world. She was about nineteen, tall and fair, with the bluest of blue eyes. She wore her brown hair arranged in broad, side plaits, as was the fashion then—in the country. I used to sit next her on Sunday at dinner, and sometimes was permitted to escort her home in the evening. No doubt she made merry at my expense, but if I had known it I should not have cared. I was unmindful of the gap between a girl of nineteen and a boy of fourteen, and saw nothing the least absurd in my devotion.

Our parson was neither rector, vicar, nor curate. Like his parish, he was a sort of nondescript: neither fish nor fowl. Men called him a Perpetual Curate. It is long since I have met with any one holding that particular rank in the establishment, and I presume that, like other and possibly better things, the P.C. has been for some reason—good, bad, or indifferent—abolished. I am, however, unable to recall any other custom or institution over whose grave some *laudator temporis acti* has not been ready to shed a tear. Why he was called “Perpetual” I have never been able to guess, since the fact that the race is extinct is proof that the title was a misnomer. Our P.C. was a short, stout, common-looking man, with a freckled face, a snub nose, and an inordinate craving for snuff and small beer. He lived, as had also been the custom with the movable Perpetuals who had preceded him, over the baker’s shop at the fishing end of the village

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no rectory, vicarage, or parsonage having been provided for his accommodation, nor is it likely that any of these words would appropriately have designated his domicile, supposing him to have had one. The baker's shop was probably stuffy ; whatever the reason, he shortly became a constant guest at our early Sunday dinner. On his second or third appearance he coolly wedged himself in between me and my charmer and engaged her in elephantine small talk. I laughed uneasily at his elderly gambols ; but I shall never forget the shock I received when, a few weeks later, my mother announced—as if it were a matter in which I could have but little interest—that Amelia and the Perpetual were engaged. I went back to school in due course, and, if I did not speedily recover from the blow, I had at least sense enough to bow to the inevitable.

Years, long years passed, during which “there had been many other lodgers” in the “secret cell” once occupied by the divine Amelia. Shortly after his marriage, the Perpetual had been presented—no doubt partly owing to his wife's charming manners and personality—to a good living in a distant part of the country. One day I unexpectedly found myself in his neighbourhood, and lost no time in calling. I was talking to Amelia—who looked almost as young and beautiful as ever—and her husband, when three fine youngsters came into the room. I might have left with the impression that I had seen the whole family, but on a sudden there was an awful noise overhead as if the house was falling, followed by sounds of infant weeping.

“Ah!” exclaimed the ex-Perpetual with a sigh, as his wife rushed hurriedly from the room, “there are five more upstairs.”

I never forgave him that sigh.

## CHAPTER II.

### MY FIRST HARE.

THE day I shot my first hare was a memorable one to me. I must have been twelve or thirteen years old. I don't think my father had ever been much given to shooting, but he had an ancient single-barrelled gun, inscribed with the name of a small local gunsmith, and with this I had shot several blackbirds, and very nearly the gardener. One first of September I was sent, in charge of the bailiff, to try my hand on a big farm in the Isle of Thanet, on which it was hoped I might find a few partridges. We commenced operations in an enormous field of seed clover; I don't think the farmer greatly enjoyed the sight of our trampling it, but he was too good-natured to object. After beating about half the field our setter found a covey. Whether I fired into the brown or not I can't say, but one bird fell and my companion marked down the survivors, about a dozen in number, half a mile away, in "the marshes." These were some middling-sized grass fields divided by dykes. The birds lay like stones in the little tufts of grass left by the sheep, till at last I nearly trod on one. There was no brown this time, at any rate, but a straight, easy shot, and I brought him down. Three more got up, one by one, from similar tufts, and then we couldn't find any more. However, I was delighted, having killed five birds without

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a miss. We were going back, I suppose, to tramp the seed clover for another covey, probably non-existent, when I heard something—it might have been a hippopotamus—move in the rushes by the dyke, and a big hare ran out almost between my legs. I was a bit scared, but managed to knock her over; it seemed like aiming at a barn door. The man took up the hare, and we were moving off when a loud voice hailed us from behind the rushes on the opposite bank; it seems the ditch was our boundary. The voice belonged to a farmer who was either Master or a close friend of the local harriers, and I found he was abusing me in the strongest language known to the natives. I was a mere boy, and I think he might have been a little less objurgatory, but no doubt he felt strongly, and was not one of those who “couldn’t trust himself to speak.” I had never heard of these harriers, but I was soon made aware that to shoot a hare was locally considered *the* unpardonable sin. My body-guard stood up boldly to the farmer (though, of course, he knew all about the harriers, and ought to have warned me), but what with the man’s roaring like a mad bull, and my fear that on my first day’s shooting I had done an unsportsmanlike thing, my day was quite spoilt. I could have cried, and indeed I am not quite sure I didn’t.

I went back to our tenant’s house; he had provided a first-rate dinner, namely, a leg of four-year-old mutton—farmers in those days used to keep a score or so of four-year-old wethers for their own table—and afterwards he took me down to his cellar. This was reached by a flight of steps cut in the chalk, and was in the form of a cross, with arched roof and a receptacle for holy water, in which reposed several bottles of port wine, one of which accom-



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panied us on our return. In some far-away days of religious persecution the "cellar" had doubtless been used by Roman Catholics for the celebration of their interdicted rites. After I had had a glass of wine (the farmer very properly restricted me to one glass), and had presented my host with a brace of birds, I felt better and, returning home in the evening, was emboldened to lay a train of powder from my flask along the station platform, which I struck with my heel when the train drew up, to the surprise and indignation of the few passengers who were preparing to alight. Poor old station on the S.E.R.! I saw it a few years ago, and should be surprised to learn that it had had a coat of paint since the day so long ago when I shot my first hare.

I am not sure that the loud-voiced farmer had anything to do with it, but I have never been very keen on shooting hares. To hear the poor things cry out like children, in their terror and agony, has always been a bit too much for me. Yet I have had some good days with harriers. One season I hunted a good deal with the North Walsham in Norfolk, and saw some really good runs. Many years later I had several days with the Ashbourne Harriers in a stone wall country. This I enjoyed immensely, not having jumped a wall since riding with the Heythrop in my Oxford days. Towards the end of the day, no doubt, one got a little weary of riding round the same course and over exactly the same places in the same walls. A man named Cotton was Master of these hounds, and I always wondered that he did not get a good pack of Fox Hounds. He was a thoroughly good sportsman, and would have made a most capable M.F.H. Perhaps he was a little too much of a rough-rider, and he enjoyed tumbling about on half-made horses, and still

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more on horses not made at all. I have lost sight of him for many years.

In addition to hunting with harriers I have seen a hare torn to pieces and eaten alive at Aintree, and I have also witnessed the cruel farce of "coursing" on a gate-money racecourse. Hare-hunting with beagles I dislike, but perhaps I am not a competent judge of such matters. I chanced, however, to be present when some young Birmingham men in green uniforms were running with beagles on a farm near me in Worcestershire. They went round and round the farm, scouting my suggestion that puss had shown enough sport for one day. At last the poor animal lay down exhausted, and was picked up a few minutes afterwards quite stiff, as if she had been carved in wood. Some one may ask what is to be done with all the currant jelly if hares are not to be killed. Of course they must be killed, but they should not be tortured unnecessarily, and no one but a really good shot should be allowed to lift his gun at a hare.

For my real apprenticeship to sport I was indebted to a neighbour of ours at Walmer, K——, an eccentric man, but a thoroughly good sportsman, who had acquired the right of shooting snipe and wild-fowl on the four or five miles of waste land between Deal and Sandwich, which, together with an inland farm or two, now form part of the Sandwich golf links, and have done so much to resuscitate the ancient and once famous borough. Golfing was an unknown art in England when I was a lad. I don't greatly care for the game, yet I have played on the Sandwich links several times, and never without recalling my early shooting excursions. The sandhills were then the property of the Earl of Guildford, whose tenant must have done very well out of the swarms of rabbits—with which

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K—— was not allowed to interfere—now superseded by crowds of enthusiastic golfers. In my second year at Eton, K—— persuaded my father to give me a new gun, in lieu of the old-fashioned single barrel. K—— then took me to London and chose a gun at Samuel and Charles Smith's, Prince's Street, Leicester Square. In the shop of this famous firm of gun-makers I saw, in the forties, and long after the advent of the percussion-cap, a number of guns belonging to Sir Richard Sutton, one of the finest shots of that or any other day. These were all fitted with flint locks, Sir Richard being of opinion that they were quicker than percussion-caps. He could not have been very far wrong, as with a second gun he could get his two brace out of a covey.

During that winter, K—— and I used to start early from Upper Walmer and, passing through Deal, would commence business by trying for a jack-snipe round a rushy pool in close proximity to Sandown Castle. The pool is still there, but the castle, of similar architecture to its neighbours of Deal and Walmer, was blown up some years ago by order of the Government, which might surely have preserved one of the three forts built by Henry VIII. to withstand a French invasion, if only to show the contrast to our present more expensive mode of securing immunity.

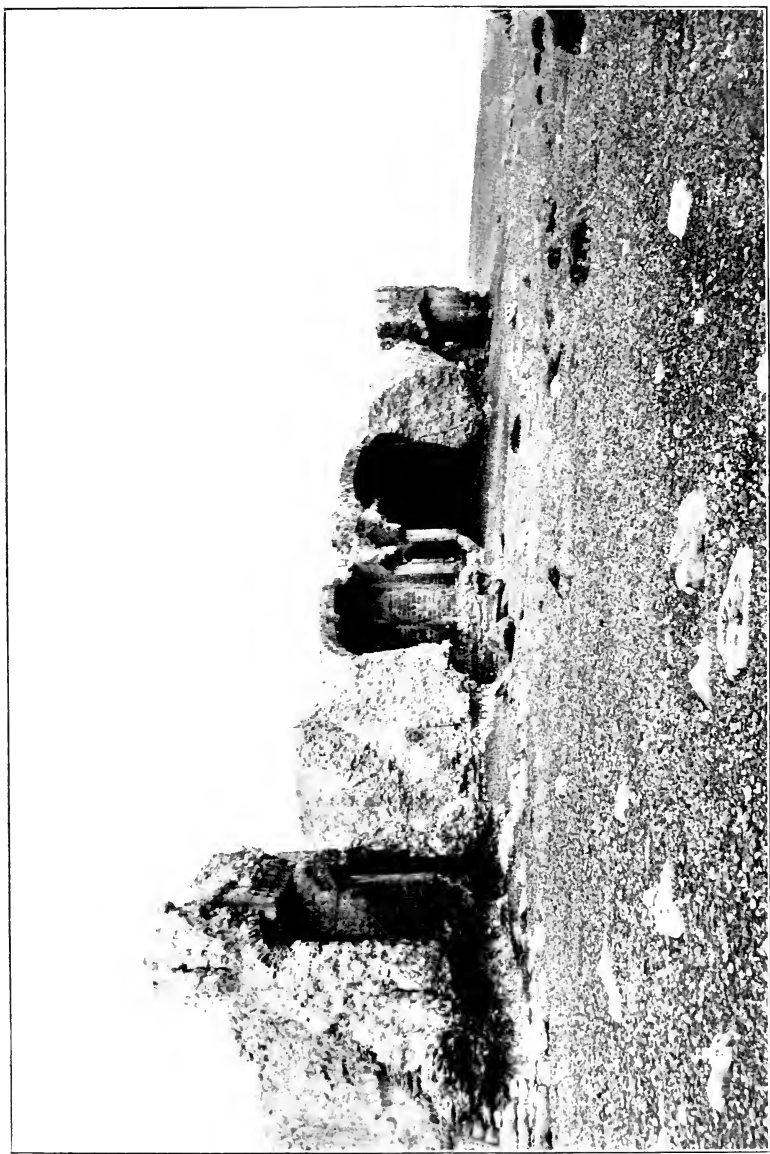
K—— was the best snipe-shot I have ever seen; but one day when there were three jack-snipe at the pool, we left them unharmed after blazing away for some time. Returning just before dark with a fair number of full snipe, we had another try for the little plagues, which may have been congratulating themselves, Agag-like, that the danger was passed, when K—— quickly added them to our bag. I suppose there are jack-snipe still, though it

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is many years since I saw one. They were indeed expensive little birds, costing as much powder and shot as would have sufficed to bag a young elephant, and having so little on them after all.

One pouring wet day K——, who was short-sighted, found increasing difficulty in keeping his spectacles dry. At last the tail of his shirt got thoroughly soaked, and he had to give up shooting, when his language, if excusable, was quite unfit for publication. That was the only occasion on which I ever saw a pack of golden plover. We used to be attended by a strong lad, who carried a pole shod with a square piece of wood to assist us over the dykes, some of which were both wide and deep. The boy had crossed the dyke, and we were still on the other side, and out of sight below the level of the field, when we heard a whirr of wings, and some hundreds of golden plover—a sheet would have covered them—flew over, almost touching our heads. K—— had put down his gun to seize the pole which the boy was sending back. He picked it up quickly, though, to my surprise, he did not fire. It seems a lump of clay from the dyke-side had stuck on the butt of his gun and prevented him from putting it up to his shoulder.

I had not acquired the art of jumping with a pole without a disaster or two. One day I did not send myself far enough, and when I should have been nearing the farther shore I began to go back again. There was an inch or two of ice on the dyke, but I went through it easily, and down to the mud at the bottom. It was freezing sharp, and my clothes were frozen as hard as boards. I was glad to get home and thaw them out. But it was all in the day's work and a useful lesson, for I certainly don't remember being caught napping again.



RUINS OF SANDOWN CASTLE AFTER IT HAD BEEN BLOWN UP BY ORDER OF THE ADMIRALTY.



## CHAPTER III.

### SPORT AT ETON.

**B**EFORE going to Eton I was for some time at the Cholmondely Grammar School, opposite the Old Gate House at Highgate. The headmaster, John Bradley Dyne, was a fairly good imitation of Squeers—of course with the necessary amount of veneer. He lived to a great age, and must have flogged some millions of boys, counting each flogging a boy. About forty years after I left, I made the acquaintance of a young man who had lived at Highgate, and whose father had taken him away from the Grammar School on account of the special attention paid to him by the headmaster. This did not astonish me, as the young man was very plump, and it was one of Dyne's weaknesses to be unable to resist a chubby boy. If, as is to be hoped, flogging, regarded as an exercise, was good for the executioner, I think that with few exceptions it did little harm to the victims. It may even have benefited them; it had, at any rate, the effect of hardening me. I had been previously at several other schools, but never at any place where boys were more ready to fight on small or no provocation. The big boys used to match two little fellows against one another, and the latter, I feel sure, were pleased with the compliment. I had endless fights at this school; one with the son of Sir Richard Bethel,

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afterwards Lord Westbury, who had then a house on Highgate Hill. Dick Bethel used to bully me, but as he was in the sixth form I was afraid to fight him till a big boy, who was by way of being my patron, said he would lick me if I didn't. I decided on fighting, and after a long struggle in the gravelled playground, adjoining the bun-shop into which we used to be hurried by our backers to have our wounds attended to by the kindly baker, I came off victorious. Oddly enough, though I was quite ready to fight, and perhaps for that very reason, I never had a fight at Eton, though mills in "Sixpenny" were then very common, and invariably fought out to the bitter end.

The only boy I remember at Dyne's who became of any note at all was Edmund Yates, afterwards owner of *The World*. He was a curious fellow, always ranting plays and songs, and after Christmas spouting pages and pages of some new pantomime that had taken his fancy. It seemed clear he would go on the stage, or to Astley's, where he would have made an excellent clown. He wrote two or three fairly good novels before making his mark with *The World*, but they are forgotten, as is the case no doubt with many others better fitted to survive. Yates' mother had been a rather celebrated actress, and boys who objected to him would keep in their desks a penny coloured portrait of Mrs. Yates, in one of her chief rôles, to be produced when Edmund became too uproarious.

I had hitherto gone up to London in a four-horse coach from Dover. When my father and mother went any distance they had, of course, to post. There were even in those days beginning to be too many people for the posthorses, and there was sometimes immense diffi-



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culty in completing a journey. If it had not been for railroads, people would have had to stay at home ; perhaps there would have been no great harm in that. Once I remember my father trying an experiment, and stopping to change horses at some second-rate changing houses, which on the London road were put in between the better known ones. But the experiment was a failure. These small changing houses are always recalled to me by Dibdin's *High-Mettled Racer*, where the postilions "loiter their time at some hedge alehouse door," and indeed they were little better. The Fountain, at Canterbury, our last change coming from London, was in those days a famous house. I well remember old Wright, one of the last of the old-fashioned innkeepers, who always brought in the first dish and took off the cover with his own hands. Once when travelling down with my father we brought the gardener's son behind on the dicky. He had been a page in London, and had misbehaved himself. It was a bright, sunshiny day, and I had to keep my eyes on the shadow of the dicky, as my father expected him to jump down and make off.

There was an end to the coaches when I went to Eton, or rather an end to their glories. Coaches were to die a lingering death in many out of the way places ; and indeed they linger yet, creeping about like bluebottle flies before the approach of winter. I now travelled by the new South-Eastern Railway. At some distance from London a traveller on the S.E.R. saw, three or four miles apart, a number of little red brick buildings with spires, which he at first mistook for churches. These were the stations of the Atmospheric Railway. All that I can remember of this railway is that it had a big tube in the centre of the rails, and that on the top of the tube ran a

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slit which, after the passing of one of the trains, had to be stopped with grease by hand. This, added to the fact that stations (for grease, I suppose) had to be erected in such close proximity, may have been fatal to what was no doubt an ingenious invention. Very soon the tubes were taken up to be sold for old iron, and the pretty little church-like stations taken down.

During my first two years at Eton I boarded at Vava-sour's—a dame's—of which I will only say that no one has written a book to prove that it was in any way a notable house, though amongst us was a member of the eight, "Hookey" Reed, an Irishman; Guy Phillips, even then a great book collector, and later thought worthy of a place in the gallery of Vanity Fair, and a bowler, Fellows, who was in the eleven, and whose nickname of "Deeper" was derived from his having rashly tried to pass before he could swim more than a stroke or two. When, soon after leaving the punt, he was seen to be in difficulties, a friend shouted from the bank, "Halloa, Fellows, where are you going to?" "Deeper," gurgled Fellows, as he disappeared beneath the waves of "Cuckoo Weir."

My tutor was W. A. Carter, to whose house, then at the corner of Keats' Lane, I was removed in my second year. Next door was Evans', and I can't honestly say that I remember anything very remarkable about it. I remember Evans the drawing-master very well, and one of the first boys I made acquaintance with was his son. My tutor had sent for me a day or two after my arrival to find out what I could do in the way of Latin versification. After I left Highgate my father had sent me to a coach at Brighton for a fortnight, but as this gentleman used to read his own verses to me all day, and in the evening send me to get mussels off the rocks for supper,

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I had not gained much knowledge of the art which was then more thought of than anything else at Eton, except wet-bobbing. In fact, I could better have made a pair of breeches than even an inferior pair of longs and shorts. I was sitting alone and very disconsolate in the pupil-room when young Evans came in, and asked me what was the matter. Finding I could not make head or tail of them, he finished off the copy of verses for me, a questionable kindness, as I was unable to live up to it. I don't remember seeing much of him afterwards. I chiefly remember Evans' from the fact that after I got into the boats I had a poet, or part of one, to save me from labouring too hard at my verses, and so perhaps injuring my rowing. The poet came over the roof from Evans' at night. In *Annals of an Eton House*, W. H. Freemantle (Dean of Ripon) writes: "My brother's room had a window by which we could gain access to the roof, and in the hot summer nights some of us used to sit upon the tiles and sing choruses." It sounds rather like cats, but no doubt my poet came to me through that window.

Of course in my first summer half I lost no time in learning to swim. I suppose there is still a "passing master" before whom the candidates stand stark naked—or perhaps that would no longer be *convenable*—to jump off at a given signal into ten feet or so of water. A waterman was, of course, in attendance to rescue the failures who had to try again another day. After passing I at once betook myself to boating, my one thought being how to get more and more time for the river. There were sportsmen, no doubt, as keen on dry-bobbing as I was on wet-bobbing, but to them the real glories of Eton were never revealed.

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During the winter half when the river was interdicted, there was some little difficulty, no doubt, in finding substitutes for rowing. It was when I was either in middle or upper fourth that I was primarily responsible for taking the whole form to Slough Steeplechases on a whole schoolday. About twenty-five minutes after four, a perspiring crowd, without a dozen books among them, trooped into school. This was one of the things a master had occasionally to bear. The accompanying grin was not suggestive of much enjoyment.

When I was a trumpery "lower boy" I had to scheme, with far more trouble than it would have cost me to become an accomplished versifier, how to avoid making verses. When I got into the boats, and it was hoped I might become a light of the Eton rowing world, I was allowed to take my studies fairly easily. But when later I arrived at the dignity of "the eight," the masters with one accord seconded to the best of their ability my efforts to evade their educational offerings, insomuch that I could, so to speak, rest on my classical oars. On my real ones I never rested, but rowed as far, as often, and as hard as I could. Anything that interfered with the wet-bob's allegiance to the river was looked on as a cruel wrong. I remember once arranging to row up to Monkey Island one "long after four" with the fellow—Dorrington, now Sir John, and a man of some note in the political world—with whom I had a boat. To my utter astonishment—I had never heard of such a thing before and thought it a great piece of impertinence—my tutor sent to tell me to come to him to have my verses looked over. I paid no attention to his request, not thinking it right to encourage him in such practices. I don't think I ever saw a man in such a rage in my life as was "my tutor" when

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I told him afterwards that an engagement up the river had prevented me from accepting his invitation. No doubt he considered "putting me in the bill"—which was fortunately the worst he could do—a very inadequate punishment.

It is hard to conceive how any Etonian towards the end of the forties could escape being some sort of a sportsman. There were no doubt a few who resisted the influence, yet to any boy with a turn that way, the example of the headmaster must have been of the greatest advantage. For instance what could possibly have been more sporting than the cautious way in which Dr. Hawtrey made his appearance at a fight. "Six-penny," where the fistic encounters came off, was close to his house, and just as matters appeared to be going too far, the Doctor, in full fig, would appear, apologetically, round the corner. This was generally sufficient to stop the affray, though once I remember the combatants being whisked off by their friends, and finishing up at the other end of the playing fields. It was seldom very long before a new boy made the acquaintance of the Doctor, who was generally supposed to take more pride in his wielding of the birch than in any other of the varied accomplishments which exalted him into the last of the Admirable Crichtons; and in elevating a disagreeable duty that he was obliged to perform, and which may at first have inspired disgust in his well-stored mind, into a high art, he showed himself as a sportsman no whit inferior to numbers of those who, partly, no doubt, from the effects of his skilful castigations, became afterwards celebrated on the racecourse or in the hunting-field.

Some of us, I feel sure, had a laudable anxiety to

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prevent the Doctor from feeling that there was anything derogatory to a man of his varied accomplishments in birching little, or sometimes big, boys. Occasionally one of us would vary what might otherwise have become a wearisome duty. I remember a boy named Northcote being once bidden "to stay"; but as he rather evidently disliked the idea, Goodlake, afterwards a Crimean hero, and a sportsman above the common, offered to take his place for a shilling. The Doctor, thinking the sight likely to be deterrent—wherein I think he was mistaken—rather liked the boys to be present; it was before the days of private executions. On this occasion he was astonished at the crowded state of his sanctum, and the giggling and laughing that was going on. When Northcote's name was called, Goodlake came forward.

"Very heicenus offence"—that was the way the Doctor pronounced it. "Go down."

"Please sir," said Goodlake, apparently in deadly fear, "do give me first fault."

It was a rule of the Doctor's never to flog a boy the first time he was complained of for an ordinary offence, but he no doubt had his suspicions, and indeed his usual formula, "I've seen your face before" was only too true. The tittering grew louder and louder, while the Doctor repeated mechanically, "Go down, sir, go down." At last Goodlake "went down."

If the Doctor ever "gave it" to a boy it was that day to Goodlake, who kept up a fire of satirical lamentations, and was generally thought to have earned his shilling when the executioner's wearied arm dropped at last to his side.

I feel sure the Doctor would have appreciated

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Goodlake's sportsmanlike attempt to introduce a little variety into his monotonous rôle.

In my opinion the annual charge for birch-rods—with which the parents of the just and the unjust were equally credited—might with advantage have been reduced. The authorities, no doubt, prided themselves on the fact that they were equal to any possible emergency. The birch-rods were delivered in enormous loads on farm wagons, and the effect on evil-doers might have been deterrent but for the obvious reflection that unless a certain number of boys, good or bad, were flogged, the skill both of the birch-maker and the wielder thereof would be wasted.

Lower-boy Etonians in my day were greatly given to hero-worship, but it would have required more imagination than we had at command to make heroes out of the assistant masters who were, generally speaking, without any sportsman-like attributes. Some of them had a nasty way of standing about up town when we were hurrying up to the river on long after fours, and so, by the foolish rule then in operation—which has since, I am told, undergone some modification—forcing us to shirk into a shop, and lose some of the precious minutes that could never be regained. An exception to these pedagogues was Johnson, who was no doubt at heart a true sportsman. His house was just opposite "my dame's," and once when there was an epidemic of pea-shooting—none of your little penny tin affairs, but glass tubes a yard or so long—there was a battle royal between the two houses. The longer range of our weapons gave us the victory, and Johnson's windows were incontinently smashed. He sent over a note, asking us to desist, as his sister was ill, and he certainly never had to complain of us again. The underlying suggestion that, under other

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circumstances, he would have taken no notice, struck us as admirable. Johnson was very blind, and on my first whole schoolday, the form being supposed to have prepared a certain number of lines of Horace for repetition, I was surprised to see a boy go up to his desk—literally under his nose, not a very long one—and pin to its front a page torn from a new boy's book. It looked a risky proceeding, but one boy after another came forward, read his portion, and triumphantly retired. While "up to" this worthy man, I never again troubled myself to learn anything by heart. Naturally I was annoyed when my next master saw everything that went on, even without spectacles.

So determined were we to find heroes among the big fellows that we elected some who had very poor credentials for the position. There was a fellow, "swell" Jervis, who was quite looked up to from wearing, in addition to the forbidden "cutaway" coat, a huge bunch of "charms," which he was always adding to. He was frequently to be seen in Meyrick's little shop, opposite Barnes' Pool, inspecting the new arrivals, of which, no doubt, he had first choice. I don't think he had any higher claims to our notice. Since leaving Eton, I have never met or heard of "swell" Jervis; but I have come across a few of my boyhood's heroes, and, to my regret, have found the majority quite commonplace. They must have stopped growing, physically and mentally, directly they left Eton, while some of the despised ones trained on.

One who did more credit to our intuition was H. H. Blundell, who, as a boy, seemed able to do anything and everything, and whose future was not to be so disappointing as that of so many others. A survival from the Crimea, where, if I remember rightly, he filled the some-



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what anomalous position of M.F.H., he went into Parliament, and was for a long time one of the most useful of the Army Members, till he was beaten by, I think, a Labour Member. I saw a notice of his death some years ago. Shortly before, I had been at the House of Commons when an elderly man with a white moustache drove up and entered the House. I asked a policeman who it was. "Colonel Blundell," he replied, and I felt a thrill.

Another who fully justified our choice was Chitty, afterwards the well-known judge, who was cricketer, oarsman, sculler, and *facile princeps* at everything. I was in "the eight" when he brought down a crew from Oxford to row us from "the rushes" to Windsor Bridge. They went away very fast, but, to my astonishment, we came up with them at Lower Hope, where I was almost sorry to hear the great oarsman give utterance to a gasp or a groan. He was, no doubt, out of training. We turned inside them, and they saw us no more.

The late Earl Beauchamp was about two years my senior, and I well remember seeing him walk up the chapel just before service and present the chief chorister with a sheet of music paper, on which was inscribed a chant of which he was, presumably, the composer. I don't remember that Lygon, as he was then called, identified himself with either wet- or dry-bobs. But anything is sport to the man who enjoys it. Etonians have always had a fine talent for nicknames, and Lygon's was "Pius Æneas." I next came across him at the first meeting of the new Worcestershire Council, when he was Lord-Lieutenant of Worcestershire. He was a staunch Tory—differing therein from the present holder of the title—very arrogant, and impatient of opposition. He used very

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harsh language to me one day from his seat on the dais, and for a long time I did not speak to him. One day he came across the street to me in Worcester, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Let bygones be bygones." This gave me a new and more favourable opinion of him, and showed him capable of generosity and good feeling. Shortly after, having consulted some of my allies on the County Council, I wrote to him to say that the county was sick of the then chairman, and would be grateful if he would take up the position at the next election. He replied, saying that he appreciated the compliment, "especially as coming from you," but that he would not like to supersede the present chairman, who had done so much for the county. He was in error, as events speedily proved, but he was not to witness the fiasco, as he died very suddenly a few weeks later, when I was glad to have had his kind and friendly letter.

There has been so much written about Eton during the last few years—I have myself written a good deal—that I am loth to dwell on reminiscences which there are few left to recall. There was the match at "the Wall" when, in company with O. Meade-King, afterwards president of the O.U.B.C., I was kept back for stoning the "tugs"—between whom and the Oppidans was in those days constant warfare. Whether I really stoned any one I can't say, but Weston's yard had been recently gravelled, as I afterwards knew a Highway Board thoughtfully to provide large heaps of stones ready for use on nomination day. For two or three days we had to stay up, and attend chapel under the concentrated gaze of I forget how many collegers. The punishment may have been clever, but we had only to show ourselves once or twice a day, and managed to amuse ourselves fairly well.

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Then there were the delightful Sundays in the summer half, when the weary oarsmen were glad to be at rest, and indeed would willingly have stayed in bed till chapel time, but at eight o'clock there was "private." It was a nuisance to turn out, and find that "my tutor" had been unable to do so. When we thought a "run" was overdue we used to arrange on Saturday to absent ourselves *en masse*. It generally happened that "my tutor" was wide awake on those occasions, and, no doubt, when he found himself the sole occupant of the pupil-room he felt dire wrath, such as might have moved Achilles; but he had to grin and bear it, as he couldn't put all his pupils "in the bill" at once. There never was a less satisfactory arrangement than the "run" by which nobody profited. The most popular preacher in my day was old Bethel, who had "the loudest voice"—as Byron says of another person—"I e'er was deafened with." Though his matter was of the poorest, the way in which he bellowed it out redeemed it from the commonplace. Modern politicians have since utilised the discovery that if they only roar loudly enough no one inquires very strictly as to the meaning of their eloquence. The Eton choir was very good in my time, or we thought so. We took a personal interest in the more notable members. If the anthem chanced to be a favourite, we would run up to St. George's after afternoon chapel for a second edition. My special favourites were, "In Jewry is God known," and the anthem from the twenty-eighth chapter of Job. I could not control my indignation the other day when a musical friend expressed an unfavourable opinion of the former. The big, fat chorister's rendering of the words, "The deep saith it is not in me," was wonderful, and I should like to have heard him in "Drinking, drinking, drinking." No doubt he and old

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Bethel, working together, could have brought down the chapel had they been so minded. When we were in funds, a favourite stroll for a summer afternoon was Bothams', at Salt Hill. No bottled cider has since seemed worth drinking. There was a market garden—Frost's, near Salt Hill—where, on payment of a shilling, we might stuff ourselves with strawberries—I doubt if Frost made a fortune at it—then home to tea. How dry and stale the bread used to be on Sundays, while the butter would be melted, and the tallow candles on the top of the "bureau" would lean over into the room, demoralised by the heat.

A memorable incident in the career of a wet-bob was his introduction to "Cellars," an institution whose meetings were held at "Tap," a more or less privileged beer-house, situated in the High Street, a little out of bounds. This function was held in the interval between dinner and chapel on half and whole holidays, and was attended by those in the boats, and a few dry-bobs. The attractions were beer of a superior quality to that at "my tutor's," bread and cheese, and celery in season. There was also a celebrated biscuit to be had there, bearing some resemblance to a Shrewsbury cake, the recipe for which was reported to be procurable for a payment of twenty shillings; but I never knew an Etonian who had gone to the expense of acquiring it. A pound in those days was, to say the least, a pound. On one's first appearance at "Cellars" the ceremony of drinking "the long glass" had to be faced. This was a long tube with a bulb at the end, out of which when you tipped it up the beer came rushing with a blob, blob, blob, on to your shirt front. In its yard of length it held about a pint. Any one acquitting himself well was cheered, which may have been the reason why those who were anticipating the

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ordeal sometimes went through a regular course of instruction at the hands of the potman, exalted into a professor *pro tem*. I think the boys who practised most failed most egregiously, but, indeed, any one who appeared in chapel after drinking "the long glass" without carrying the tell-tale marks of his failure on his shirt front, was the exception that proved the rule.

"Check nights"—so called from the shirts donned by the crews—included a supper washed down with unlimited champagne, held in a room attached to Surly Hall, an inn on the Windsor side of the river. These not infrequent dissipations were quite tiny orgies compared to that held on the fourth of June, which, naturally, came only once a year. Yet I have seen a "check night" concluded by the chairs and tables being thrown through the windows into the river, where they were passed, a mile or so on their way to Boveney, in rowing home. The proceedings on the fourth of June have been often described, and, together with "check nights," have long since been done away with. *Eheu fugaces* . . .

I got into the eight in '51, when the only thing to interfere with my happiness—the fly, so to speak, in my ointment—was the new style of rowing, introduced by a faddist who came down to coach us, which he called the "elastic curve." The author of this torture, which I am glad to remember was exceedingly shortlived, posed as a great sportsman, but has always been connected in my mind with Surtees' great hunting authority, Pomponius Ego, because all his talking and writing about style was in reality only his method—which he may have thought very subtle—of advertising himself. You were supposed to work the "elastic curve" in a circle, and after the manner of a paddle-wheel. But paddle-wheels are,

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fortunately for them, inanimate. No way of rowing could possibly have been invented better calculated to induce speedy fatigue, and tire every muscle of your body without at all increasing the speed of the boat. With the exception of the Captain of the Boats, who could not have been more enthusiastic had the invention been his own, we all hated it, and, I fear, would have been pleased to locate Pomponius in a place where his "elastic curve" would have had no water to act in.

It was the custom for boys who were leaving to write a copy of English verses in the last week of the half, on the joys of schooldays, and their griefs at leaving them. Of course these verses were generally awful balderdash. Though I had been unaccustomed to writing my own verses, I decided, when the time came for my "Vale.," to dispense with the services of my poet. Possibly I was tired of this official's productions, and indeed they were generally such poor stuff that it was a wonder that I had not long ago given him his congé. Very naturally he kept his good things—if he had any, which I doubt—for himself, and his clients had to put up with beginnings, middles, and endings of Virgilian, Ovidian, and Horatian lines, which he fitted together as children used to do with the old wooden puzzles. As Byron remarked of another poet, "his muse made increment of anything," though it was generally considered that he was best on "Spring"; perhaps for the reason that this subject made its appearance about once every half.

I worked very energetically at my "Vale.," and remember thinking when it was finished that it was not half bad. I was therefore not very pleased when P——, the master close to whom I was standing, on commencing its perusal, looked up at me with a quiet twinkle in his eye. Then I



DR. HAWTREY AS "JANUS" (ABOUT 1848),  
(By an Eton Boy.)





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saw his face grow redder and redder, and it became evident that he was in danger of exploding from suppressed laughter. I peeped over his shoulder to ascertain, if possible, which passages had so mightily impressed him. As I did so he regained his gravity with a struggle, and carefully folding up my "Vale." put it in his pocket, and called up the next boy. When I regained my seat I saw that he was regarding me with a puzzled air of amusement. But by this time I imagine my face was as red from anger as his from suppressed merriment. I have forgiven almost everybody everything—as one gets older one sees that in the majority of cases no injury was intended, or, better still, that none was effected—but I have never been able to forgive or forget P——.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT "THE HOUSE" IN THE FIFTIES.

I LEFT Eton in 1851, rowing down to London in the "ten-oar," and the coveted light blue shirt, and having a fine time at the Star and Garter and Hampton Court on the way down. After the Long Vacation I became a member of "the House." My four years at Eton had fitted me to take honours as a waterman, and I am not sure that I had then any higher ambition than a continuance of rowing, sculling, and punting. Having lived on the sea-coast, I had seen no hunting beyond a few days with the local harriers, and as I was soon asked to row in the Ch.Ch. boat I remained for some time constant to the river. In my first year I rowed behind E. C. Burton, a connection of mine, who came up from Westminster, and was in "the House" boat for five years. He died quite recently at the age of seventy-nine. He was a great oarsman, and a proficient in all sports demanding strength, courage, and endurance. He was described by Sir John Astley in his *Recollections* as the best all-round athlete and sportsman in England.

One's ideas change with one's surroundings; somehow there did not seem to be as much fun in rowing at Oxford as at Eton. Certainly there was the day we bumped Exeter, who were fourth on the river, and who rowed on without acknowledging the bump, which they, no doubt,

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imagined they had escaped by the skin of their teeth. Next day we were determined there should be no mistake, so rowed on till our boat was level with their number four, when we turned on them, and sent them up high and dry on the bank. I met an Exeter man a few years ago who was rowing on that occasion, and he still seemed to feel rather sore.

It was not long before I found the Isis both winding and unsavoury; there were far too many dogs in it, and it was hard to say, since there was then no dog tax, where they all came from. Their name was legion—whatever pet names they may once have answered to—and if you were upset you found yourself swimming amongst a whole pack of them.

Wet-bobbing at that date was unfashionable at "the House." Almost every one rode, or attempted to do so. Even the "scrivs" hunted on presumably cheap steeds, whose visible anatomy might have been hired from the British Museum instead of from a little dealer in Bear Lane. There were three men "up" with me who afterwards became masters of hounds, all of them Etonians, and two of them from "my tutor's." These were Morris, who had the Shropshire, Boughey (afterwards Sir Thomas), who hunted the Albrighton for many years, and Askew, who had a pack somewhere in the north. Oddly enough not one of the three would have ridden over a hurdle to save his life, but they were nevertheless good sportsmen. My tastes might have led me to join the crowd at Canterbury gate had not hunting been so expensive. After all, shooting was good enough for me, and it was not long before I discovered that it was possible to get some—not perhaps the first quality—at a moderate cost. The relations between farmers and undergraduates were,

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no doubt, a little strained, and indeed the two classes seldom met save when the farmer, aided by sturdy labourers with pitchforks, succeeded in nabbing some unfortunate "larker." But some of the farmers were good fellows enough, and did not object to your walking over their land—which was in great part water—in search of snipe. I don't know how things are now, but in those days snipe simply swarmed in the neighbourhood of Oxford. One would scarcely have been surprised to flush one in Peckwater, or even to hear one "scape" out of your bath in the morning. As they had not arrived at the tameness of the modern pheasant, their acquirement was a laudable ambition. I was so unfortunate as to be absent when two friends of mine succeeded in bagging forty-two couple somewhere in the neighbourhood of Islip. Partly, no doubt, owing to their success they got a little elevated on the way home. The snipe had been tied up by the heads in bunches, and these were to be seen strewn about Peckwater for days after. There were plenty of places near Oxford where any one who knew his way about could get a few snipe without trespassing, or at any rate without giving offence. *Par exemple* there was always a snipe or two in the season in the little rushy gutter that ran round the old racecourse at Abingdon. On Sir George Bowyer's place (now Radley College) a couple or so might be had without going many yards from the high road. The more reckless or ambitious sportsman could easily in the course of an afternoon trespass on the adjoining estates of three or four of the local nobility and gentry, when the number of one's enemies worked rather for safety than danger.

I had a friend at "the House" who would neither row nor ride, though on one occasion he made an exception in

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favour of the latter, and we used frequently to go shooting together. We confined our attentions almost entirely to snipe. There was a tow-headed old fellow who went by the name of Warmingpan, who had a punt in which he used to convey us from one likely spot on the river to another, and occasionally when our presence on the other side was a matter of urgency. I had always fancied him a bit of a poacher, and any doubts I may have had were resolved when I visited Godstow a few years ago. Meeting the elderly proprietress of the inn, whom I remembered quite a young girl, I asked her what had become of "old Warmingpan." She looked puzzled for a moment, and then shocked. "——!" she said, giving his correct name. "He got transported for . . ."—well, for doing what he ought not to have done. Poor old Warmingpan! I can't remember how my friend and I first got introduced—for, at Oxford, of course no acquaintance would have been possible without a formal introduction—to a farmer, Mr. Gaylad, as he preferred to be called, who lived about five miles out of Oxford. L—— and I had several times shot over his farm, which abounded in game, before we invited him, one day after market, to finish up the evening in college. I don't know what Oxford port may be now, but in those days it was a dark, thick compound, a foe to sobriety, and little indebted, I should imagine, to the grape for any portion of its not too evident merits. Mr. Gaylad, however, found it so much to his liking that it was quite late before he announced his intention of starting to walk home. A suggestion that he should be invested before leaving in a cap and gown was received with acclamation; and on his appearance in these vestments, and half-seas over, in "the High," he was immediately proctorised, when his answer to, "Your

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name and college, sir?" was more objurgatory than polite. The joke was repeated till we had either had enough of Mr. Gaylad or had used up all the available caps and gowns, of which, since he never thought of returning them, he must have had a large if not very valuable collection. It was strange that the proctors never showed the slightest diminution of ardour.

L——, though a great ally of mine, was not every one's money. He had a nasty way of coming up behind you, placing his gun close to the back of your head, and shooting your cap off—a trick, the safe performance of which gave evidence of a certain amount of skill. In default of other game—he had the greatest possible objection to returning with an empty bag—he would sometimes take a pot shot at you when he thought you were at a safe distance—which you were not. Nor was it only the companion for the day of his shooting excursions who was endangered by his recklessness. One day, pistol-shooting in his rooms, the mark a candle balanced on the handle of the door leading into the "scout's hole," E——, the scout, rushed out of his sanctum, pale as a ghost. "Mr. L——, you'll be the death of me; I know you will. If I hadn't just moved a step on one side, I should be a dead man now." On inspection it was found that a bullet had penetrated the thick oak door, passed out through the window at which the scout was accustomed to stand, and so into Bear Lane. Indeed, L——'s scout had an adventurous time of it, partly, no doubt, made up to him in perquisites.

Once, when L—— was returning with empty pockets by way of Port Meadow, he calmly shot a goose, presumably the property of some Oxford "freeman," and stuffed it into his capacious pocket, with the remark, no doubt true, that it was better than nothing. On another

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occasion, having had similar bad luck, he arranged with a farmer, through whose yard he passed on the way home, for the purchase of a couple of queerly marked ducks that took his fancy. These the farmer threw into the air, and L—— shot and pocketed them. Arrived at his rooms he sent post haste for D——, an undergraduate who fancied himself a bit of an ornithologist. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and D—— at once declared the ducks to be of an exceedingly rare species, seldom seen in England, and evidently but just arrived from the coast, as was proved by the shellfish still in their crops. These were beans, as the ornithologist may have discovered on skinning them. To the best of my recollection he recouped himself by keeping and eating the ducks.

On another occasion, coming upon a stray deer near Wychwood Forest, L—— incontinently shot it, then, arranging with a butcher who chanced to come by, he had it cut up and sent to "the House"; when he presented the senior censor with a haunch. This dignitary was, of course, horrified, when, as was natural a serious row arose over the affair.

Only once did L—— desert his favourite sport for a meet of the Heythrop in full hunting costume, spurs only excepted, which he could not be persuaded to don. The affair was mooted, as most foolish ones were, at a "wine," one friend (?) being responsible for the mount—a seasoned and temperate hunter—while the costume was contributed piecemeal. L—— had never been seen outside a horse before, and, indeed, said that he had never mounted one before in his life. Be this as it may, it was, no doubt, his first appearance with hounds, and there was much curiosity as to how he would comport himself. In the event he rather disappointed expectations.

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He jogged along without quite losing his balance, and when a fox was found, he followed modestly in the rear, to the confusion of those who thought him capable of trying to catch sly Renard. The run was over a stone wall country, and, waiting till the wall had, as always happens, been gradually levelled, he rode solemnly through the gap with the ruck. He arrived home in safety, if rather the worse for wear, and was never known to mount a horse again.

One thing leads to another, which may be the purpose some of them were intended to serve. Even the snipe were not always so handy that it was possible to reach our shooting ground on foot. Hiring was expensive, so, by the advice of one of our farming friends, I went to look at a pony standing at old Perrin's stables in St. Aldates. Old Perrin has, of course, long since departed, but his stables still remain and serve their original purpose, which is the case with very few. The last time I was at Oxford I saw that Joe Tollit's stables, in what was then Bear Lane, had become the appanage of the Mitre, while Figg's in St. Aldates, where dwelt the indomitable badger, to whom Sunday—as if he were a parson—was anything but a day of rest, is (or was when I saw it) some sort of a place for hiring and, I suppose, making, steam launches, which seems a droll, or, perhaps, rather a sad finish for a hunting stable.

Old Perrin was a curious character, of the sort depicted in *Soapy Sponge*, and other similar tales, and as he was reported, quite truthfully I believe, to starve his horses, these might be expected to improve in the hands of a new owner. The pony for which he asked £15 was a ragged, loose-limbed mare, very blood-like, but in sorry condition. She turned out quite a useful animal.



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When she had improved in condition I used to ride her up to Bullingdon, and she won many times on the course encircling the cricket ground. On one occasion I was challenged by an undergraduate, Jex-Blake, the owner of an Arab pony, who may have presumed on his jockeyship. I won cleverly by a neck, when he immediately offered to run me again, and was greatly annoyed when I left him forty lengths in the rear. Being at a political meeting a few years ago I met him, high up in the Church, and after a few remarks he turned the conversation to my pony. "And have you," he blandly inquired, "got her yet?" I replied that if she had been alive it would have been a record, as she would have been about fifty years old.

The pony carried me so well at Bullingdon that I thought I would try her with hounds, when she proved exceedingly clever, though hardly up to my weight. As I had deserted the river for shooting, I now began to give up the latter for hunting, being careful to get as much sport as I could for my money. I bought a big, strong, fine-looking mare from Joe Tollit; unfortunately, she did not prove very sound, and at the end of the season she had to be blistered. Even after summering, her forelegs appeared unlikely to stand hard work. Being at T. T. Drake's sale of cubhunters at the Station Hotel, a farmer I knew, a very cautious rider, who hunted regularly with the Old Berkshire, bought for twenty guineas a five-year-old bay thoroughbred mare, that looked sound and like galloping. Meeting him a few days later mounted on his new purchase, he complained that she was no use to him, as she went too fast at her fences. "How would it be," he asked, "if you were to let me have that mare of yours and take this one in exchange? Your mare will never do another season's hunting, and she would suit me to

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breed from, while this one"—bringing his hand down on the flank of his mount—"might win a steeplechase at Aylesbury." I liked the idea immensely; the ex-cub-hunter was in capital condition, only wanting a few gallops, and the exchange was speedily arranged, my friend handing over in addition a certain amount of cash. Bracelet, as she was called, went into training at once, taking her gallops on Port Meadow. I had a very useful groom, who had been in a racing stable, and had profited considerably by the experience. The undergrad. races at Aylesbury were rather poor affairs, and the pick of the competing horses generally hailed from Charley Symonds', or Joe Tollit's stables. Between these two was a certain amount of rivalry, Symonds being, for some occult reason, considered the more fashionable, while Tollit was the more workmanlike. It was the usual thing for a sporting undergraduate who fancied he could ride a bit to hire one or other of the rather moderate "cracks" owned by Symonds or Tollit, and himself appear in the saddle at Aylesbury, sometimes with less disastrous results than might have been expected. Joe Tollit was indeed a notable character; he was a fine rider, which could not truthfully be asserted of his rival. The way in which he would "lark" over big places when going from one covert to another caused intending purchasers to imagine that his mount was a particularly docile animal, requiring only the proverbial rein of worsted, whereas the contrary was often the case. Joe was an excellent fellow in his way. I was so unlucky while at Oxford as to break a collar-bone in two successive years, each time within a week or two of Christmas. On the second occasion I was staying up for the vacation, and had three horses at Tollit's; two of them well-bred screws,

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the other sounder and less useful. Finding I should not be able to ride for six weeks or so, during which time the horses would be eating their heads off, I sent for Joe and asked him to take them off my hands. He demurred to this, saying he had quite enough horses, and the season was half over. However, he very kindly sent for his brother, a London dealer, who took two out of the three for a fair price, one of the selected being the sound one, a very poor jumper, and indeed the cause of my accident. While I was laid up, my mother came all the way from Lancashire to visit me at my lodgings in St. Aldates, where some officers of the Oxford Militia, one of whom was an old Eton friend, were doing their best to console me. They retired on her arrival, leaving dense clouds of smoke behind them, and my mother returned next day quite reassured as to my health. I met Joe Tollit at Warwick races shortly before his death, when he complained bitterly of the decay of sport at Oxford, by which he meant, no doubt, the scarcity of undergraduates who wished to hire hunters.

After a week or two on Port Meadow, my man gave it as his opinion that Bracelet was very fast, and that he was right was proved when she easily won her race on the first day at Aylesbury. I had been so fortunate as to secure the services of L——, about the best of the undergraduate jockeys—a one-eyed man, no doubt, among the blind. I was, of course, delighted at my success, and made sure of repeating the victory on the second day, when I should have the same horses to encounter. However, my jockey was dissuaded by the blandishments of Symonds or Tollit, I forget which, from riding for me again, and I was forced to put up my groom at the last moment. He was better on the flat than over a country,

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and let Bracelet down at the last fence, when she looked like scoring a second time. I blamed my ex-jockey for deserting me, saying I had the fastest animal in Oxford, when he replied he could find plenty to beat me. A match was made, and he went off to scour public and private stables in search of the flier that I felt sure he would have some difficulty in discovering. He eventually pitched on a horse named Eurus, owned by Holland, the sporting proprietor of the Cross Hotel. I was relieved to find he could do no better. Eurus was an undoubtedly useful half-bred, well-known with the Heythrop, and other neighbouring packs, but deficient in speed, and, moreover, credited with a temper. There was a great concourse on Port Meadow when Bracelet won the match of two miles in a canter—she could have won with another stone or two—and my ex-jockey, who was on the back of the loser, learnt the useful lesson that scarcely any amount of weight will bring two horses together, one of which can gallop, while the other cannot. No doubt the livery stable-keepers would have welcomed a weekly event of this description which, however, never recurred in my day.

Bracelet's "career" was unfortunately exceedingly brief; I suppose I was in haste to be rich, and, knowing nothing of the twin sciences of racing and placing, thought she could win anywhere and everywhere. I foolishly entered her in a hurdle race at Harpenden, to be run in heats, which were just beginning to get out of fashion. I shall never forget that day at Harpenden. Every one appeared to be a Welsher, a profession in those days as popular as the Army or the Bar, and far more remunerative. Welshers owned, rode, and pulled horses, accosted you on the course, in the ring, in the paddock, and everywhere. In the second heat two jockeys, who

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would nowadays have but a short shrift, arranged to shut out Bracelet, and, having to pull up suddenly, she broke a bone in her fetlock joint. Her "racing career" being evidently over, I sold her to the owner of a barn on the common, who put her in slings, and, I believe, kept her for breeding.

The numerous fine riders to hounds, residing in the neighbourhood of Oxford, must often have wished that the sporting undergraduate was conspicuous by his absence only. Chief among them was Mr. T. T. Drake, whom I remember seeing jump the park wall at Heythrop on his grey mare. (Heythrop House was then a blackened ruin, having been burned down some years before.) This wall must have been close on six feet high, and the rest of the field dismounted and led their horses through a postern. I think the heaviest man I ever saw attempt riding to hounds was Morrel the brewer and master of the Old Berkshire. He was a living embodiment of the Jorrocks of fiction, but his mounts were of a considerably better class than Xerxes, and Arter-xerxes, and he would gallop at a great pace till stopped by a fence. At one time a regular attendant at the meets of the South Oxfordshire was Elwes, then engaged in dissipating the savings of the famous miser of that name. Mr. Elwes was one of the first to set the example of giving fancy prices for race-horses, and he purchased Oulston—I believe for £6000, an enormous price in those days—with the hope, in which he was disappointed, of winning the Derby.

In Wild Dayrell's year I went up from Oxford for the Epsom week, and in London came across P——, an old Etonian, and a neighbour of mine in Kent, whom I had not seen since he left Eton to join the Army. He now told me that he had already sold his commission, and got

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through all his money. He was going down to Epsom with the determination to better his affairs, but appeared to have no idea how this operation was to be effected. On Tuesday, as the train was leaving for Epsom, a tout, who, it appeared, was known to P——, sprang into the carriage. The fellow had but one piece of information, and this was to back Marchioness for the Oaks. P——, ready to catch at any straw, and having some reason for trusting his informant, was so far impressed by the tip that on our arrival on the course he at once commenced to act upon it. On Wednesday Wild Dayrell won the Derby, and as I had backed him at longish odds a month or so before, I invested part of my winnings on Marchioness. On Friday, P——, who had done little during the week but back Marchioness, stood to win an enormous amount, or, as seemed far more likely, to lose a sum that he would never be able to pay. Looking over his book on our way down I was perfectly horrified, and, though he brazened it out, I could see that he was beginning to repent of his rashness. The favourite for the Oaks, as every one is aware, was Nettle, the property of the afterwards famous, or, rather, infamous Palmer, and she appeared to be winning easily when she fell over the rails, and Marchioness won in a canter. I fancy quite a number of people imagined something was going to happen to Nettle, but whether the astute owner had made arrangements for her to lose the race, it is impossible to say. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and P——, at any rate, was triumphant. I went down to the Corner on Monday to receive my winnings from Bignel, the proprietor of the Argyll Rooms, a betting man much affected by sporting undergraduates and young Army officers. I found him paying out at his usual post, when he promptly

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handed me some notes. I retired to a distance of a few yards to count them over when I found the amount was £5 short. Bignel, however, though he knew me perfectly well, and scarcely two minutes had elapsed before I informed him of the deficiency, declined to make it good, and I had not sufficient confidence to venture on making a disturbance with such a well-known man. P——'s winnings, on paper, were enormous, but I am afraid he was even less successful than I was in securing them; for, being at Liverpool in the autumn, I saw him chasing a very dirty and apparently impecunious Jew, with whom he had been betting at Epsom, and who, he said, owed him £400. However, he must have secured enough, from the biggest fluke I ever saw on a racecourse, to set him up for a time.

Joe Tollit notwithstanding, there may be plenty of sport at Oxford yet, though of a different kind than was the vogue in my day. The new suburbs which have grown up in what I used to consider the "slums," and which are inhabited by the new race of "professors" and their wives—formerly interdicted luxuries—cannot surely be completely given over to dulness. The new professors' daughters, too, must have their ideas of sport, though, as is the case with fish, their victims might call it by another name. True, a goodly number are in spectacles, but these, I feel sure, are donned either in thoughtful appreciation of the *genus loci*, or from a kindly wish to veil the brightness of their orbs of vision from hosts of would-be admirers.

Perhaps the special variety of sport affected by the proctors has suffered less during the last fifty years than others once accounted more reputable. The proctors are still in the enviable position of Masters of Hounds, who are quite certain of a find, with the addition—which should

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be pleasing to generous minds—of occasionally affording (as in the case of Mr. Gaylad) some measure of enjoyment to the quarry.

Even in my day I don't suppose every one at Oxford was miserable who was not riding, rowing, or shooting. As I write, I seem to see old Dean Gaisford, with his round shoulders and not too frequently smiling face, emerge from the Deanery door. We had a feeling for him almost amounting to reverence, which he appeared a most unlikely man to inspire, but which has, oddly enough, increased rather than lessened in the course of years. But boys — we were little more — seem sometimes to diagnose men more correctly than their seniors. We came to the conclusion that under his rough demeanour he concealed a kind heart, as of a bear who should hug you in sport. I have always felt that though he may never have ridden to hounds, or won his "blue," the old man was at heart a true sportsman. What could indeed be more sportsmanlike than his determination to uphold the dignity of "the House," and no wonder that this was appreciated, since it acted occasionally as a most useful shield. Some may yet remember the advent into Hall during "Collections" of the junior university proctor, Mr. X— of — College, eager to detect some delinquent who had escaped him on the previous night. The Dean, who was standing with his back to the big fireplace, and his gown tucked up under his arm, moved slowly across towards the intruder, who had not uncovered. His gruff, "Take off your cap, young man," was very effective. The youthful proctor turned and fled, his ears waxing redder and redder until we lost sight of him.

In his epistolatory efforts the Dean was occasionally more curt than even F.M. the Duke of Wellington.





FINMORE, THE DOCTOR'S FACTOTUM.  
(From *Eton Sketches*, about 1850.)

[See page 25.]



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Lord —, who had written to the Dean to inquire how his son was getting on, received the following answer:—

"MY LORD,—Such letters give much trouble to your humble servant,  
THE DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH."

On another occasion he was even briefer; the sole reference to Christ Church in the voluminous report of the Oxford and Cambridge Commission being:—

"From the Dean of Christ Church we have received *no* communication."

Mention of the great Duke of Wellington reminds me that his death occurred while I was at "the House," when there was a general desire to attend his funeral. The Dean good-naturedly signified his willingness to grant leave to any one who could show a letter from a friend inviting him to stay in London. A man named Boddington, a stationer in Oriel Street, was the means of obtaining leave for some who had no relations living in the Metropolis. His invitations, at two and sixpence each, ran something in this way:—

"DEAR M. (or N.),—I hope you will come up and stay with us for the funeral. Your aunt (or cousin) is a little better.—I am your affectionate,  
—— —"

These invitations were all accepted, which was passing strange, as I do not remember that Boddington ever took the slightest trouble to vary his "round text" hand.

The Deanery dinners, to which we were invited in batches, were not very jovial affairs, though occasionally enlivened by the intrusion of a little comedy. The shy undergraduates used to crowd together by the door, and the Dean made little rushes at them from time to time,

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like a butting ram. His attempts at conversation, from not being adapted to the tastes of his guests, were frequently nipped in the bud. Occasionally he hit the mark. V——, who was wholly given up to shooting, was present at one of these entertainments, and the Dean, probably from knowing his friends, had heard of his skill with the gun.

“A good country for snipe, Mr. V——,” he began gruffly.

“It is that,” returned Mr. V——, and the conversation ended.

The following is a fair instance of the Dean’s liking for a sort of clumsy joke. Lord A——’s son, when at “the House,” was invited to a wedding in the middle of term, and his tutor called at the Deanery to request leave for him.

“You think, Mr. B——,” the Dean inquired blandly, “that it would do no harm to his studies in the middle of the term?”

“I think not, Mr. Dean,” replied the tutor confidently.

“Ah well, it might freshen him up. And his father wishes him to go?”

“Yes, Mr. Dean.”

“And the bride? I understand you to say that she desires him to be present?”

“Yes, Mr. Dean.”

“And you wish him to go?”

“Certainly, Mr. Dean.”

“Very well, Mr. B——, then he can’t go.”

As I have said, I am not prepared to deny a man the credit of being a sportsman because he has had no opportunity of hunting or shooting; I should therefore be inclined to give a testimonial to the little usurer—I mean a usurer on a small scale, or rather, perhaps, a usurer who

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did not lend much—dealer also in cigars, who resided in what was then Bear Lane. He had a sounding name, suggestive, not inappropriately, of buccaneering days. Some of us were periodically hard up, and our finances must indeed have been in a bad way when V—— and I visited his emporium with the fond hope of extracting a tenner at some reasonable rate of interest. We had no thought of being too particular. The buccaneer's terms were, however, so extortionate that, after exchanging a glance of wonder, not without an admixture of admiration, we turned away without a word and left him.

I did not care much for the assistant masters at Eton, but as sportsmen I don't think they showed to disadvantage with the Oxford dons, and the latter may have got worse since my day. A few years ago I was waiting for a train at Oxford station when I saw a middle-aged don—at least I suppose he was a don of some sort—in college cap and *no* gown, smoking a cigarette. Curiosity impelled me to follow him to the refreshment-room, when I perceived that his preference was for "Scotch cold." I can't fancy a don of my day smoking a cigarette or drinking whisky at a railway station with or without a gown. Whatever were the deficiencies—and I am inclined to think them many and great—of the dons of my time, there was room, it appears, for deterioration.

## CHAPTER V.

### AMERICA.—I.

WHEN I left Oxford, the Crimean War was raging. I joined the dépôt of the East Kent Militia at Canterbury, and shortly after proceeded to Malta, where I remained till the regiment returned to England, on the conclusion of peace. Malta, during the war, was a very interesting place, but there was but little sport to be had there. The Smouches naturally objected to our shooting their pigeons; there were a few quails, but their pursuit was exceedingly arduous, as it involved climbing the rough stone walls that buttressed the narrow terraces on which the native farmers grew their wheat, and which resembled a staircase of gigantic steps about seven or eight feet high. I had made bold to bring a dog with me, contrary to the regulations. By the aid of my servant, I had kept him out of sight till we were nearing the Bay of Biscay, when the Dutch skipper caught sight of him, and threatened to put him on shore at Gib. Just before arriving there, the dog disappeared again, though he was to the fore during our journey up the Mediterranean. At Malta one of my comrades-to-be came on board, and the dog sneaked into the boat when we went ashore. Next day he accompanied me to say farewell to some friends who were going to the Crimea. The Dutch skipper lost his temper on seeing him. "Zo it vas your dog! If I had

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known it vas your dog——” etc. etc. Tippoo was not a good setter, but a great deal better than nothing, and, as a companion, most loving and intelligent. I don't remember any other officer at Malta having a dog, or even a fowling-piece, but, no doubt, the majority had plenty of occupation in quite another line. Tippoo had been black and tan on leaving England, but picked up a good deal of tar on board ship, and this had an attraction for the soft stone of which the Florian barracks are built, so that he was always developing white patches.

After our return to England the regiment was disbanded, and I was shortly on my way to America, furnished with about a bushel of letters of introduction from English Churchmen to Canadian bishops and deans, and therefore with every facility—even if I was not to eventuate into an eminent Colonial Divine—for becoming acquainted with the methods of our co-religionists in Canada West. That I had no introductions to the important Roman Catholic section in Lower Canada, which I might have found a still more interesting study, may have been an oversight ; but the importance was minimised by the fact that, recognising their futility, I threw my introductions all overboard before reaching Quebec.

Twelve or even thirteen days was in those times reckoned a fairly good passage, but I was heartily sick of the ocean before I was half-way across the Atlantic. The only sport available, namely, betting on the run of the ship, did not appeal to me at all. Some little amusement was to be gained by a study of the passengers, of whom a similar mixture is no doubt still to be encountered. There was, of course, the American bridal pair, whose billing and cooing were less easily evaded than tax-gatherers on shore. There was the familiar bagman,

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whose mind, any more than his manners, certainly does not change with his sky; the invalids ordered abroad by their doctors—too late, as every one but their loving wives saw plainly enough; intending settlers, some of them already broken down and disappointed. These gaze forward from their favourite position in the bows, eager to catch a glimpse of the new country which they have decided cannot be more cruel than the old one.

One little group I noticed, which held aloof from the others, and appeared to be neither quite hopeless nor very sanguine. The head of the family was a strongly built, rather rough-looking man, clad in the ordinary corduroy of the small English farmer, his cord gaiters coming down to a pair of heavy boots with enormous nails, which left their mark, to the dire wrath of the skipper, whenever he swung round on his heel to continue his antepandial stroll. His wife was a rather pretty but faded young woman, around whose skirts, in fair weather, would gather a number of youngsters, whom it was hard to believe could be members of the same family, since they were all about the same size, and, apparently, the same age. I made the acquaintance of Mr. Spuds, as I will call him—he crushed my foot one day with his heavy boot as we were together trying to evade the “bridal pair”—and we became quite friendly. Mr. Spuds informed me one morning, when we were partaking of a “bitters” in company, that his folk had resided on the same farm in Warwickshire for generations; that he greatly regretted leaving, but that he could stand it no longer; he had indeed had worse luck than ordinary. Wondering what particular bad luck could have befallen this young man, who had apparently not been disappointed in his love affairs, I asked him what he had to complain of.



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He looked very sheepish, and for a while made no answer. When I pressed him, however, he told me the story of his misfortunes.

“May be,” said he, “you’ll not be much wiser when I have told you. I’d been getting on all right till a year or two ago, when prices dropped down to nothing, and even then I might have got on as well as my neighbours. But last year I found it was no use trying. It was that Bunt, you see, as did it.”

“Bunt!” I said; “and who, pray, is Bunt? Ah, the landlord, I suppose.”

“A deal worse nor any landlord,” replied Mr. Spuds. “My landlord, poor fellow, was a good enough sort, and he was right down hurt when he heard of it. ‘Spuds,’ says he, ‘think it over; perhaps he’ll go again.’ But there was no use talking like that. This is how it was, you see. He’d been about the neighbourhood a goodish bit a generation or two ago, but nobody hadn’t seen him for years, and all thought as he’d gone for good.” —“So should I have fancied,” I interjected; “he must be quite old.” —“When one day, just before harvest-time, my little girl there, she’d been out by one of the wheat fields that we were just going to begin cutting, and she came back into the house laughing, and holding out to me what looked like an ear of wheat. ‘Ain’t this funny, dad?’ says she, and she rubbed it out, and showed me that instead of grains of wheat (though the ear looked all right outside), it was full of little black things not quite as large as a vetch. ‘There’s plenty more,’ said the little goose, not dreaming what I felt about it. ‘Ain’t it funny?’ says she. Well, it was a precious sight too funny. The dickens a word says I to her, but I went to the bottom of the stairs. ‘Wife,’ I calls out, ‘we must

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be packing.' 'Packing!' screams she down the stairs—didn't you, Polly?—'What in goodness name are you talking about?' 'He's come,' says I. 'The devil's come!' 'Who's come?' says she. 'Are you mad?' 'Bunt,' says I. 'Bunt!' says she, and she comed straight downstairs, and I was frightened to see her, she was that white. Sure enough I gave notice, and sold things off, and here I be."

Almost everything comes in useful one day, and some years after my return from America, I met a middle-aged man, a great reader, who informed me that he knew everything, and had nothing more to learn. I was greatly astonished, but recovered myself sufficiently to offer to bet him a sovereign that I could mention something of which he was entirely ignorant. On his agreeing, I asked him to tell me what "Bunt" was. This he was quite unable to do, nor did it help him much when I showed him some of the seeds which had been many years in my possession.

If it had not been for meeting a man on board ship who said he was an old Etonian, and won my heart by his mention of "brozierung my dame" and other Eton passwords, I should very likely have stayed in Canada. But he insisted so strongly on the fact that the States were far preferable, that, after spending a few weeks between Quebec and Canada West, I found myself in Chicago, where the old Etonian had arranged to meet me. Instead, I had a letter from him saying that he could not be there for some time, and I never heard a word of him afterwards.

I had not been many hours in Chicago before I started off to find "the old fort." I had heard that a fort still existed, which, in days before there was any idea of a "Lake City," had resisted the attacks of the

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Indians. I wandered about, making inquiries of all and sundry, but no one seemed to have heard of it. At last I chanced on an antiquarian—the only one I ever met in America—who gave me the desired information. It was an old log hut, standing isolated in the centre of a square, and in course of being surrounded by blocks of high iron buildings, which made a fairly striking contrast. On my next visit to Chicago, “the old fort” had disappeared, and I never remember hearing it mentioned again by any of the inhabitants of the rising city, who had doubtless more interesting things to talk about.

I had soon had enough of Chicago, and hearing of a place where there was some good duck-shooting to be had, I went off to see what it was like. It was on the Calumet, a river that drains itself calmly into Lake Michigan, much as the Stour at Sandwich “runs” into the sea. Here I lodged with a Dutchman (“farmer” he perhaps called himself), and his English wife, and had some weeks’ excellent sport. I made friends with a young German who was staying there shooting ducks, and trapping muskrats, mink, and anything else that came handy. The duck-shooting was splendid, and we had it almost entirely to ourselves. I wish I had kept specimens of all the varieties of the duck tribe, whose name was legion, which we shot and sent in sacks to Chicago. I might have stopped longer on the Calumet, but one day one of us unfortunately shot a loon, which the Dutchman’s wife, with an eye to profit, cooked for our dinner. Of course it was impossible to get a knife into it, and it would have been amusing, if I had not been hungry, to watch the Dutchman trying to make believe he was carving a spring chicken. It came up again next day, when it

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was, if possible, tougher and harder. It would doubtless have appeared again many times had I not captured and buried it, still almost intact. We agreed to shoot no more loons, but I think it was hunger as much as anything that decided Kœnig and myself to pay a visit to Chicago. We walked in—about twenty miles—and about six miles on our way came to a house at which “hunters” put up. As we were passing, a flock of Canadian geese flew over, and a young fellow who was standing by the door put up his gun and brought one down. This was almost the only flying shot I ever saw made by an American; but things have altered since then. On speaking to him I noticed that his gun was English-made. With the exception of my own I never saw another English-made gun in America. Almost every “Dutchman” possessed some sort of a gun, “made in Germany,” and frequently with a shot barrel on top, and a rifle barrel below. The cost of these weapons was very small, and, as I never remember seeing a “Dutchman” shoot anything, they were probably not very deadly.

It was some time since either Kœnig or I had been on the spree, and we determined to have a good time. The first thing was to get a square meal, of which we were both greatly in need. We decided on paying a visit to “Bishop’s.” Bishop was an Englishman who kept a small restaurant or tavern which he had christened “The Mitre.” He catered specially for Englishmen, and I am afraid he did not make much of a living, since the class to which he appealed, who cherished home feelings—or a liking for old-world cookery—were a rather impecunious lot. The best way to get on in a new country—it might not prove you the best kind of fellow—is to abjure all

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thoughts of or regrets for the old one. Incredible as it sounds (for Chicago, even then, was a big place) there was not a bottle of English porter to be got elsewhere. Bishop was a hearty, genial fellow, and for years it was my delight, after a month or two of salt pork, to visit his hostelry. When you left, his farewell, accompanied with a genial smile, was, "Come and see the Bishop at the Mitre, sir."

We wound up the evening by attending the theatre, where a young woman in velvet tights was playing Hamlet. "To be or not to be," in a squeaky female voice, started me off laughing—I suppose it had something to do with the Bishop and the Mitre—and Kœnig joined in. Soon the audience, or a great portion of it, followed suit. We were looked upon as the originators of the turmoil that ensued, and were requested to leave, which we did, and I never again entered an American theatre. It is strange how history repeats itself. During my time at Oxford I went down to Hull to visit my brother R.N., whose ship was being repaired in the dockyard. We went with a number of officers to the theatre, then leased by a man of some comic talent, Sydney by name, whom some may still remember. On this occasion he had deserted comedy for tragedy, and a young actress, who was playing the leading character, sighed so often and so loudly that I was at last moved to echo her respirations, and this was gradually taken up, till every time the young woman sighed, such a sigh went up from the audience as I should imagine has never been heard since. We were requested to cease sighing or vacate our box, and we chose the latter, to the relief, no doubt, of the actress, whom I regret to say we left in tears.

I now decided on quitting the Calumet, and, leaving

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Kœnig to look after the ducks and muskrats, I started off on the track of the still incomplete Illinois Central Railroad, a region practically unsettled, save for a few pioneers recently attracted to the neighbourhood of the dépôts newly erected eight or ten miles apart. From these little stations I, my dog—I had been fortunate in acquiring a really good pointer from an Englishman who was leaving the country—and my gun made excursions into the vast sameness of the prairie. Where all places were so much alike, to choose was exceedingly difficult. Once you had decided on the locality, you need have no more trouble, since every one was anxious to sell. A few locations, with wood and water handy, had been taken up long ago. The scarcity of taverns mattered little, as every one—so seldom was a dollar or a stranger met with—was anxious to be hotel-keeper for the nonce. I would reach the log hut of an old settler at dusk, and in five minutes be quite a friend of the family. These old settlers were a fine manly lot, troubled only by fever and ague, though of these they had what they no doubt considered a sufficiency. Looking round, as I sat on a log after supper in front of the door, my tired dog at my feet, on the park-like “grove” at the back, and the wide expanse of prairie in front, its brown autumn dress relieved here and there by patches of bright green, where a few acres of winter wheat had been sown perhaps for twenty consecutive years without any manure, I would say to myself, “Why not stop here?” But there was no more reason for stopping here than at my host’s of the previous evening, or the place which would receive me tomorrow. The young women were tall, slender, graceful, with olive, not dusky, complexions, and with long, straight, dark brown hair, about which they appeared to trouble

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themselves very little, and large, liquid, brown eyes, which their unavoidable lack of experience did not prevent from flashing occasional lightning glances. In some cases there may have been an admixture of Indian blood, but where this was impossible or unlikely it appeared these old settlers were approaching the Indian type, as might be noticed, when, as sometimes happened, three generations were seen living together. Though, for that matter, the old grandfathers were frequently more like Indians than Americans, and had fallen into their predecessors' habit of breaking an almost perpetual silence with exclamations of, apparently, involuntary surprise. At parting from my host, I always felt that I was exiling myself from a possible future, and my adieux were cordial in proportion to the feasibility of my overnight schemes. The old settler (and his daughter, perhaps, if he had one), would accompany me for a short distance, to wonder at my skill in "shooting flying," and to carry home—a welcome change from the everlasting salt pork—the first brace or two of prairie chickens that fell to my gun. Probably neither gave me another thought when I was lost to sight beyond the rollers of the prairie, though my advent may have been an event in their dull lives.

As the months passed, and the Indian summer crept nearer, my wandering life, notwithstanding its sameness, became more and more delightful. The tiny eminences became outlook stations for prairie wolves, fierce-looking, but harmless, and the merry little goafer (ground squirrel) had his habitation everywhere. I had soon made a sufficient approach to "land speculator" to know that where the rosin weed, with its blossom like a small sunflower, flourished most luxuriantly, the richest land was to be found. To its stems, festooned with gossamer, the

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bob-a-link clung and sent forth its reiterated note. From the prairie pools, circled with belts of brightly coloured flowers, clouds of red-winged "blackbirds" rose on my approach. Ducks, blue-winged teal, and many varieties of plover abounded. Troops of awkward cranes bustled themselves laboriously out of the sedge into the air, where they stayed, far out of shot, till I had gone by. Towards evening large flocks of Canadian geese would fly over, making for the pools, or, if there was any in the neighbourhood, for the winter wheat. My dog was always pointing rattlesnakes, to his serious discomfort; but the bite of a rattlesnake, at any rate on the prairie, is seldom fatal to man, and never to animals. Once, about dinner-time, I arrived at an out-of-the-way prairie farm. The good woman of the house cooked my dinner, for which I paid in prairie chickens, and, as I was leaving, told me her son had been bitten by a rattlesnake. His thigh was swollen to the size of his body, and was as hard as a board. The good woman had put some soda—"saleratus" she called it—on the spot. There was nothing else to be done, as there was no doctor within twenty miles; but I heard afterwards that he recovered.

When people are all original it is little improvement on the universal dulness of English agricultural districts, and it was refreshing one day to come across an old gentleman who differed from the usual American type. One evening I arrived about dusk at a little prairie settlement at which I decided to pass the night. At the evening meal, as the Dutch landlord, his family, and the servant were sitting down, as a matter of course, with the guest, a little English-looking gentleman with thin grey hair and moustache, who was evidently an habitu , joined the party. I made friends with him, and he afterwards



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invited me to accompany him into his private room. I knew sufficient by this time of prairie hotels to be aware that the tenant of a private room must be some one out of the common. While the land boom lasted, travelling speculators slept three or four in a bed—a small one at that. I found the little attic under the shingles lined with bookshelves, on which reposed the best English and a few American authors. The old gentleman had been here, he told me, two years. He was a land agent by profession, and was looking forward to doing some business shortly, as the place was filling up rapidly. Indeed, no less than four wooden houses had already been erected on the six or seven miles of prairie discernible from the hotel. During the next few days I went shooting with my new friend, who ingeniously directed our expeditions to points where he had a lot to survey, or, possibly, to sell. His implements he carried in a light buggy, and when I had completed the slaughter of a covey of prairie chickens—the old gentleman had a gun in the buggy, for what purpose I am unaware, as he did not shoot flying—I would assist him in running out his lines. He was reported to have been a judge in one of the Eastern States, but as nobody had visited him since his arrival, and he had certainly not stated the fact himself, it was not easy to guess how it had been ascertained. Doubtless he could have told a story if he had chosen—as could every one you met, and indeed they generally did, but the story was not necessarily true. America is the easiest country in the world in which to live down one's past, concerning which, indeed, nobody cares a straw. But even in America it is well to begin the operation betimes.

A slight inducement is often all that is needed to make up one's mind. I got to be quite fond of the

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little gentleman, who reminded me, more than any one I had met since leaving home, of an Englishman. Before many days I had bought a tract of prairie "on time." This, my friend assured me, was dirt cheap, and certain shortly to double its value, and this might have been correct had not the land boom come suddenly to an end. When I had made my purchase, the old land agent—as politicians at home cease to take interest in a man who has voted—had no further use for me.

Winter was now coming on again, and the question was how to get over it cheaply. While duck-shooting in the autumn, I had got acquainted with an old settler who lived in the timber near the borders of Lake Michigan, surrounded by swamps inhabited by the fattest blue-winged teal, and the biggest and noisiest mosquitoes I have ever seen. The family consisted of the old man, his maiden sister, and a black girl who had been a slave. The old man never addressed his sister, all communications being made through the medium of the black girl. He was tall, with fine features, and a profusion of long, shining black hair, beginning to be touched with grey, which he pretended not to arrange after a portrait in his possession of a famous American statesman, Henry Clay—a name familiar to Englishmen from its connection with a celebrated brand of cigars. The old man did little work of any sort. In the spring he planted a few potatoes in the sand; in the summer he collected a certain, or uncertain, quantity of hay from the neighbouring slews. This last duty he preferred to perform by proxy, and he was so popular that he not infrequently had his desire. In the winter he chopped as little firewood as possible. The evenings he passed seated in his shirt-sleeves on a stool in the kitchen—



ENTRANCE TO SCHOOL BUILDINGS (SHOWING THE  
"OLD APPLE WOMAN"), 1840.

[See page 23.]



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a leaky lean-to at the back of the log house—his legs crossed, his arms folded on his breast, his eyes fixed, in apparent contemplation, on the stove. Seated there he would quaff a silent glass, every now and again, of neat whisky—not a particularly strong concoction—until at last he would retire to bed muttering maudlin rhapsodies, in which frequently recurred the revered name of Henry Clay.

Here I decided to pass the winter, and after buying a wagon and horses in Chicago, I employed my time, assisted by old David, in getting out cedar posts to fence my new homestead in the spring.

Coming into the log house one evening I saw a strange, unkempt, stolid-looking young man of about two-and-twenty seated, apparently quite at home, on old David's special stool in the little kitchen. He was explaining his advent to the latter, who was perforce standing. The newcomer, we learnt afterwards, was of English birth, but had been deserted by his father in one of the Southern States a few months before. Since then he had been wandering about the country, living how and where he could. He took his seat at the supper table as a matter of course, a bed was found for him, and after breakfast next morning he was sent into the bush with an axe to chop wood. A number of tramps used to pass the house, and they were not so rude as to do so without calling. The custom was to give them a meal and a shake-down, and in the morning send them into the bush with an axe, presumably to work out their board and lodging: in reality the implement was an old one, with which they were expected to clear off. The newcomer, however, worked hard all day and effected a surprise by reappearing at dusk with the axe.

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It was embarrassing when he walked in, seated himself calmly by the stove after performing his ablutions, and awaited the evening meal. No one dreamt of telling him he was *de trop*, and indeed he would scarcely have understood any but the very broadest hint. Weeks slipped into months, yet he was still there, like a stray dog that had determined never to be an outcast again. The brother and sister compounded for their coolness to one another by acting the good Samaritan to him.

There was little for poor William to do; had there been more, he could not have done it. It was soon discovered that he was half-witted, or even less. His sphere of duty soon narrowed into driving the cows to the bush in the morning and bringing them home at night; but to this slight call on it his intellect was unequal. The country was thickly timbered and intersected with swamps, which were impassable except in winter and in the droughts of summer. William, however, developed an unexpected talent. One evening in summer he came in very late, and seated himself in the kitchen with a brighter air than was usual with him when he had, as was now the case, returned without the cows. "If I couldn't find the cows," he exclaimed triumphantly, when scolded, "I've found a bee tree." After this piece of luck he never deigned to think of anything but "bee trees," and the cows came home at their own sweet will when they came at all, like the goats of the "Eclogue." William even became a nuisance, as, when he had found honey, no one was allowed a moment's peace till an expedition had been started to secure it. His method was simplicity itself, and dispensed with the paste and the little box affected by the professional bee-hunter. He went mooning along with his head in the air, and

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the bees caught his eyes as they circled about the top of the tree in which their home was located. Thanks to his new talent the poor fellow became quite a self-supporting institution; at everything else he was a complete failure.

This was an example of sport on a limited income that I never saw equalled, and, no doubt, there is something akin to sport in which every one is capable of excelling. Even now poor William would have few competitors in his own line. It will be some time yet before millionaires in search of sport are compelled to take up with bee-hunting.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AMERICA.—II.

I N spring I got my fence posts down by rail, hired a man—a very bad and expensive one, as usual with the genus out West, whose failings Bret Harte has, for once, not exaggerated — and commenced boring holes with a post augur—a great improvement on digging—eight feet apart. This was not only hard, but very slow, work, and a mile of these holes, besides representing considerable time and labour, was trying to the temper—especially to that of the hired man. When I had bored half a dozen or so I wanted a rest; the hired man wanted one earlier. Where the ground was soft as it fell towards the south, we would sharpen the ends of the posts, and drive them in with a beetle, which was a refreshing change of labour. When they were all fixed, the lumber arrived from Chicago, and a two-board fence of sixteen-foot boards was arranged so as to prevent as far as possible anything in the shape of a cow creeping under or getting a head between. I began fencing in the middle of May, but it was August before my fence was finished. Afterwards I added a third board, which made things safe.

My land started along a slight hill to the north, coming down to some low land at the southern end. A quarter of a mile to the south was the station of the Illinois Central Rail Road, beyond which not a house or



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shanty was to be seen for many miles. On the west the prairie was fenced in by the railroad. I cannot state the extent of the wild land to the east of my farm, as I never thoroughly explored it, but it was a good deal more than I was ever able to stock. On the south the prairie was as much mine to all intents and purposes as if I had bought and paid for it. On all the rolling prairie, with its splendid crops of grass, I never, save on one occasion, saw twenty head of cattle except my own. After the first year I got together quite a considerable herd, but I regretted to the last day of my stay there that my want of capital and inability to stock the vast acreage made me a loser of thousands of dollars per annum.

In the intervals of hole-boring, which I left as much as I dared to the hired man, I had been "breaking up" the new land with my team as fast as I was able; but still, not very fast. I was a poor hand at ploughing to start with, so got the stationmaster (who knew even less about the matter) to help me to run out a few half-mile furrows. In three or four days, thanks to the perfect American plough and its sharp, rolling coulter, I developed into a fairly good ploughman.

As fast as the land was ploughed the hired man followed leisurely, bare-footed with a small specially made iron shovel, with which he cut a snick in the leathery sod. Into this snick he dropped two or three grains of Indian corn, pressed the sod over it with his toe, and passed on. In addition to the sod corn I had also by September the first—early sowing was of the greatest importance—harrowed in twenty acres of wheat. By this time I had discarded the native rubbish, and hired a really good Irishman at monthly wages, who stayed with me till I left America, and of whom I got very fond. When I had

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put up a fairly good shanty for him and a board stable for the horses, I considered my farming over for the year, and gladly turned my attention to shooting. As there were absolutely no cattle about I had done my fencing in a very leisurely manner; but when my sod corn was a foot or so high, I heard one morning the sound of the lowing of oxen, and looking out saw through the mist an immense herd of some hundreds surrounding the shanty, and spreading over the farm on the side where the fence was still unfinished. We ran out, and with the aid of the mounted cow-punchers, who seemed greatly amused at our indignation, succeeded in moving the herd on without their having inflicted much damage. This drove was coming up from Texas to Chicago, grazing on its way. During all the time I was on the prairie I was never troubled by any more of them.

At that date people were too much taken up with the pursuit of the almighty dollar to have time for the pursuit of *feræ naturæ*. An Englishman with a love of sport could get any amount, and, instead of its costing him fabulous sums, as would be the case now, might find it a source of profit. I have already mentioned the American I met who "shot flying," and very few shot at all, except, in some of the States, with revolvers. I was not an extraordinarily good shot, but quite a crowd used to follow me when I went forth from one of the little towns on the Illinois Central Rail Road to slay prairie chickens. "He shoots flying" would be whispered in accents of surprised admiration. I had a contract with a game-dealer in the Chicago market, who took all the birds I could send him. His price was low, except on one occasion, when I went out on the last day of July and appeared in the market next morning—the first of the shooting season

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—with my spoil. The dealers thronged round me that day, but the price afterwards was not more than sixpence or sevenpence a brace. In hot weather—and it was always hot in the shooting season—the greatest care had to be taken, or the birds would be fly-blown in an hour or two. I used to start out with a light buggy drawn by an old mare, between whose ears I could shoot without disturbing her in the least. If I was intending to avoid the settlements, I would drive quietly along the dusty tracks across the prairie, leading no one knew whither, which the prairie chickens resorted to for dust-baths. My dog—about the best pointer I ever knew—would lie at my feet, his nose over the wheel. On scenting game he would jump out, and come to a point twenty yards or so from the track. I would drop the reins, and descend leisurely. When the birds, rising one by one, not in coveys, were accounted for, the dog would quickly remount to his seat on the buggy. No amount of persuasion would induce him to continue the search once he had made up his mind there were no more. When we were not following a track he would range at a distance of half a mile or more from the buggy, the white spot on his left side visible in the short upland grass. When he stood I would turn the mare's head in his direction. In a quarter of an hour or so I would arrive, when he would give me a look to say he thought I might have hurried a bit more. Towards evening the mare's head would be turned towards a station on the Illinois Central Rail Road, stopping by a haystack to carefully "draw" the birds, and insert a wad of hay. This answered fairly well, though of course I had numbers of birds spoilt, which had to be thrown away. From the station the birds would go to Chicago by the evening train. Not till the winter was at

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hand was it possible to "hang" birds, and even then they never got "gamey" as they do in England. I never tried to make a record bag, being content with anything from fifty to seventy. There was no limit to what might have been done in August by any one murderously inclined. In September the birds were better sport, and they soon got wild enough for anybody, in fact, too wild for most people. When they began to perch in rows on rail fences one hundred yards away, and otherwise misbehave themselves, it would be time for the ducks and teal to arrive again.

In autumn, sport of a sort was provided by the many thousands of pigeons which, following the example of the Chicago Bank clerks, and other employees—or, more probably the pigeons had set the example—were flying south across the Continent on the approach of winter. The American wild pigeon is a small bird, about the size of the English stock-dove. It makes, or should make, excellent pies, but in those days the local cooks were too incapable, or perhaps too lazy, to utilise them. The only pies I remember seeing in America were pumpkin pies, and these were the better the less "punkin" entered into their composition. For many days there would be a continuous stream of pigeons, and as their flight was low, and just above the tops of the trees, one would have thought the poorest marksman could hardly have failed to make a bag; but to shoot them flying would have been quite beyond the skill of an American gunner. The "sportsmen" would wait in the woods in the neighbourhood of their well-known roosting-places, and shoot them in sackloads at dusk off the boughs. I never participated in a battue of these little birds, for which there was, no doubt, a ready sale in Chicago and other big towns; but

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one day I had been shooting with some friends in the bush near Lake Michigan, when we went into a log house for lunch, stacking our guns in a corner near the door. Above the door was a large hornets' nest, the inhabitants of which kept coming into the room after the flies. Outside the log house was a big tree with a long dead arm stretched out straight about ten yards from the ground. While we and the hornets were lunching, one of us chanced to look out and saw the dead branch crowded with wild pigeons as thick as they could stand. Reaching silently for our guns we stole to the door, and in a moment a fusilade made a clean sweep of the pigeons.

I regret that I never had any luck with snipe in America, not that I did not on a few occasions come across some, but there was always something to prevent my making a good bag. Once I was out in a canoe on the Calumet, looking for some young geese that were hiding in the wild rice, when I heard a snipe "scape" close by. Leaving my canoe, I walked along the bank, when I put up a snipe every yard or so. They got up singly, not in wisps, and there must have been thousands. I fired a few shots, but, owing very likely to the size of the shot, without touching a feather. I desisted, but returned next day with any amount of snipe-shot, when to my immense disgust there was literally not a snipe to be found. Snipe, in the Western States at any rate, must have had an enjoyable time, as I never met any one who would have had a thousand to one chance of killing one.

I had never done much fishing in England, having been twenty miles or so from a trout stream, but in America I soon learned to fish "for the pot." The Calumet swarmed with fish. I would get into my canoe,

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my gun laid beside me ready for anything that might rise out of the wild rice, and a long line with a spoon hook at the end of it tied to my leg. Suddenly there would be a tug, tug, at my thigh, and I would haul in a pickerell (American short for pike), very likely ten or twelve pounds' weight. Bass and catfish, with their nasty spikes under their chins, were excellent eating. I seldom used anything but a spoon hook. One winter, when all the small lakes adjoining Lake Michigan were frozen over, some of the dwellers on the lake shore broke through the ice and hauled out the fish in buckets when they crowded to the holes to breathe. I remember seeing on the ice a heap of some tons of whiting which remained frozen for some time before being removed to Chicago, where it was no doubt sold at a good price. At certain seasons the pike in these lakes used to float near the surface of the water, and I several times tried to shoot them from a canoe. My companion was a murderer who had done time in the States prison, but he was a very gentlemanly fellow, and an excellent shot. He must have had a very sharp eye, for he would blaze away at fish that I could not get a sight of.

In my second year I had a few acres of Indian corn on a patch that had been ploughed and cropped the previous year, and was getting into fine order. This corn grew to an enormous height, certainly ten or twelve feet. Wishing to save some of it for seed, I had it put up in great stooks, like tents. A number of mallards were attracted to it, and every evening just before dark they would come and take their toll. Inside the stook Koenig and I would await their arrival. We shot, and shot, but the survivors did not appear to understand matters. They would perch on the very stooks inside

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which we were hiding, and commence to feed again. Their tameness was almost, not quite, shocking to me. I never saw anything like it before or after.

On the approach of winter becoming evident, ex-bank clerks, broken-down bagmen, and tramps of all sorts and descriptions, in tall silk hats some of them—I had once had a man who mowed for me for several days in a tall hat—would start from Chicago along the line of the Illinois Central Rail Road, to walk south before the setting in of the cold weather. We could see the tiny black dots many miles away on the perfectly straight line. Occasionally one of these travellers had been known to us in a bank or store, but he generally preferred to remain incog. If we succeeded in overcoming his *mauvaise honte*, we would sometimes ask him to remain for a night's rest, but the majority had a feverish desire to press on.

Deer were seldom seen on the prairie. In the timber they were plentiful, but hard to get at. I remember once being in a small place on the Illinois River, when a big herd of deer stood for a little while gazing down the street of the new village, of whose institution they had probably been quite ignorant. When they had impressed it on their minds, they turned away and bounded off unmolested to the wilds again.

It was on a piercingly cold day on the prairie this winter that Arthur, my man, came running up to the station, where I was trying to keep myself warm, to say that there were a number of deer feeding at some hayricks that we had put up on the prairie about two miles north of my shanty. I snatched up a rifle, ran down to the shanty, threw a saddle on one of the horses, and made for the hayricks as fast as I could. The

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deer would not leave the ricks, but dodged about from one side to the other. I dismounted, and stole after them on foot. It was not long before I had a chance, and putting up my rifle I essayed to pull the trigger. To my disgust I was unable to move my finger, and after standing for some time with my rifle pointed at the deer, which seemed to understand the state of affairs, I rode back again, leaving them in possession.

The greater part of this winter I spent on the prairie, with occasional visits to Indiana, where I had bought some timber land that I thought might be useful. The sudden way in which winter set in was a caution. I had driven into Chicago, about forty miles, in quite warm summer-like weather, and on my way back made a detour to do some necessary business at the county town. When I arrived there in the evening it was beginning to snow; next morning when I started to drive home, about twenty-five miles across the prairie, it was bitterly cold, and, having no gloves, I stopped and bought a pair of woollen mitts, which were all the proprietor had in stock—he had evidently not yet laid in his winter supply. When I reached the bare prairie the wind, which was now right in my face, got colder and colder, and I had every now and then to get out of the “sulky” and run behind to keep my nose and ears from freezing. I was glad towards dusk to see the line of my fence on a little hill a couple of miles in front of me. The bay mare I was driving was perfectly white, like an iced cake, and her nostrils choked up with icicles. My man was looking out for me; he pushed me into the shanty, while he went off to see to the mare. I found the stove red-hot, and some hot milk ready for me. This was the worst cold I ever experienced. It was quite a long time



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before I got over it, and I was afterwards able to understand an expression Arthur was always using on a specially cold day: "The cold of the grave is in me bones."

Poor Arthur had not a very lively time in the winter when I was away. A good part of the first winter he spent standing on a nail keg and sawing off the tops of the cedar posts that protruded needlessly above the boards. When I came home with the horses he would lose no time in going round to collect these precious odds and ends of firewood. I shall never forget his joy, as of a dog, at my return. It was cold in the shanty that winter, and no mistake. Hot tea accidentally spilt formed in ice on the table, which was drawn close to the red-hot stove. The nails protruding through the plank roof had a half-inch coating of rime, the window was darkened with perpetual frost. But the rapid, unexpected changes were more trying than the severest cold.

The station-agent was a wild young Scotchman of good family, and about my own age, who, when a lad, had enlisted in the Life Guards, been bought out by his friends, put into a good business in Canada, drunk himself out of it, and afterwards tried several things with the same result. Finally he had landed at our station, where he remained on a salary barely sufficient to keep him in food and garments of sufficient solidity to keep out the cold. "By G—," he used to say when drunk, "I took the shilling." I used to sleep at the station, and he returned the compliment by taking meals, not very luxurious ones, at my shanty. Every day in summer a large block of ice was left at the station, which I took down to the shanty. Sometimes we were so clever or so fortunate as to induce Saturday's

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supply to last into Sunday. In summer and autumn the station swarmed with mosquitoes, and, as we were without the luxury of mosquito-nets, it was almost impossible to get any sleep. In the evening a wheat train would frequently lie up at our station for the night, when we would sleep in one of the trucks, where the aperture at each end kept up a draught which the little pests found deterrent. S—— would leave a note for me, if I was late coming back from shooting: "Am sleeping in car, number so and so." I would then climb through the hole at the end of the car, in my nightshirt, and lie down on the bags of wheat, on one of which S—— was already snoring. It was always deliciously cool, the only nuisance being the strong smell of garlic. In ploughing for wheat on the prairie we would turn up the wild garlic, like continuous strings of pearls, and you could smell a wheat train miles away.

One occasionally hears some one mention having met with mosquitoes in England, but these, to one who has known the American variety, are quite a negligible quantity. I remember once on the Calumet turning out at sunrise to pick huckleberries, an occupation likely to be rendered intensely unpleasant a little later by the "deer fly." (This is a horrid little fawn-coloured beast, that settles generally on the back of your neck between your hair and your collar. I don't think he was poisonous, but he made you jump confoundedly.) I got out of the window to avoid waking any one, and going down to the river stepped into a canoe and paddled across. Apparently I disturbed a family of four or five mosquitoes who had been roosting on the bank, and who followed me, and almost pushed me out of the canoe. They were certainly the biggest, fattest, and hungriest I ever met

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with. When I reached the far side of the river I had only succeeded in killing one of them, and his friends showed such an eager desire to avenge him that I turned tail, got into the boat again, and back to bed, my chief difficulty being to keep my pursuers out, and I was both surprised and relieved when they departed without smashing the window. When I was in the timber I used, unless otherwise engaged, to milk six or eight cows night and morning. When the cows came up from the slews in the evening they would be literally covered from nose to tail with mosquitoes wedged together as close as they could pack. When you put your head against the cow's side, preparatory to milking, you would squash a few thousands, but, like a famine in India, it appeared to have little effect on the reduction of the population. I never suffered much from them except on one occasion, when, having missed the train to Chicago, I walked in about twenty miles with a friend. We were very tired, and went to bed after supper without noticing the dilapidated state of our mosquito-curtains. In the morning my friend's face was swollen almost beyond recognition, and I—well, I was not quite as bad. On the walls were quite a number of mosquitoes who had evidently dined, not wisely but too well, as appeared shortly afterwards, when their corpses varied the somewhat monotonous pattern of the wall-paper. But the insect I hated most was the "gally-nipper"—I am ignorant of his scientific name. This insect had at first a somewhat deceptive resemblance to a daddy-long-legs. He had, however, a tube which made all the difference, as, soon after its insertion in his quarry, his thin body developed into a red bottle of quite respectable size. I had a mare I always rode when hunting stray cattle on the prairie, and the devotion of

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the gallynipper to this animal was quite touching. Once when I was on her back from sunrise to sunset they almost bled the poor beast to death. The blood ran from her head and neck on to the reins. Of course I did my best to keep them off, and so diverted their attention to myself. I had a flannel shirt on, tight at the shoulders, and it was there that they drove in their hateful appliances.

Fortunately my friend S—— had but infrequent opportunities of over-indulgence in whisky—the only fault he had—and we became great friends. On the prairie one had to be even more merciful than my old friend Dr. Hawtrey in respect of “first faults.” Occasionally a land speculator, who wanted to see how his land—some of which my cattle may have been utilising—was getting on, would call at the station. He generally brought something superior in the way of liquor, and S—— would cook his dinner—of prairie chicken, most likely—on condition that he laid the table, washed up, and made himself generally useful. An old judge, an immensely fat man, would once and again come down from Chicago, and we would shoot him a prairie chicken, which he would afterwards pluck, grill, dance round, and finally devour. He would have looked well in the local *Punch*, had there been such a publication, very drunk in his shirt-sleeves, shedding maudlin tears over the remnants of his meal, and the next day sentencing inebriates in Chicago. These treats, however, did not often come our way.

Sometimes we entertained guests of another description, who helped us to while away the long evenings, which else had been rather dreary. There was an uncouth Yankee fiddler, who would enter our sacred precincts, welcome but uninvited, and commence to search for a whisky bottle,

TWO  
ETON HEADMASTERS.



DR. HAWTREY.

DR. GOODFORD.

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fiddle in hand. There was Arthur, my Irishman, whose solitude we often deigned to cheer, and who rewarded our condescension with amusing if somewhat coarse reminiscences of "the ould counthry," which he interlarded with an eternal, "Wid faver to yees"; a very quiet, gentlemanly young farmer from Pennsylvania, who afterwards murdered an Irish labourer in the heat of passion, and underwent a year's confinement in a penitentiary.

But our most frequent and most welcome guest was Kœnig, who would come to us from his headquarters on the Calumet River. He would bring with him his gun and his guitar, and use them for our welfare and delectation. He would come in from shooting, throw down his gun, take up his guitar, and play and sing to us while we plucked the birds and cooked them for supper. At a short distance from the north end of my farm was a big "creek" the only water for miles round, which, in addition to supplying the cattle with water, was in autumn resorted to by flocks of Canadian geese, mallards, and all sorts of plover. To the first of these my patch of wheat, which neighboured the creek, was an additional attraction. Kœnig was always bringing home something from the creek after dusk. One night he came home quite late, wet to the waist. "By G—," he said, "S—, I shot seven geese." We laughed, seeing he was empty-handed, when he told us he had seen seven geese fall to his double-barrel out of a big flock just about to settle on the creek, but had been unable to find them. He got very angry when we pretended not to believe him, and shortly went out again, rousing us in the middle of the night by returning with two geese. When he departed again we shut the doors and went to sleep. Early in the morning I heard Kœnig trying to get in, but was too sleepy to

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bother. Suddenly, first one goose then another came through the window into the sleeping-room, with a crash. I got up to remonstrate, but Kœnig was off to the creek again. In the morning he appeared with two more geese. The seventh had probably crawled out of the creek, and escaped on to the prairie. It was all we could do to prevent Kœnig's immediate departure, but at last we managed to smooth him down. He was much too useful to part with.

In the spring I had a reminder that prairie farming is not all beer and skittles. My winter wheat, which I had at one time thought was killed off by the frost, began to look quite flourishing again, and I promised myself a crop after all. Imagine my disgust when I found that nine-tenths of it was "chess," or "cheat," a weed which some consider degenerated wheat, and which resembles wheat till it should come into ear, when it bursts into something between wild oats and dodder grass. I thought of my friend Mr. Spuds, and wondered whether he would consider this preferable to the "Bunt" which had driven him from his Warwickshire farm. The only thing to do was to cut it, cart it away, and burn it, to prevent seeding.

I had not troubled the doctors since leaving England—nor indeed much before—but this autumn I made my first acquaintance with the profession in America. I had been having a long day after prairie chickens, it had been frightfully hot, and towards evening, when I was nearing a little settlement about seven miles from my farm, I suddenly felt very sick and ill. I managed to reach a little tavern, the keeper of which put me to bed, and sent for the doctor. It seems he was a new importation, for which reason I had never heard of his existence. I



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suppose I had fainted, but when I recovered, the sun was shining into the room—there were no window blinds—the walls were covered with thousands of bugs, and a big, heavily bearded man was standing by my bedside, holding in his two hands an enormous bowl. This contained senna tea, which I was ordered to drink, and the doctor and I afterwards became great friends, though he never again prescribed for me. The doctor had a family of pretty little round Dutch children. He had also a younger brother, a “professor,” whose speciality it was to convert the commonest corn whisky into port wine. I used to go in and watch him making his brew in an enormous boiler. Once I went his rounds with him, when he visited the principal Chicago liquor merchants. They would bring out some whisky in a glass, and he would manipulate it into the simulation of port wine. I think the charge for which “I fix him” was a dollar a gallon, which sounds fairly cheap. To-day in England the obliging German chemist seems to be doing the same thing, only that now they are making whisky out of their abominations instead of port; and there is no doubt that the stuff advertised as first class and sold everywhere is little better than poison. When I returned to America some years later I found the “professor” married to one of the little round children of his brother the doctor; I confess I hardly knew what to say to him.

By next year I had *volens volens* got quite a lot of cattle together. Trade was very bad, and money exceedingly scarce everywhere. Small farmers used to come from ten or twenty miles across the prairie with a cow or two they wished to sell. I would say, truly enough, that I had no money, when they would reply that I should have some by and by and walk away,

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leaving the cows behind them. I don't remember an American ever doubting my word, but I am sure a great number would have been greatly surprised, and perhaps a trifle hurt if I had taken theirs. Hay was plentiful; I contracted with a Dutchman to put me up a hundred tons for one hundred dollars. This I built up outside the fence of the cattle yard for the cattle to help themselves to. But the prairie winter was too cold for the cattle to do more than just live, and even this was more than all could accomplish. The survivors would be turned out towards the end of May so many bags of bones, and in a month or six weeks would be quite fresh. I decided to rent a big stretch of rather swampy land on the border of Lake Michigan from Senator Douglas, the "little giant" whose defeat for the Presidency by Lincoln was shortly to cause the Civil War. Meeting his secretary to arrange terms, he told me very condescendingly that Senator Douglas was a man without any pride, and would not mind speaking to me at all. I am afraid I did not appreciate the compliment, and thought the secretary a bit of an ass. After taking this land, I never put up any more hay on the prairie, but on the approach of winter drove my cattle down to the lake shore, where there was plenty of shelter. Quite a number stayed there and multiplied. I soon found that an arable farm on the prairie was no use except as a homestead. In fact, I never knew any one without private means who was able to make any payments on the bills he had given when he bought his land. The Illinois Central Rail Road Company had received from the Government a concession of alternate sections of land for, I think, three miles on each side of the track. None of the men in my neighbourhood who bought on time from the Company

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ever paid anything at all, and after staying some years, and letting their land get into a much worse state than when it was bare prairie, they were turned out. There was always something happening to disappoint expectations. One year we had a frost every month, so that the Indian corn came to nothing. Then blight would attack the spring wheat—I have before spoken of “chess.” I have gone hopefully into a square mile of spring wheat, expecting to find it swarming with prairie chickens, and found it blighted and literally not a grain of wheat in the six hundred and forty acres; of course prairie chickens were conspicuous by their absence. People bought wild land to improve it and sell at a profit. My land was improving in value if, as a farm, it was paying nothing. Yet a man could, with ordinary luck, raise enough for his family to live on, by working hard, and employing no labour, and perhaps there is hardly any corner of the earth where, by labouring equally hard, a living might not be secured.

The Illinois Central Rail Road was then a rough and rude affair. Coming out of Chicago one evening, in company with my Scotch stationmaster, on the last train—there were only two trains *per diem* each way—after a tiring day in town, I dropped asleep, and only woke to see that we were passing a little hill on the prairie, topped by some rude buildings, which I knew to be about two miles south of my place. Not feeling at all inclined to walk back along the line nine miles from the next station, I jumped up and commenced ringing the bell communicating with the engine-driver, to the horror of my stationmaster, who thought he would get into trouble. The train pulled up short, and as the frightened passengers quickly unloaded on to the em-

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bankment, the conductor came along wanting to know who had rung the bell. I knew him well, a big, one-eyed man, who had been a navy in England, and a very rough customer. I had often seen him chuck stowaways off the train, while in motion, in most truculent style. I told him I had rung the bell, as he passed my station without stopping, and I should be obliged by his backing the train, as I did not wish to walk. He looked me over, and I think, but for my being an Englishman, he would have tried to chuck me; instead, he called out, "All aboard"—possibly he was not without a sense of humour—and ordered the driver to back the two miles. I have more than once seen a train stopped while a passenger descended and walked some distance after his hat, which had blown away on to the prairie. But I do not suppose that would be likely to happen now.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AMERICA.—III.

IT must have been in the late autumn of my third year in America that, being down at old David's place near Lake Michigan, I noticed that several of the "Hollanders," who were trying to scrape a living out of the sand-ridges, had collected from goodness knows where quite a quantity of cordwood, which they had stacked on the borders of what they were pleased to call their farms. This I wondered at, as it seemed lost labour, and I could not imagine what they intended to do with it. Mentioning the matter to my friendly station-agent on the prairie, he suggested that I should apply for a wood contract from the Illinois Central Rail Road. There was no available coal, and as the greater portion of the line ran through the timberless prairie, the Company had to get the greater part of its fuel from the Michigan beech forests. The wood-contractor in chief was a man I knew very well, one of two brothers who farmed a couple of square miles at no great distance from my dépôt. I took the station-agent's advice, and made arrangements with the "Hollanders" to take their wood at a certain price, provided I could get a sub-contract. Then I drove over to interview my neighbour the contractor. He was about six feet six inches in height, and very stout, the biggest man, I think, I ever saw in the States, quite young, but

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already getting grey. He gave me a sub-contract in the most good-natured way, and at a price that would leave me a good profit. I think an American is always glad to do a kindly action, if it will not interfere with his own plans; and this is more than can be said of all others. I at once went down to stir up the "Hollanders" and set them to haul their wood to the edge of the Calumet River, so that it could be carried over on the arrival of winter. When the frost set in I was at work from daylight to dusk with two teams, loading the wood on one side of the river, and dumping it on the other bank, to be removed from thence to the side of the Michigan Central Rail Road track when the ice broke up. For this labour I was well paid by the "Hollanders," who were afraid of losing their market. Summer came, and we had a fire or two, which by great good luck did little damage; but one day on my return from the prairie I was glad to see a wood train loading up. Up to this time the "Hollanders" had not asked for any money, but now they began to be clamorous. Before I could pay them, I had to see the contractor, and this, though I had fancied from his size it would have been easily managed, was exceedingly hard. Indeed, he seemed to have the receipt of fern seed. One day I succeeded in finding him in Chicago, and determined on having a settlement. When I mentioned my business he treated me *de haut en bas*. He did all he could to get rid of me, and declared he had no money, but I vowed I would not leave him till he had found some. He would stop on the side walk, pretending to talk business to people he met, when I had to wait with what patience I could muster till he had finished. Generally his friend got bored and excused himself. When dinner-time came he asked me to dine with him

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as he could not shake me off—I suppose he was hungry—at one of the best hotels, and after a good meal I felt emboldened to press him a little harder. At last I accompanied him into the Marine Bank—I was afraid to leave him for a moment—where he had an interview with the manager that seemed unproductive. Bank hours would soon be over, and he may have seen that I was getting desperate, for, when I suggested that he should go to the pay-car and get an advance, he very sulkily agreed. Luckily the paymaster's, Komstock's, car (which he used as an office when in Chicago) was at the dépôt, and he at once handed over a bundle of bills to the contractor, of which the latter turned the larger portion over to me. But he was very indignant, and behaved as an impecunious "swell" in the old country might do on being asked to pay a five or ten years' old tailor's bill. I went back joyfully and paid my "Hollanders," having something over for myself, which was lucky, as the contractor became bankrupt immediately afterwards. I never got the balance, as the Company, though they burnt the wood, declined to settle my account, and no doubt they were within their rights. The big man's prosperity was by no means checked by this little incident. When the war broke out his place was covered with nigger teamsters and horses, and although he had always professed to be a hot Southerner, he went in largely for Government contracts. I have no doubt he would have made a fortune, for he was what in America is called "smart," but on my return, some years after the war, I heard he had been dead some time.

I saw at intervals a good deal of Chicago in those days; I have already mentioned "the old fort"; much too old-fashioned a building to have a chance of surviving.

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Chicago was then a rising city in more senses than one, as it was undergoing the process of being raised above the level of the lake, below which the pioneers had commenced operations. It was a curious sight in those days to see wagons and powerful teams of horses "stalled" in the mud of the principal streets. I was a witness of the raising of the Briggs House, then one of the largest hotels in the city, where the first storey of the hotel had, from the raising of the roadway, developed into a basement. I several times stayed at this house, where a notice might be read warning you not to put your boots outside your door at night; if you neglected it, they would be collected by a speculative gentleman with a sack. It was a common thing on a main street to meet a wooden house being moved out of town by a windlass, as they move a bathing machine at home. When the locality became too fashionable the owner would sell his lot and move with his wooden house into the country. In those days he had not far to go. Very likely the family might be seen breakfasting in the kitchen, and the owner's coat and hat hanging in the lean-to as they went by.

I was in Chicago when the late King Edward VII., then Prince of Wales, visited the place and was the guest of "Long John" Wentworth, the Mayor. The Prince was very well received, and I remember his being shown to the people from the balcony of one of the chief hotels, Mr. Wentworth, who was about as tall as my wood-contractor, towering over the Prince, his hand on his shoulder. In connection with this visit the account of the death of Sir William Russell reminded me that that prince of war correspondents accompanied the Royal party to Canada and the States. On Sunday, when the Prince presumably



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remained in Chicago, Mr. Russell went shooting on the prairie. It was no doubt the only day he could count on for getting a little sport. I don't remember at that time any very strong feeling as to keeping Sunday strictly as a day of rest, and, in fact, it was frequently chosen by my American friends who wished me to provide them with a day's shooting. Nevertheless, Mr. Russell was apprehended, brought before some court, and fined; I believe the amount was ten dollars. This exceptional treatment—for, though I suppose there was some ancient law, unrepealed since the days of the "Mayflower," anent Sabbath-breaking, I never during my stay in America heard of another instance of its enforcement—may have had its origin in some remarks of Mr. Russell's that had appeared in the London press. Certainly no slight was intended to the Prince of Wales. The affair caused some sensation, and the weight of American opinion was strong against the course taken by the Sabbatarians.

An enthusiastic reception was accorded to the Prince by the Canadians; it was indeed reported that at Montreal and other large towns the water in which the princely ablutions had been performed was carefully bottled off (as an American Company is now doing with the waters of the Jordan) and sold to the more ardent of his admirers.

Mr. Wentworth, mentioned above, was a "character" of a sort that may be now becoming rare even in America. In following what he considered the best interests of the city he was a law unto himself, and the citizens, instead of taking offence, honoured him for his disregard of restrictions, which would have tied the hands of ordinary men. I remember a striking instance of his boldness.

Across the river, on the west side, in a place called

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“the Sands,” was a row of wooden houses, inhabited by an undesirable class of tenants, who preyed on the sailors who came to Chicago on the grain ships, several of whom were reported to have been murdered, and their bodies cast into the river. The Mayor proclaimed that if these houses were not vacated by a certain day, they would be burnt down. The tenants took not the slightest notice of the edict, considering, no doubt, that the Mayor would not dare to carry out his threat. They were mistaken, however, for on “the appointed day” Mr. Wentworth, accompanied by his myrmidons—as an Oxford proctor by his bulldogs—went calmly forth, and himself applied the torch to the obnoxious buildings. The sight of the poor creatures hurrying forth in their smocks must have been truly edifying. Of the frail wooden buildings nothing remained in a few minutes but a line of white ashes, which I myself saw a day or two afterwards on “the Sands.”

On another occasion Mr. Wentworth used equally summary means to get rid of the nuisance occasioned by the protrusion on the side walks by merchants and others of signs and emblems. A whisky merchant would thrust out a barrel-shaped board on one side of his door, whilst a tobacco store would exhibit the usual Highlander with his snuff-laden fingers thrust into the faces of the passer-by. Storekeepers were warned that on a certain date such of these signs as were not removed would be carted away and burnt. As in the previous case, no one took any notice, and they were probably surprised when the Mayor appeared, up to date, with his bulldogs, and a wagon into which the offending obstructions were thrown. The “signs” were carted off to the court-house, which then stood in a large enclosure bounded by a high iron rail-

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ing. Over this they were thrown in a heap, but instead of being consigned to the flames, they remained there for a long time, no doubt as a salutary warning.

Later I did myself the honour of placing a humble contribution in close proximity to the Mayor's collection of signs. It was suggested to me one Christmas that a profitable trade in Christmas trees might be done with the Germans (Dutchmen), who then formed half the population of Chicago. Taking a wagon and horses I drove about thirty miles into Indiana, where on the shore of Lake Michigan was a vast extent of swamps—locally "slews"—alternating with sandy ridges, whereon grew a profusion of small fir trees. Selecting the best shaped of these, I pulled them out of the sand, and with a couple of hundred of them on my wagon started for the city. Early on the twenty-third of December I was making the round with my trees. The friend who had suggested the new business kindly accompanied me, and pointed out the most likely localities for customers. Of these at first I had no lack, and indeed thought my fortune was made. A few of the finest trees went at a dollar apiece, but they soon dropped to fifty cents, and then to a quarter, by which time the portion of the Dutch population desirous of keeping up the old-country custom in a foreign land showed signs of exhaustion. It was getting fearfully cold; I was almost frozen, while my horses, poor creatures, were white with hoar frost. Directing their steps towards the court-house, which struck me as a good place for "dumping," I threw the balance of my trees over the fence, where long after I saw them, looking withered and disreputable, but in honourable proximity to the Mayor's "signs."

I remember being in Chicago one summer when a big

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propeller came into harbour, her decks piled high with square boxes covered with pink netting, which made quite a fine show. These boxes contained peaches, and in about half an hour every one in the city who had fifty cents to spare was the owner of a bushel or so of splendid fruit. I took some down to the prairie and distributed them among the locals, some of whom had certainly never seen a peach before, and were unlikely ever to see another.

Chicago was full—I suppose it still is—of saloons, but the majority of these catered rather for the “Dutchman” than for the American population. The former drank nothing but lager beer, but of this harmless beverage they consumed oceans. The education of the American-born in foreign whiskies had scarcely commenced — I don’t know how far it has got now. When, as occasionally happened, I spent a Sunday in the city with a friend, we always stopped on our way back from church to have a glass of neat Scotch whisky at the sole place at which it was then retailed. The old Scotchman who kept the saloon had a very long face, which he could still further elongate on occasion. It was our custom to invite him to join us in our potations, when he would raise his glass to his mouth, give a little “click,” and lo! the whisky was gone. During the brief process his chin would drop into his cravat, but it soon regained its normal position, if indeed the normal position was not the elongated one. I feel certain we went to his saloon more for the pleasure of seeing him swallow than of taking anything ourselves, and though I was very poor in those days, and the Scotch whisky very dear, I considered it cheap with that sight thrown in.

I once drove nearly twenty miles into Chicago with a

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load of hay. I don't remember the reason, possibly I wanted a day out. I waited long in the hay market, but not a soul came near me. I was going off to the stable where I occasionally put up, to see if the proprietor could do with it, when I saw an out-at-elbows Irishman crossing the street, whom I hailed. He was, to the best of my belief, the only brewer in Chicago, and sometimes he brewed, and sometimes he didn't. There was a big brewery in existence, but it was standing idle, and tenanted only by rats and the watchman, a weird place to visit at night. At that time all the beer drunk in the numerous saloons by the "Dutchmen" came from Milwaukee. It seemed that the only brewer kept a horse, an extravagance of which I would never have dreamt of accusing him. He bought, or rather begged, my hay, and I took in payment a barrel of his beer, and very poor stuff it was. My feelings on the return journey may have borne some resemblance to those of Moses Primrose after his more famous deal.

What I missed most in America was the riding. All the time I was there I don't remember seeing a dozen men on horseback, except a few "bosses" every now and then in political processions, when they would have been safer on foot. I had seen abundance of fast trotters in buggies and "sulkies," and, once, Flora Temple trotting her twenty miles in an hour. I had ridden occasionally for a whole day in search of strayed cattle, but without experiencing much pleasure from the exercise. My bullock team were greatly given to straying; one of them, which would have taken a jumping prize at any show, used to negotiate the six-foot high fence of the Illinois Central Rail Road as neatly as ever hunter with the Heythrop got over a stone wall. Driving my bullocks

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home when I had found them was a fatiguing process, as when this plaguy animal jumped the fence (which he did for no reason but to annoy me) I had to dismount, tie my mare to the fence, climb over, and drive him back again. Sometimes he would go quite a long way before he could be induced to return, and then I had to retrace my steps to where I had left the mare. By the time I had remounted, the bullock had very likely climbed over again. His "butty" too seemed inclined to follow a bad example, so I sold the pair to a man who lived some twenty miles away on the other side of the railroad, which they seemed, for some occult reason, to prefer, and they troubled me no more.

When, after my second year in America, I took a holiday and went to England for three months, in the winter, I looked forward eagerly to getting some hunting. Nor was I disappointed. One of my first visits was paid to a friend in Norfolk, who mounted me with the North Walsham Harriers. My mount was a four-year-old mare, which, though she gave me several falls by reason of her insisting on flying the "banks," instead of "kicking off" on the top, and so clearing the ditch, struck me as one of the best animals I had ever known. We had one extraordinary day when the hare, after a straight run of three miles, ran down the cliffs, and swam out to sea, followed by the hounds; needless to say I did not follow them. So much was I pleased with the mare that I would have taken her back to America if I could have afforded it, and I made up my mind to become possessed of her if I returned to England before she was past mark of mouth.

My holiday did me a lot of good, and I set to work with renewed zeal. In two years more I had got quite a big herd together, and in another ten years or so I could



THE BROAD WALK, CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD (1840).

[See page 35.]





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see a chance of utilising my run, if by that time it was not sold or cut up into forty-acre lots. The sport was as good as ever, even better; the slight increase in the number of settlers (none of whom, even yet, shot flying; indeed, very few possessed a "shooting iron" of any sort) favoured bigger bags, as the birds from miles round flocked to the cultivated ground. Only one or two superior people had put up notices warning off trespassers "with dog and gun." I ought to have been contented, but I felt, nevertheless, that I was getting tired of it all. If man cannot live by bread alone, neither can he live by shooting. It was the solitude, I think. Not that I did not know a number of Americans in Chicago and elsewhere, good fellows mostly, but they were, naturally, not quite what I had been used to, and I was getting weary of them. In my first and second years a friend or two from England had looked me up. I had shown them what sport was to be had, fed them up on mush and prairie chicken, and then finished up by spending a few days in Chicago with its *quasi*-civilisation. I began to think of quitting. There would be no difficulty about this, as my land was getting valuable. The tiny village up at the station had been growing slowly, very slowly. In addition to the blacksmith's shop and the one private house, which were there when I came, we now possessed a whisky saloon—a foul hole where "40 rod" was sold by the usual Irishman—and finally a store. It was this last that was indirectly the cause of my leaving.

The store was owned by two brothers P——, one of whom was a capital fellow, said to be a retired slave-driver, who resided there as manager. One day he came to me—I suppose the money was coming in slowly—and said he wanted to sell out. When he went on to say that he

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wished to give me the refusal of his store, his "town lots," and other property, I stared, and told him I didn't want it. Nothing daunted, he began to enlarge on its advantages, and the certainty of its speedy improvement. He would take \$3000. He would take \$2000. If I thought it only worth \$1500 he would see his brother, who would perhaps agree to take that sum. I hadn't any money? Oh, that didn't matter, I would pay when I got some. (Every one used to say this to me when I pleaded lack of cash instead of jumping at a "bargain.") It was Saturday evening, and I told him, as he was rushing off to take the train to Chicago to see his brother, that my offer, supposing I had made it, was not a standing one, and I might change my mind by Monday morning, when he would return by the first train. He smiled; he knew better.

When he was off I began to think. Buying a country store was not a very sporting thing to do, not my idea at all of "sport on a limited income." Doubtless S—— would manage the store for me, but I should be tied to the country all the same, if not to the counter. I felt like Robinson Crusoe; "never hear the sweet music . . ." of the hounds in full cry; then all the half-forgotten pleasures of sport in the old country came to my mind. That settled it, I would see P—— and his store hanged first. On Sunday morning I drove across the prairie to where a Scotchman, L——, a great friend of mine, managed a farm of two square miles for a Southerner, a West Point man, who had not been seen since the arising of the rumours that were anticipating the Civil War. L—— I knew was very uneasy, and desirous of taking a little place for himself. I thought it likely he would take mine. So it proved, when he drove back with me, and in an hour or so we had

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valued the live and dead stock—for which he gave me bills—and drawn up an agreement.

P—— got off the train on Monday morning, and rushed to embrace me. “I’m pleased to say that my brother——” he began, when I interrupted him. “I’ve changed my mind; I’m going to England this week.” He wouldn’t believe it at first, and when he did he seemed to think I had wronged him, but I reminded him of what I had said when he left me.

In a week I was on my way to England. Before leaving I made a hasty trip to bid farewell to old David, and left some cattle in the bush in his charge. Years after, when I paid a visit to America, the old man reminded me that he owed me \$200 for a pair of black bullocks which were then getting quite elderly. The cows I had left with him were still the same number, old David having probably eaten the increase. I thought it was like wrapping another man’s talent in a napkin.

On the way to New York I made friends with an Englishman who was also going home. On our arrival we went to an office—to which a tout introduced us—to get our tickets. I don’t know to this day whether it was a “bogus” office or not, but of these there were then plenty in New York. The man sold us tickets by a steamship advertised to start the next day, but which, on inquiry, we found had not come in yet. I believe she did not come in for fourteen days or so, having been awfully knocked about, and the captain killed on deck by a falling spar. As we could not afford to stay in New York, we went back to the office to get our tickets changed to a boat going on the morrow. The fellow laughed at the idea of disgorging, and told us to go to H——. We went out, looking, I dare say, very foolish;

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but I was determined to get the money back somehow, and meeting a policeman a few doors off accosted him. He looked us over and smiled, no doubt considering us greenhorns, which I don't think was quite the case. Then, without a word, he walked back with us to the office.

"You go in," he said, "and ask him for your money again."

We did so, and the manager was recommencing to swear, when looking up he saw the policeman, standing by the door, revolver in hand. Whether it was bluster on the officer's part I don't know, but the manager went to a drawer, brought out the money, and slapped it down on the counter. I have no doubt the recording angel dropped a tear—it would require "one of the largest size"—on the page or two of oaths that he may have thought under the circumstances not wholly inexcusable.

I will here briefly conclude the story of my connection with America, of which my recollections—the dull and dreary parts, as usual in such cases, having been almost forgotten—are very pleasant. The kind way in which the Americans treated a newcomer will always abide with me, together with the memories of the sport which no one envied me or interfered with; which cost me nothing, and which no one, even with an income other than limited, will ever see again. The American shoots flying now—it was some time before he took to it. He has his preserves, carefully looked after, like those of an English nobleman, but the wild freedom is over. The rolling prairie is parcelled out into lots of all sizes, down to forty acres, tenanted by Dutchmen and others who know nothing of sport, and who lead a sordid life in a trying climate dominated by Trusts. Iowa,

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Nebraska—in my day looked on as Ultima Thule—Kansas (it was “bleeding Kansas” then) are filled to overflowing; a thousand miles galloped over in fifty years! Nothing left now, as a settler from Montana remarked to me the other day, but to glide down the slope into the Pacific.

On my return to England I had constant reminders of my land on the prairie. Once it was a letter from a lawyer to say that my fence must be moved, as I had omitted to leave space for a road, which indeed I had not expected would be required for some generations. To move some miles of fencing and set it up again, boring the new post holes, so to speak, with an augur three thousand miles long, was an expensive affair. This was nothing to hearing one day from a friend that my land had been sold for taxes. The law was that when the owner omitted to pay his taxes any other person could pay them, and so acquire a “tax title” which could only be redeemed by paying within one year to the holder double the amount he had disbursed. Clearly my tenant had not kept his agreement to pay my taxes, which, during the war, had risen from a mere trifle to quite a large annual sum. I made up my mind to get rid of the land, and for this purpose it was necessary to cross the Atlantic once more. About a fortnight before Christmas I started on the s.s. *Cuba* for New York. Before leaving I had three overcoats made as nearly as I could guess to fit three of my old friends. One was my tenant, for whom I had the greatest regard, though he was now putting me to the trouble of another journey to America; the others were two Chicago friends who had shown me the greatest kindness during my stay in the country. I inquired of a Huddersfield man where

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the best cloth was to be had, expecting to hear from him that it was procurable in his own town. Instead, he told me that for the very best I must go to France. I had three coats made of French cloth, which cost me about five pounds apiece. I was sadly afraid of having to pay duty on landing at New York, so wore them by turns, and had two of them on and my old coat, together with the other new one thrown over my arm, when asked if I had anything to declare. Seeing the official pay some attention to my attire, I explained that I had a fine taste in overcoats. He looked me over for a few seconds. "I reckon you don't mean to catch cold," he said good-humouredly as he passed on.

When I got off the train one morning at my old station the first man I saw was my tenant L——, to whom I had written from New York. He was at first awfully hurt, and said that I might have trusted him, but I soon smoothed him down. Things had been bad with him, he told me, and his wife had been ill. He wouldn't take his new coat, preferring to put up with my old one, which was a nuisance, as I had to wear the one intended for him, and as it never fitted me, and was of much too good material to wear out, it was some years before I felt satisfied with my appearance in winter. The other two coats fitted the intended wearers very well, but they were loth to accept them, saying that if I put them into an auction I could get 150 dollars apiece for them. I dare say they were right, but nothing was too good for the friends who had done so much for me, and whom I was never to see again.

So reassured did I feel with L——'s explanation that I went back to England without redeeming my taxes, or making any effort to sell the land, which I could see

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was getting very valuable. And long before the year of grace was passed, L—— had bought back the “tax title,” and put things straight again.

Before leaving the country I made several excursions with L—— into the surrounding country, which was filling up fast. Not the least curious thing that I came across was at the big farm on which L—— had formerly been manager. The man, who had probably got it for a song (the original owner had not appeared in Illinois since the war), had taken over a herd of a hundred well-bred Durham cattle, which would soon have grown into a valuable property. Not content with these, he went down to Texas in the fall, and bought four or five hundred Texan bullocks, which he intended, no doubt, to drive home by the same route that the herd had taken that had formerly aroused my indignation by trespassing on my unfenced “estate.” On account of cattle disease a detour was necessary, by which the arrival of the herd was delayed, and for the last portion of the journey there was little or nothing for them to eat. On the arrival of the survivors there was, on the two square miles in cultivation, a hundred acres of Indian corn (which had to be reserved for the shorthorns) and about twenty tons of hay. The speculator soon realised his difficulty, for he commenced advertising for hay, but as this commodity had generally but little saleable value no one put up more than was sufficient for his own needs. Moreover, he had forgotten, or never heard, that Texan cattle have never been accustomed to hay, and don't know what to do with it.

The “proprietor” was absent, or I should greatly have liked to interview him. L—— and I went into the stockyard, extending over a hundred acres. The weather

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for the season was mild, but snow had fallen to a depth of three or four inches. A number of snow-covered mounds were scattered about the stockyard, as if it was a cemetery. Beneath these mounds lay, unstripped of their hides, the bullocks that had already died of hunger. On the surface of the snow, too weak to rise, each with a modicum of hay in front of him, lay the remainder that had not yet succumbed. I shall never forget the look of reproachful surprise in their magnificent eyes. "What do you mean me to do with this?"

My farewells in Chicago were soon made. The sportsmen who used to come out and shoot with us, or to see us shoot on the prairie, were now generals and colonels, and mostly wooden-legged or one-armed. I had seen Chicago in its childhood; it was now grown up, and it didn't appeal to me any more. But even recent revelations cannot take away my pleasant memories of the youthful city I used to visit in my youthful days when, tired by the solitude of the prairie, I wanted a little society, or a day's fun. I should not care to see Chicago again, but I should like to revisit the prairie once more, and see how the trees are prospering that I planted fifty years ago.

Before leaving New York I had laid in a supply of the best tobacco procurable, which I fondly hoped the Liverpool Custom-House officers would permit me to retain. I had already (as I mentioned in another book) had a great slice of luck when coming home from Malta, when my brother, a lieutenant R.N., came on board the troopship on her arrival at Portsmouth, and escorted me and my Gibraltar purchases to the *Victoria and Albert*, on which he was serving. My venture on the present occasion was of far better quality, and my anxiety all the



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more poignant. I had ten pounds of Virginian leaf in half-pound cakes, which had cost me a dollar per lb. To the inquiry, "Have you anything to declare?" I replied that I supposed I was permitted etc. etc.—the usual thing on those occasions. The officer's suspicions were evidently aroused, and he commenced rummaging in my bag, when, of course, he came on the cakes of tobacco, and, indeed, the bag contained little else. Giving a quick glance round, he carried one of the cakes to his nose—which I remember was a very large one—and, after an appreciative sniff, put it in his pocket, closed and marked my bag, and left me without a word, and uncertain whether to be thankful or angry.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BRIDGNORTH.

FATE, chance, luck, or whatever any one chooses to call it, took me, soon after my return from America, to the neighbourhood of Bridgnorth, where I leased a clay farm of from 400 to 500 acres. It was rather a rash proceeding, but I wanted to be doing something, and had no prophetic insight into the future of farming on strong land. In the early sixties changes which were to have a great effect on the future of country life and of agriculture were within visible distance. The scythe, which for centuries had done such excellent service not only in its more legitimate line, but also, not infrequently, in warfare, was being gradually superseded by mowing and reaping machines. The vast majority of these hailed from America, where they had long been considered indispensable by every farmer who owned a forty-acre lot. Some of the leading English manufacturers of agricultural implements had tried unsuccessfully to improve on the American patents. The most futile, if the most amusing, attempt was that of a firm who invented a machine which horses were to push instead of pull; but this truly original suggestion was not destined to be long-lived. Welsh and Irish labourers were beginning regretfully to discontinue the journey they had made, during harvest-time, to the same farm for many years. Their abstention was to be

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followed a little later—as rats leave a sinking ship—by that of the natives, who were become “ambitious of the town.” Cattle-dealers, an honest and capable set of men, and hitherto the chief dependence of the stock-breeding farmers, were to be driven out by the auctioneers, and the value of land in clay counties was to drop to nothing at all.

I soon found there were disadvantages in a position I had rather hastily assumed, yet it was not long before I saw that I might have done worse. True, there was little chance of making money, or of getting much profit intellectually, still, I might be able to keep what I had. There was, at any rate, plenty of fresh air, any amount of hunting and shooting at what would now be considered infinitesimal cost, and association with men who, if not very clever in the city acceptation of the word, were an honest and true-hearted race, and some of them even in those days interesting characters. They would be still more interesting could they be met with to-day, but, alas! they have departed, and their successors, however worthy, are of a different sort. The isolation of that part of Shropshire was favourable to “character,” which flies the intrusion of strangers as an owl from the teasing attention of small birds.

At that date most of the visitors to Bridgnorth arrived by a unicorn coach from Shifnal. It was the time when the glories of the old coaching days were over, and their place had not yet been filled by the railroads. The few coaches yet remaining on the roads were certainly not fitted to survive. I shall never forget the way in which the three skeleton horses attached to the Shifnal bus crawled along, while the driver nodded on his box. It was indeed only right that by a leisurely approach the

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stranger should be prepared for the peaceful calm of what was almost, not quite, the sleepest town in a county where none were too lively. In addition to the Shifnal coach there was a rather better two-horse bus from Wolverhampton, which contrived to continue running long after the opening of the Severn Valley Railway. This was driven for many years by a man named Sefton, a fine specimen of the stalwart Shropshire breed, and with the rare endowment of a fund of native humour. This gift he utilised—as is the case with humorists—in a way that must sometimes have been prejudicial to his business. When Mr. Sefton got a little “market peart,” the return journey from Wolverhampton was not always entirely free from danger. The hill by which he had to make the descent into Bridgnorth is one of the steepest in England, and it was his delight if he had a nervous passenger, or one whom he chose to consider so, to gallop down this steep hill at top speed. Of course his knowledge of the road, and of his horses (and their understanding—which horses endowed with a little humour must surely have arrived at—of just how much was earnest and how much brag), made his recklessness less dangerous than it appeared to the stranger who was experiencing it for the first time. A regular traveller soon got to enjoy the fright of the novice as much as the driver himself—or else to pretend to. Sefton’s skill, or luck, generally brought him and his fares through safely, but once a portion of his freight was shot through the bow-window of the little public-house—which stands, or used to stand, at the bottom of the hill—to the great discomfort of the two elderly landladies.

Not that Bridgnorth in those days had a monopoly of isolation. There were places even more secluded and

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harder to arrive at, and on that account even more primitive. Some of these to this day preserve the personality—so to speak—which Bridgnorth may congratulate itself, fortunately on insufficient grounds, on having lost. Bewdley, near which town I afterwards resided for some years, has scarcely undergone any change since the days when it used to return two Members to Parliament, though the thousands of trippers may be too much taken up with admiring the blooming cherry orchards, or studying the intricacies of the river, to take much notice of the natives, who would prove at least equally worthy of their attention. As a student of their peculiar traditional customs, I must confess some of these incited rather to annoyance than admiration. It was difficult for a resident requiring a new door to appreciate the humour of the Bewdley carpenter, who would take the measure with his arms, which he would strive, of course unsuccessfully, to keep rigidly unmovable till he reached his shop. On his way home he would be accosted with the usual hospitable formula, "Come and have a drink, mate." To which the grieved but conscientious workman would reply, "You d——d fool, can't you see as I've got the measure for a door?"

There was a large tannery in Bewdley, at which in the season the arrival of wagons laden with bark from the neighbouring forest made quite a busy scene. I would see from my window a loaded wagon drawn up, from which the horses would be removed. Some one would strew a few slabs of bark by the side of the wagon nearest the river. A big man—*deus ex machinâ*—would then emerge from the tannery armed with a crowbar. This he would place under the wheel, while another man held the shafts. A jerk, and over went the wagon; surely a clever

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if primitive mode of unloading. Almost before the crash had travelled up to my window, the empty wagon had been reinstated, with a haste that may possibly have served to keep the proprietor in ignorance of the strain to which his vehicle had been subjected.

There were some curious folk about Bewdley in those days, as very likely there are still. About the drollest was a man named Griffiths, a commission agent, from whom I used occasionally to buy linseed cake. He was quite without education, except of the most elementary sort, yet posed as an author (of historical plays, amongst other things), and writer of poetry. On market days he used to try and persuade his customers to purchase his doggerel, which certainly had neither rhyme nor reason. Griffiths actually came forward as a Radical candidate for Bewdley at the General Election (I remember his informing me of the fact as he walked about Bridgnorth market with a big sample of cake under his arm) and obtained one vote—his own. He used to be favoured with a considerable amount of chaff, but no rhinoceros could have been more impervious, and his folly may have brought grist to the mill. Many years afterwards, when living near Kidderminster, I came across a book purporting to be a history of the town and its most notable citizens, when to my surprise I found my old linseed-cake friend exalted into "one of our worthies." It struck me that Kidderminster must have been rather hard up!

But a reputation for eccentricity may have been in those days a paying asset, though to-day it might consign its possessor to a lunatic asylum.

Another amusing character, as I hope he still is, was the agent from whom I used to buy artificial manure, and

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whom I must have known for about forty years. His delight was in long words and high polite phraseology, which, when he was offended—fortunately a rare occurrence—would diverge into an exaggeration of Maryatt's "bloody politeful." One day not so very long ago I found him at the bar of the Lion Hotel, Kidderminster, having a rather heated argument with a farmer about Phryne, of all people. "Here," he exclaimed as I entered, "is some one who can decide the question." Then turning to me, "This gentleman and myself have had a little difference of opinion. Would you have the great kindness to inform us who Phryne was? I have been trying to persuade my friend that she was a lady of doubtful antecedents." I felt a little astonished, though I was fairly well used to his excursions into matters having little or no connection with the artificial manure trade. "Not very doubtful," I replied; "Phryne was a . . . ." I never inquired what the farmer's opinion of Phryne might have been, or how he became interested in her character, but he may have bought a cow or a mare on whom the name had been bestowed by a previous owner.

There was a young fellow who used to attend the Bridgnorth market with whom I dealt occasionally, chiefly, I think, to begin with, because he played a very good game of billiards. Once I sold him a quantity of beans; when he paid me he had the assurance to dock me several pounds for quite an insufficient reason. I was standing on the steps of the newly built Market Hall (which no one used, all business being done in the street), when, seeing him some distance off, I called out in a loud voice, "B——, you are a thief." It made quite a sensation. I had not seen him for over thirty years, when one day, being at the Talbot

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Hall, Kidderminster, one market day on political business, I came across my friend of the beans, old looking and almost stone deaf. Rather to my surprise he accosted me at the top of his voice. "Do you remember calling out to me in Bridgnorth market, 'B——, you are a thief?'" The farmers raised a roar of laughter, and B—— seemed to enjoy the joke as much as any one else.

The first year I was in Salop there was a good deal of charcoal burning; several ironworks on the Severn banks belonging to Mr. Foster (who afterwards purchased the Apley estate) used charcoal in the manufacture of iron. Salop iron was then thought the best in the country. A year or two afterwards these works were standing idle, and I never heard any more of charcoal-made iron. The charcoal burners were a rough lot and notorious poachers. Pheasants in the breeding season are very pugnacious, and the burners were said to keep a gamecock to challenge them, and put them *hors de combat*, whence they speedily went into the pot.

I had not, in deciding on my new home, paid much attention to the scenery, and was therefore as much surprised as pleased to find that the locality, if rather wild, was exceedingly beautiful. The Severn flowed through Bridgnorth, four miles away, and on the other side, nearing Ludlow, were the Clee Hills. Towards Shrewsbury the Wrekin rose out of a fairly level country, while within a drive the Caradoc uplifted its peak in the neighbourhood of Church Stretton. Bridgnorth itself was a quaint old town, with its Town Hall (the council chamber, apparently only to be reached by a ladder from the High Street), standing erect on its props in the centre of the roadway, as if waiting for another flood, and its fine old timbered





WEST FRONT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD (1840).

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houses. It has long since been provided with a railway of the sort one would suppose it to have desired, which travels through a number of old-fashioned places till it arrives at Shrewsbury, formerly considered an Ultima Thule. I suppose the approaching traveller, craning his neck out of the carriage window, still compares Bridgnorth to Jerusalem, though the surrounding country is scarcely a replica of the Holy Land, nor do the Wheatland farmers, unless they have recently changed a great deal, bear any close resemblance to the Jews. My neighbours almost to a man were sportsmen, and fortunate in that the locality was an ideal one for the sportsman with a limited income. They made but little money, and that little they spent freely. There was a good deal of wheat grown on the strong land, which indeed would grow but little else, and the price was not yet absolutely prohibitive. A great number of Hereford cattle were bred and fatted on the rich grazing lands in Corve Dale and similar localities. If not cattle-kings, the Shropshire farmers were a well-to-do and independent class. Since I left America the farmers in the States have been practically ruined by the Trusts, and it seems too much to hope that the characteristics for which the English farmer has so long been noted have a chance of surviving much longer.

My farming began very badly with the most disastrous season I ever saw or heard of. On many farms in my neighbourhood no corn was carried to the rickyard. For some reason, probably the eccentricity or impecuniosity of my predecessor, I had less grain to harvest than should have been the case, and some of my wheat I managed to stack, but greatly out of condition. One farm on which I had the shooting was a melancholy sight, the wheat standing in the fields in October, the shocks grown

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together, while the oats which had been cocked were mere heaps of ill-smelling black dust.

In addition to the shooting on my farm of four or five hundred acres, I had shooting rights over the remainder of my landlord's estate; and these extended to rabbits, to the great annoyance of the tenants, one of whom was accustomed to state that he had lost a cow in a hole which I had had dug when searching for a lost ferret. The whole district, notwithstanding the stiff clay, was overrun with rabbits, which required an immense amount of keeping down, or they would soon have eaten up everything, as in Australia. It took quite a year's apprenticeship before I was able to make head against them. Afterwards, with careful management, they never gave me any trouble, but a good deal of pleasure, except when I happened to be asked out to lunch, and my host thoughtfully regaled me on rabbit pie!

Fortunately it was considered bad form to have one of these little beasts on the table. They were carefully reserved for the weekly advent of the "higgler"—a race of men even more useful to the small farmer than the cattle-dealer—who found appreciative customers in the "Black Country." For a clay country partridges were plentiful, and we had an occasional stray pheasant, and a few woodcock. There were stubbles in those days, not the bare shaven things that now usurp the name, but a thick cover, a foot or so high, interwoven with all sorts of weeds, and making better lying than swedes. On the advent of the reaping machine, partridges which had been accustomed in September to lie like stones till they were kicked up under the nose of the old pointer, soon developed new habits, and began to run down the furrow as soon as you came into the field. This necessitated

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driving ; but for the destruction of the old stubbles, people might yet be found "pottering," as some call it, with a pointer—than which I feel sure there was no more enjoyable or sportsmanlike way of shooting. However, I soon found that I was not to be entirely dependent for my sport on shooting.

I had only played cricket in "aquatics" while at Eton, and was surprised when I first joined the Bridgnorth Cricket Club to find that my play had improved instead of deteriorating. I had lost touch with all my old friends while in America, but found six or seven Christ Church men members of the club. The majority had been at the House with me, but, having lived all their lives in one of the dullest neighbourhoods in England, they were not particularly lively. One of them had nearly killed me when a friend was bowling lobs to him on the Ch. Ch. ground, and I was doing ditto hard by to some one else. A man named Colley used to play regularly with the B.C.C., who had made over seventy runs in an innings in the Oxford and Cambridge match ; he never made any with us, and I suppose the bowling was not good enough for him. One of the annual matches played by the B.C.C. was on the late Lord Stamford's ground at Enville. Lord Stamford used to play with the Enville club when staying at the Hall. He bowled very fast underhand, a practice that, if reintroduced in the present day, might prove very destructive to good batsmen—which we were not. On a hard wicket the way his lordship used to make the ball whiz about one's ears was a caution ; and what particularly vexed him was to see the intended victim taking things calmly instead of funking. With all his faults—one of which was the over-preservation of game, whereby the farmers on the estate

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were as surely eaten up as if they had themselves been rabbits or pheasants—Lord Stamford was immensely popular in the district, and his victories on the turf (which would have been more considerable had not his hot temper led him so frequently into disagreement with his trainer or jockey for the time being) were welcomed with enthusiasm. I remember being one day at Wolverhampton market, when I saw a small landowner and farmer from the Enville district walking on the other side of the street. He was laughing to himself, and slapping his thigh at intervals when I crossed the street and asked him what the dickens was the matter. “Matter!” he said; well, not much the matter. Only Lord Stamford won a hundred thousand from Lord D—— last night.”

How he had got the news, and whether it was true, I don't know, but there was an impression that Lord D—— was not a very desirable friend to the Lord of Enville, though the latter might have been supposed to be able to take care of himself.

It might seem that with hunting, shooting, and cricket I should have found plenty of occupation even without farming, which last required a great amount of time and attention. The chief market towns were at a great distance, Ludlow, the best market for Hereford cattle, was sixteen miles off; Wolverhampton twenty, and Shrewsbury twenty-four. This last opened at eight, so that to drive there one had to start at 5 a.m. If you arrived a little late everything had been bought up by the dealers, who would ask a big profit. Yet the fact of being hard worked did not prevent me from taking up another occupation, and from this I reaped—while doing, I hoped, some good in my generation—a fund of instruction and

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amusement. Needless to say the new occupation was politics. I had been brought up a Tory, and did not find that my long stay in America had done anything to change my opinions. Indeed, I think it was rather the reverse. Though not a voter for the borough, I soon began to take an interest in Bridgnorth politics. Several of the "Freemen" worked for me, or in some other way came under my influence, and I was frequently asked to try my hand on some one who had managed to escape the net which was pretty closely drawn. This book has nothing to do with politics, but I cannot refrain from giving an instance of the strange way in which the Freeman of Bridgnorth regarded his privilege of "exercising the franchise."

Once on the eve of an election I was asked to canvass a Freeman of good position and more than average intelligence, one R——, a farmer, over whose land I had the shooting, and who eked out his farming by making draining tiles. There were three candidates in the field for one vacant seat: Mr. Henry Whitmore of Apley, a Tory, and R——'s landlord; Mr. Pritchard, a rich Bridgnorth banker of no particular politics; and Sir John (afterwards Lord) Acton, a Liberal. The situation was made more complicated by the fact that R——'s farm was on the point of being sold to Pritchard, while Sir John's agent had developed a mania for draining, which caused a vast number of draining tiles to pass from R——'s yard to Aldenham. I called in one day after shooting to interview R——, who seemed delighted to explain matters. "Naturally I should have voted for Whitmore, but he is selling the farm to Pritchard. Then Sir John is getting a lot of tiles off me. I'd best not vote at all."

I demurred to this, and put in a few words about the

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farmers' duty to the Tory party, and so on; but he did not appear to be greatly moved.

At last, "I'll go and fetch my book."

Leaving me, he returned shortly with a book containing the accounts of his sales of draining tiles. After some time spent in calculations, "I find," he said, "that Whitmore has had quite a lot of tiles; not so many as Sir John, but he's not my landlord. Pritchard will be soon; but he hasn't had any tiles. You may say I shall be pleased to vote for Whitmore."

As I have before remarked I was never much of a fisherman, but I now possessed a trout stream, a very little one, and hard to fish on account of the overhanging trees. I used to "lade" it every year, damming the stream, and running off the water through a number of wooden troughs. The men enjoyed the "sport" immensely. I used to get a few pails full of moderate-sized trout, which else would have been utilised by the herons from Lord Forester's heronry. In the first year of my tenancy I came one day on the son of a neighbouring landlord and J.P. walking calmly up the brook with his rod. "I've got quite a nice basket of trout," he said (so he had). "I come here every year." He did not offer me any trout, but I said nothing, as we were very good friends. That autumn there was a General Election. I had been doing a little political work, and a man living on the other side of the country, proprietor of two or three small farms in my neighbourhood, who had been in correspondence with me about his tenant's political leanings, advised me to go over his farms some day and see if I could find anything to shoot at. One day I went with a sporting friend to look for them. They were hard to find and not much use, with the exception of one,



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where there was a patch of three or four acres of heather in front of the house. This was full of birds, and we made up quite a nice little bag. Taking leave of the farmer's wife, whom we presented with a brace of birds, we told her we would pay her farm another visit very shortly. "Oh," said she, "that bean't our land as you shot 'em on. That belongs to Squire P——"—whose son had caught my trout. I wrote and apologised, not very humbly, as I was thinking of a "Roland for an Oliver," and got a very nice polite reply saying it didn't matter at all.

I had another proof that it is unwise to be hard on any one for a small peccadillo when you are at all likely to be in the same box yourself. I was one day walking along a footpath leading to an outlying farm about four miles from my house, where I had the shooting, when a number of quite large birds got off the stubble at some distance and settled in the big straggling hedge adjoining the footpath. I had not the remotest idea what they were, but when my dog pointed in the hedge and they flew out, I got a brace right and left, and on picking them up, saw to my surprise that they were grouse. I heard afterwards that there were always a few grouse on the Brown Clee Hill adjoining. The next market day at Bridgnorth a very rude little man came up to me, and said he heard I had been poaching on his shoot, and had shot some grouse. I explained the matter, saying it was owing to curiosity on my part, and that I would send him the grouse if he wished; but he made a great row, and at last I walked away, "leaving him to it," as they say. A week or two afterwards my bailiff and keeper told me he had seen the little man, who was some sort of a bagman, when driving along the Ludlow road, about three fields from my house, stop his horse, get out of his trap, and shoot over

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the hedge into a covey of partridges grouped on the stubble. This was a very soothing *quid pro quo*, the more so as on the appearance of my man the little bagman had jumped into his trap and driven off *without the birds*.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CATTLE-DEALERS IN THE SIXTIES.

IF, as seems fair, the provider of sport is entitled to take rank as a sportsman, the leading cattle-dealers in South Shropshire had an undeniable claim to the honour, since without them sport in the district would have been impossible for men of limited incomes. In addition, they had the great recommendation, than which nothing is more characteristic of the true sportsman, of finding their own sport and enjoyment in the business in which they found themselves placed, and which they followed, to the exclusion of all other matters whatsoever.

It is hard to say how, in the days before auctions, the Wheatland farmers, many of whom never dreamt of keeping banking accounts, would have got on without the cattle-dealers. There were a number of them in my day, and of these, two, of quite opposite characteristics, were notable men.

The first of these, Tom Davis by name, was certainly the most remarkable cattle dealer I ever heard of, and to do him justice would require the pen of a Smiles. He was a little, wiry, fresh-coloured man of about forty, with a gentlemanly address, and an insinuating smile, which could not but have its effect on all who came across him, from gentlemen farmers to butchers. He was one of the best and quickest judges of sheep or cattle that ever went

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into a market. By seeing him so frequently about our neighbourhood, and from knowing that he had a large farm a few miles away, many got to fancy that he was merely a local dealer, and our peculiar attribute. So also may have thought the farmers of many other districts; but the fact was very different. He lived at Wolverhampton, in the Black Country, finding that a convenient centre from which to travel all over the Midlands. On Monday he attended Liverpool market, a journey of over a hundred miles, and to reach there in time for the market, then held much earlier than is now the custom, he would have to spend a good portion of Sunday night in the train. Travelling back after market he would reach home late on Monday evening. On Tuesday there was a large weekly market near home. On Wednesday he would be at Wolverhampton, where he nominally lived, and on Thursday at Birmingham. I forget his Friday's task, but the day was certainly not unoccupied. Saturday (except when there was a monthly or fortnightly cattle market which he wished to attend, and which might be in any county) he would devote to looking over his farms, of which he had two or three large ones always crowded with sheep and cattle, or to driving about amongst his numerous customers. When the season permitted—that is, always except in mid-winter—he would, at the conclusion of each market, ransack the neighbourhood he happened to be in. How he found time and energy to visit all these markets, in addition to calling on his legions of customers, was a mystery even to those who knew him best. But he managed it somehow. He had, of course, to pay the penalty of his success and popularity. If he had desired ever so earnestly to do less business, he would have been

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forced to continue in the old groove or give up altogether, as many of his customers would have nothing to do with any other dealer while he was to the fore. Failure—not that he ever failed—to keep an appointment would frequently have meant a financial crisis to a hard-working but overburdened farmer. At night, when other dealers were enjoying a glass, or glasses, in the bar of their favourite inn, and waxing eloquent over the day's successes or failures, he would be engaged, after a frugal meal, in going through the day's accounts with his clerk. These were always posted to his customers next morning, and he was himself a good accountant and correspondent. Bank holidays were his great delight ; no child could have more enjoyed what he was pleased to consider a holiday. Contrary to most people's ideas he would have liked a few more of them, and he probably thought that Sir John Lubbock—as he was then called—was the most practical and businesslike of statesmen. He would start from home at daybreak, driving twenty miles or so into the country with his big brown horse, which was almost as well known in the district as its master, to a farm where he had previously arranged to look at some beasts. From thence he would get the farmer to drive him to another place, whence he would be forwarded to another ; in good times selling, perhaps, at the next farm the stock bought at the last. He was such a valuable man to the country that the farmers would do anything for him ; but it was not every one he would visit. Towards night he would have worked round to the farm at which he had left his horse in the morning. Then came the twenty-mile drive home, where he would arrive sometime in the small hours, having thoroughly enjoyed his holiday. Perhaps his plan was as healthy a way of spending his time as

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that of many others. Oddly enough, though he did a large business, often amounting to thousands of pounds a week, with a London agent, he had never been in London. It was said that he once started, and got as far as Rugby, when he returned—I forget why. The enormous amount of work he had to get through found him out at last, and he died a comparatively young man, from a slight illness which he had left himself no surplus power to resist. No man could possibly have been more missed, and he left a gap that it took a dozen of the ordinary dealers to fill, and even then it was not filled in the same style. He was not above the necessary arts of a dealer, whose absence would have caused many to put him down as a fraud, and without which he would not long have remained a dealer. But his depreciation of his customers' wares, and "cracking up" of his own were exceedingly moderate, if not absolutely true or conspicuous by their absence. He was a thoroughly honest man, and it would have been hard to find any one in any walk of life—I say this advisedly—more respected. Times have altered since then, and it is not risking much to prophesy that his like will never appear again. One of what he considered his amusements is worth noting. In the Birmingham cattle market when trade was dull, and butchers—which was seldom the case—deaf to his blandishments, he would fill up the time by making careful estimates of the weight of the cattle he had for sale. With these on next market day he would compare the real weight as returned by the butchers to whom the cattle had been sold. Cattle in a dull market are generally sold by weight. This amusement was all very well and improving for the assistant, but it was a great proof of modesty that he should imagine that there was any room for improvement in him. But it is the men with most knowledge who

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are most anxious to acquire more. Just as the busiest men always have a little spare time, whereas the idlers never have time for anything.

After his death it seemed as if very little good had come of all this slaving process, and some people went so far as to pity him, in that—in their view—he had got no fun out of his life. I certainly knew him well enough to be certain that he would have got no enjoyment out of it in any other way. All men are not similarly constituted, and there may be professions generally thought less seductive than cattle-dealing, on the followers of which a good deal of pity is wasted by men who cannot understand that there are persons who, fortunately for themselves, take a pride in doing well whatever they have to do. The last time I saw him, he knew he was dying. His eyes had a weary look, whether from illness, or because he could not go on dealing, it is impossible to say.

“God bless you, old chap,” I said, but the words seemed to have very little meaning to him. Any heaven without a cattle market at least twice a week he would have found very dull. He looked wearied and worn out, and motioned me away. He had been an honest man and wronged no one. On the contrary, he had done much good, and forgiven many who had wronged him. I think his only feeling with regard to dying was a dread of enforced idleness. There are many to whom this would not be a very terrifying prospect.

It would have been quite impossible for Tom Davis, even had he been more zealous and energetic than the reality, to do all the work of a district which included Corve Dale and other noted cattle-raising centres. Ben Cooper of Pattingham, who shared the trade—I am sure the idea of “rivalry” never suggested itself to either of

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them—which before the introduction of auctions must have been exceedingly profitable, was equally well known and trusted. Yet no two men could have been greater contrasts. All Tom Davis required, even after a deal of exceptional magnitude, was a cup of tea, and I never remember seeing him touch a glass of liquor. Ben was a hard-headed old chap who could, and would, take any quantity of whisky, brandy, or gin, good, bad, or indifferent, and it was reported of him that he had tried the hardness of his skull against the curb stones of all the neighbouring market towns. He died not very long ago, having survived his more temperate colleague for many years. There was little to choose between the judgment of the two men, though I have heard some say that Ben was the better judge of a beast—he could scarcely have been much better. I was myself a witness of the celerity with which he could price a number of cattle with, it seemed, merely a glance of his eye. During the rinderpest scare in the winter of 1866, when the plague seemed to be advancing towards our neighbourhood, he was fearful that the restrictions imposed on the moving of cattle would make it difficult for him to supply his customers in the spring. He therefore asked me (and no doubt a number of others) to feed some cattle for him till the beginning of May, which, if not permitted to remove, he would slaughter on the premises, and for which he would pay eightpence per lb. I thought this quite good enough, though as a rule I did not do much winter cattle-feeding, and I managed to feed twenty-two beasts, of which I was getting rather tired before the time came to hand them over. Being doubtful of my own judgment, I asked the Scotch bailiff of a neighbouring magnate to come over and value them, when, after an hour or so's consideration, we arrived



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at the sum of £510. Old Ben turned up after dark on the appointed day, and without having his horse taken out, marched off to the cow-house. He came out in five minutes, or less. "If I give you a cheque for five hundred and five," he said, "there won't be much the matter." So I thought, and he wrote out the cheque, had a drink or two, and was gone.

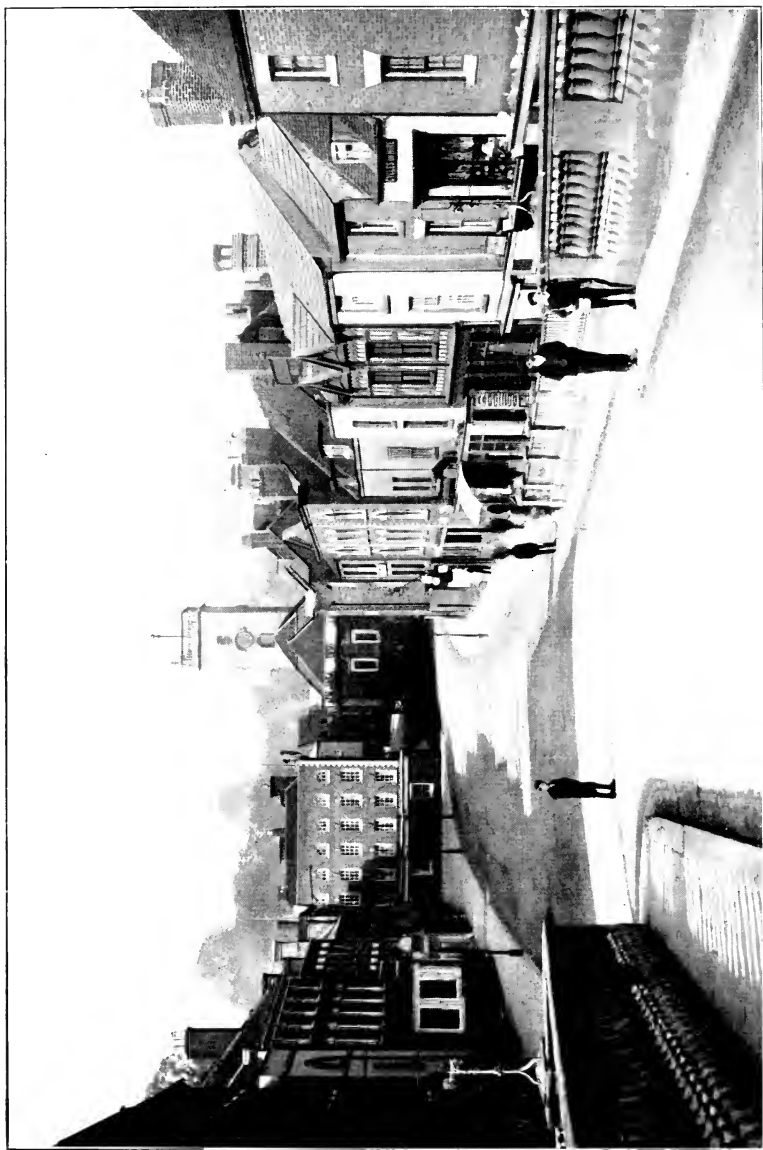
I am not sure that in those days it was an advantage to a dealer to be temperate and sober. Apparently few dealers used to think so. If a dealer determined on being temperate, he had to start with a cast-iron will, while if he was to be the reverse, he had to be provided with a cast-iron head and inside, to enable him to swallow with impunity the awful stuff served out at the public he was forced to frequent. There are men still surviving who have got drunk after every market for forty years on the vilest of vile liquors. One of these, a clever fellow enough, who had made a large fortune, once remarked to me in a hurt tone, when half-seas over, that he supposed I did not think him fit to black Tom Davis' boots; to which I quite honestly replied that I didn't. There were some curious characters among farmers in those days, many of whom could imagine no greater insult than for a man to refuse to drink with them. Jerry —, one of the best-known farmers in Corve Dale, who kept a fine herd of Hereford cattle, used always to feed a big lot of bullocks for the Christmas market, and for these there would be considerable competition. Tom Davis would very likely go to look at them, but, as he would not stop to make a night of it, he had but little chance of acquiring them. The day after his visit Ben might rattle up to the door with his thoroughbred horse in the shafts. If, as was likely, it was getting dark, he would ask for a lantern, and go straight

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off to look at the bullocks. In about two minutes, during which time the man would have taken out his horse, he would come back. "How much for them bullocks?" Jerry — would ask twenty-five pounds, when Ben would bid twenty. After supper the two would sit down by the kitchen table, and try to drink one another under it. By slow degrees, and with vast expenditure of cider—to my astonishment it has recently been stated in Parliament that cider is non-intoxicant—the seller's price would come down, while the offer of the would-be purchaser would rise to meet him. Once they were reported to have been found in the morning, their arms leaning on the table, both fast asleep. On one occasion the battle raged for three days and nights, when old Ben departed, looking as fresh as paint, but without the bullocks. He may indeed have forgotten the object of his coming.

It is hard in these times to imagine how any farmers could have got on in this way, but the fact may be thus accounted for. Their rents and payments were low, they spent little or nothing on themselves except in drink. Their labour bills were low, owing to most of their land being in grass. The grass land was good, and they had sufficient sense to value the famous herds of cattle which grazed it. Fat beasts were dear, and they made their own cider.

In addition to these two notable men there were scores of little dealers, shrewd enough most of them, but unable to make more than a living, owing, generally, to their love of "a glass." A few of the smartest of these made money during the rinderpest scare, when it was impossible to get any cattle at all except through the benevolence of the dealers, who charged what they liked, and were the only



LOAD STREET, BEAVLEVY.



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people really conversant with the troublesome and exacting regulations. One of these men, who leapt suddenly into comparative affluence, though, like many other dealers in those days, he could neither read nor write, I knew very well, and he was useful to me on many occasions. I remember him as usually having his head bound up with a red silk handkerchief, in consequence, I suppose, of an affray on the previous evening. He lived close to Lord (then Sir John) Acton's place at Aldenham, and was, if I am not mistaken, a tenant on the estate. We had just had a fright, as the Government Inspector had declared the cattle on Sir John's home farm to be infected with rinderpest, and had ordered them all, about fifty in number, to be pole-axed. According to the experience elsewhere, we expected the plague to spread to our own homesteads, but days and weeks passed without our fears being realised. I called on the dealer, Adams by name, to induce him to send me, as a special favour, some cattle I urgently wanted. After our business was transacted he said that if I had a few minutes to spare he would like to show me something. He took me, with an air of mystery, his finger on his lips, to the boundary of his farm, and, looking over the hedge on to Sir John's home farm, pointed out to me a thick crop of saffron—colchicum, or autumn crocus—growing luxuriantly in the field on the other side. This plant, as I well knew, was dangerous to cattle turned out on it through carelessness or ignorance. Sir John mistrusting, I suppose, native talent, had imported a new agent from Norfolk, where (perhaps owing to the immunity of the natives from gout) saffron may have been unknown. The new agent turned some hungry cattle on to this field, grateful, no doubt, for what he imagined "an early bite." "Rinderpest," whispered Mr. Adams with a smile, as he

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pointed over the hedge. Indeed, it was shortly decided by local judges, to our great relief, that the supposed cattle plague was only a case of our old acquaintance "saffron," and it must have been long before the agent forgot the properties of that previously unknown herb.

## CHAPTER X.

### FARMERS AS SPECIALISTS.

FORTY years ago there were more specialists to be found among farmers than is now the case. Sir Walter Scott's remark that a literary career should be looked on rather as a walking stick than a crutch, applies with equal force to a *spécialité* as an aid to the more commonplace work of the farmer, though in these days of keen competition even the least profitable divergence from the beaten path is unlikely to remain the monopoly of the inventor for more than a season or two. In old days the specialist was more fortunate. One of the earliest and most successful was the now almost forgotten "Simpson," who may have been indebted to his prosperity for the simplicity of his methods. "Simpson" was the embodiment of milk adulteration in the last century. The original was probably a large dairy farmer in the neighbourhood of London, a genial old fellow who considered his special treatment, which was merely the diluting of the milk as provided by the cow with as much water as his customers would stand, a joke of the first water; and indeed no joke is as good as the one that pays you. There was probably a verb "to 'Simpson'," though certainly not in general use. Oddly enough "Simpson's" customers were equally alive to the humour of paying for new milk and getting the bluest of sky blue.

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Indeed, till quite recently a milkman taking his milk from a farm would drive his cart straight to the pump, and pump water into his cans, till, if the farmer happened to be about, he was ordered to stop, when he would, almost reluctantly, make the addition of a little milk. There were curious ideas about milk in those days, many people believing that it was chiefly composed of calves' brains and chalk, but it is certain that "Simpson" would never have authorised the expenditure that the more costly of these ingredients would have involved. He has departed, and, indeed, was scarcely fitted to survive. People are now so wanting in humour as to be unable to see any joke in the adulteration of milk which is now subjected to pains and penalties more or less deterrent. The stream once so profitable to "Simpson" and his successors has been diverted into other channels, and the pumpers are now so skilful and energetic that almost everything we eat or drink is more or less of a make-believe.

Another once profitable *spécialité*, which has also come to grief, was taking farming pupils. While there was still a profit to be extracted from the pleasant pursuit of agriculture, numbers of young men of good family were sent to noted farmers, chiefly in Norfolk and the Lothians, to learn farming. Nowadays parents prefer their sons to matriculate in stock-jobbing or wine-selling. Yet surely the advantage of agricultural lore to any one destined to succeed to an estate well out of the reach of the jerry-builder is more obvious than ever. In the sixties I used frequently to visit a Norfolk farmer who occupied about 2000 acres of light land, all arable, with the exception of one 100-acre meadow. He was an active young fellow, about thirty years old, already getting



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a little grey, and no wonder. His wife was a member of a noted farming family, her father and brothers holding about 7000 acres in the county. He had a large house, formerly occupied by the local squire, which was packed from attic to basement with pupils of whom he always had five or six at £200 a year, and his rapidly increasing family. A horse was kept for each pupil, and after breakfast the hacks were brought round, and the cavalcade accompanied their tutor round the farm. Instruction was blended with amusement; there was a good deal of larking over fences, and those who did not care to study agricultural lore could, at any rate, learn to ride. One day, I remember, we had a race, ten shillings entry, round a 100-acre field that was being got ready for swedes. The going was first-rate, and, as I had been provided by my host with a superior quad, I managed to distance the lot. At dinner it was dress clothes and champagne. There have been considerable changes since that day; not all for the worse. If there is no more champagne, neither does the landlord send round keepers, when the corn is about ankle high, to drive in stakes to prevent the tenant from using a reaping machine. This was not an unusual procedure in Norfolk. No doubt my friend's *spécialité* was a useful help in a bad season, but I used to think that when the champagne and the horse's keep had been paid for there was not much left of the £200. When agriculture got into a bad way, farming pupils, like wheat, fell lower and lower in the market. First to £100, then to £50 (when the "education" of the unfortunate youths was limited to chaff-cutting, and other menial occupations), and then to zero. The *spécialité* was as dead as "Simpson" or Queen Anne.

Later on there was the supplying of Shropshire sheep

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(a breed that for many years was exceedingly fashionable at home and abroad) to Americans, then just beginning to turn their attention to the improving of their flocks—this not before it was needed. Out of the new development a number of Shropshire farmers, whose flocks were above the ordinary, made fortunes, and these, no doubt, supplied the genuine article. At cattle shows they would lunch sumptuously about twenty times a day—and even more frequently at the Royal—and each time with a different American in tow. I used to wonder how they could keep up even a pretence of an appetite. The Americans were so ingenuous (a less unusual trait with them than is generally supposed, if one may judge from the frequently recurring reports of transatlantic victims to the old and familiar “confidence trick”), that I am afraid a good number got taken in. A young man, a neighbouring farmer with whom I was acquainted, who was related to a successful breeder of Shropshires, went into the American business—as tipsters trade on the names of famous jockeys—and I was for some time puzzled to understand how he managed to supply his numerous clients from quite a small flock. I had some lambs once at a local sale, and to these my friend paid a good deal of attention. They were eventually knocked down to him, and, meeting him afterwards, he informed me—“only don’t tell any one”—that one of my lambs had started for America. I forget the price, but it was, no doubt, more than I received for the whole pen, and conformable to the pedigree with which it had been supplied. And indeed the purchaser might have had a worse lamb. I believe that American taste has since shifted to Lincolns. In my opinion—perhaps a little prejudiced—it would have been better to stick to the Salopians.

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Yet another *spécialité* that came in with the bad times was the attempt made by farmers in the neighbourhood of towns to subsidise their legitimate business by taking lodgers. I once paid a farewell visit to an old friend who was on the point of leaving the farm whereon he had been born and bred. This move had been decided on not from any desire to cast himself adrift from the associations of a lifetime, but because the agriculture in which he delighted had, so to speak, receded, and left him high and dry. Rather, perhaps, his once quiet home had been overwhelmed by a flood of buildings and villas occupied by townfolk with whom he had nothing in common. He was a cheery old fellow, and I found him seated on one of his boxes, watching the loading of the last van with furniture, of which he had inherited or collected a vast but not very valuable store. In his right hand was an oak stick with which he was making passes, not very vicious ones, in the direction of an intrusive crowd of queer and uncountrified-looking men and women who were attempting, some with threats and others with no less futile blandishments, to force an entrance some hours before the expiration of his legal tenancy. The incoming farmer had already let his house, with the exception of the kitchen and an attic or two, in suites to various lodgers from the neighbouring town. It was raining heavily, and this caused the delay in their anticipated introduction to furnished apartments in the country to be specially aggravating. The new farmer had not put in an appearance, but his wife was present in her new rôle of landlady, and engaged in smuggling in the more riotous, and condoling with the less obstreperous of her clients.

Passing out by the back way, after shaking my old friend's hand—for indeed it was no time for prolonged

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leave-takings—I chanced upon a herd of eager suppliants, resembling in their disarray a ghostly crowd awaiting Charon and his ferry, and each one bent on smuggling something over. At the door of the harness-room stood a hysterical woman bearing a cage, in which was a canary, apparently her sole possession. A man stood on the doorstep, watching like an exiled cat for the opening of the door, and holding suspended by a string a tawdry picture in a dilapidated frame; presumably an heirloom which he was desirous of placing under cover in the new gallery-to-be. In the yard (drawn up side by side with a farm wagon, loaded with the soaked bedding whereon the newcomers were to repose) was a town cab, from the shafts of which the horse had been removed, and whose Jehu was grumbling at the non-arrival of the beer with which no one had thought it necessary to regale him. The windows of the cab were hermetically sealed, and the occupants were awaiting the course of events with a creditable amount of patience, slightly tempered with wonder.

I have sufficient confidence in the shrewdness of the present race of farmers to feel certain that many of them would be quite capable of inventing new specialities, fitted to take the place of those that have unfortunately lapsed, were it not evident that in these days of fierce competition a hungry horde of imitators would hasten to profit by the experience of the yet unremunerated pioneers.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WHEATLAND HUNT.

I FOUND the local hunt, the Wheatland, a rough-and-ready pack, and these epithets were equally applicable to the field, which was only on very rare occasions supplemented by an iron master or two, or a sporting publican from the Black Country. I lived in the house that had recently been inhabited by the owner, John Baker, M.F.H., who, since resigning the Mastership of the Wheatland, had been twice promoted, the second time to the command of the North Warwickshire. He was one of those, still occasionally met with, who are born with an ineradicable love of sport. His subscription list, while hunting the Wheatland—a two-days-a-week pack—varied from £140 to £170, and he had been accustomed to come home from hunting to dine on a red herring, washed down with a bottle of port. He would then start off on a night journey to Wales, where he was agent to a big landlord, making the return journey again by the night train in time for the next meet of his hounds. No doubt he quickly discarded the herring when he took up his residence at Leamington, compounding for it by a double allowance of port. In my time the subscription list of the Wheatland rose to £400, which was considered sufficient to enrich the Master beyond the dreams of avarice.

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I lost no time in making my appearance with the hounds, when my old pink, or rather mulberry, caused considerable surprise, but I couldn't afford to spoil a decent black coat, or to buy a green one—green was the colour of the hunt uniform. For seven years I seldom missed a meet of these hounds, or failed to be in at the death on the occasions, rather infrequent ones, when reynard was unable to save his brush. I was fortunate in possessing just the horse for the country, and if I had had the pick of all the hunting studs in England, I could not have found a more suitable one.

The horse was indeed no other—as an Irishman would say—than the mare who had carried me so well when I had come over from America during the winter. One of the first things I did when I left the prairie “for good” was to inquire about her. I heard from my North Walsham friend that he had sold her to my brother, Captain R.A., to whom I had I suppose weakly let out the secret of her prowess. My brother was stationed at Tilbury, and about that district he was driving “my” mare in a high dogcart, and at a pace that I saw must soon finish her. Her pedigree was a trotting one, of which fact I had then heard nothing. However, for some reason, my brother was not particularly anxious to keep her, and he sold her to me, together with the trap and harness, in which she was seldom afterwards to figure. Shortly after I was riding her with the Wheatland Hunt, and she at once showed herself *facile princeps* in that wild and difficult country. She would creep, she would fly, or do whatever she considered best suited the occasion. There was only one thing that she neither would nor could do, and that was turn away from hounds. She was a bit of a puller, and, as I always rode her in a

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snaffle, I sometimes came home feeling as if I had been sawn asunder.

The M.F.H. at that time was a large, fat, handsome man, a small wine merchant at Broseley, a little Shropshire town celebrated for its clay pipes. He looked exceedingly well in the green uniform of the Wheatland Hunt, but he hadn't an idea in his head, and he never rode a yard. Mitchell, the huntsman, may have had every wish to keep with his hounds, but, as he was always mounted on a screw or a roarer, or both, he was quite unable to do so, so he contented himself with blowing his horn in the rear. Naturally the hounds took to hunting themselves, without bothering their heads about horn-blowing. They were of all sorts and sizes, with or without pedigree, but though rum 'uns to look at, some of them were undoubtedly good 'uns to go. In that blind and awkward country it was hard work to keep with them, but out of a field of fifteen or twenty there were five or six who could do so.

There was a brick earth in a little spinney a few hundred yards from my house, and there was always a vixen from the surrounding country ready to utilise its advantages as a lying-in hospital. I have no doubt that there was considerable jealousy of the fortunate one who succeeded in making good her claim to the domicile. The earth was a bit of a nuisance sometimes, as when they could not find elsewhere the hounds would be brought some miles across country to try "Baker's gorse"—there was no gorse that I ever could see—when I had to fetch my terrier and bolt a fox for them. One winter I had an attack of diphtheria, a disease of which no one in those days, in my neighbourhood, at any rate, knew anything. There was an old Bridgnorth doctor named Phillips, who

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had an enormous nose, and wore a remarkable hat, but was, in other ways, not much of a doctor. Except that he wore no beard, he bore some outward resemblance to the prairie doctor of the senna-tea bowl, who may even have been his superior in medical science. This man used to come over and look at me every day, always leaving with the formula, "Soon be well!" I was getting frightfully weak when one afternoon the hounds turned up, desiring me, as usual, to save them from a blank day. Hearing I was ill, the Master sent for my terrier, but she was an old favourite, and I never allowed any one else to handle her. There was nothing for it but to twist a comforter round my neck, throw on a topcoat, and stagger out to the earth with the terrier under my arm. She duly bolted a fox, when I picked her up and staggered back to the house without speaking to a soul. I was told afterwards that none of those present expected ever to see me again. Next morning I came down as usual, having neither slept nor eaten anything for days, when suddenly I felt hungry, and, snatching up a crust from the breakfast-table, found to my surprise that I could swallow, and in about a week I was out hunting again. Old "Soon be well" congratulated himself, during the brief remainder of his career, on his wonderful cure.

Yet it was seldom I called in a doctor, as in those days nothing seemed to disagree with me. I remember a post office official coming down to regulate our affairs, and as I had a boon to ask anent delivery of letters, we became acquainted. He was a splendidly built man of great size and strength, and had brought down with him a useful mare, which he rode regularly with the Wheatland during his stay, which his love of sport may have caused



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him to prolong for a week or two after his business had been concluded. One day he was to dine with the M.F.H. at Broseley, with whom I also had an engagement, and I arranged to call for him in Bridgnorth on my way. A hard frost had set in, and the night was bitterly cold. I had a couple of rugs in the trap, which were under the seat. About half-way my companion began to shiver. "I think you might have brought a rug," he said, his teeth chattering. "Oh," I replied, "there are a couple under the seat." He gave me a look while he reached for them, and wrapped himself up. "Why on earth didn't you bring them out?" he asked testily. "Never thought of them," I said. "I wouldn't give a d—— for a man whose skin wouldn't keep him warm." This remark I had made once or twice in America when coming across some Yankees shivering and shaking, with their feet roasting on the red-hot stoves in the *dépôts*. They used to give me a look, half anger, half envy, and my friend gave me just such another; but in those days, and with the exception of one or two extra-special occasions in America, I had never troubled about cold.

In addition to the brick earth near the house, there was generally a litter in a spinney a few hundred yards on the other side of the road. I found the close proximity of a dozen or so of foxes rather trying. I never knew foxes behave in such a free-and-easy way before or since. Looking out of my bedroom window in the morning before the men were about, I several times saw a fox negotiating the yard-gate with a hen or half-grown chicken in his mouth. In fact, it was impossible to keep chickens. I did not mind so much about the rabbits, to whom reynard paid close attention morning, noon, and

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night. My neighbour at Meadowly, near Aldenham, had also a huge covert which always held foxes, though once I remember him laying out a long row of about twenty dead turkeys for the inspection of the M.F.H. when he arrived with the hounds. I think it was my keeper (and bailiff) who, finding his occupation going, suggested that we should trap one of the cubs from the second litter by way of giving them notice to remove themselves a little farther off. He set a trap carefully, and caught a well-grown cub, which he put in a big loose box, and kept in condition by driving him round it every day for an hour or so with a hunting whip. He took to it like a squirrel to a cage. One day when hounds were coming to draw our spinneys we decided on treating the M.F.H. to a bag fox. I had been away, but came back in the morning, drove home, and found a note from the Master saying that he had heard I was going to put down a bag fox, and requesting me not to do so, as he thought it bad for the hounds. It was, however, too late to alter our arrangements, as my man had started with his charge. After several small coverts between Bridgnorth and my house had been drawn blank, the hounds were put into the spinney, and for some little time the fox seemed disinclined to make a move. When he did so he got a very short start, and made away up a steepish grass hill with his brush a foot or two from the leading hound. I thought, as he must also have done, that it was all over with him. Then he worked off the stiffness, and got a lead of a few yards, and eventually he got clean away, after giving quite a good run.

About this time something happened to the Master—whether financial or not, I forget—and the hunt was put

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into commission. Five or six Masters were appointed, none of whom rode to hounds, preferring to keep their breath to blow their horns. When you were well on in front, the music, as of a brass band, was quite pleasantly mellowed by the distance.

The field included a droll character or two. The drollest, perhaps, was a small landowner, less notable then than would be the case now for a thick, muddy complexion. I had seldom seen the like, and it is no great loss to the present generation that neither they nor their fathers are conspicuous by it, since it was the result of a close addiction to port wine. H—— could scarcely be called an extravagant man, since in other matters he was almost penurious, but port wine he would and must have. His contempt for a man who could not drink port wine was unutterable—not that he did not occasionally try to utter it—and indeed he had, as a general thing, but little fault to find with the inclinations of his associates. It was not so many years ago that H——, who even now was far from being an old man, was a keen fox-hunter, and one of the best goers with the Wheatland. Gradually he had become less and less of a hard rider, till now, though still frequently seen at the meet, he was never to be found at the finish of any run, however brief. He would come out appropriately clad in a coat of port wine hue, on his old white horse, and when a fox was found he would quietly disappear, and make his way to the nearest house where he might hope to be regaled with his favourite wine. On these occasions he was the least exacting of men, and was hardly ever known to complain of the quality, provided he was sure that his hostess—whose husband was very likely following the hounds, or who might even be dismounting elsewhere on the same

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errand to which she was indebted for her guest—had nothing better to offer him. Towards evening, having finished his bottle, and, if he could get it, a second, he would mount his old white horse, and ride home for some more. To show what a good example can effect, this worthy man was the means of forming quite an association of port-wine drinkers; a sort of oasis in a cider country. There was no meanness about him, and nothing pleased him better than for his friends to do to him as he did to them, and sit drinking port at his house from morning to night. In such a truly hospitable neighbourhood, the man whose legs—and body, very likely—had been under H——’s table yesterday was anxious to return the compliment on the morrow. At first, H—— had been voted a nuisance, but his pertinacity—the fine old English quality of being determined to have what you want—had in course of time succeeded in developing among his friends a taste for the liquor he loved, till now, when the hounds might be experiencing a blank day, any covert that he chose to draw in the course of his day’s hunting was almost certain to reward him with a find. It was noticed that the once smartly dressed wives of these accommodating toppers, who had never ceased to grumble at the visits of “the old soaker,” as they called him, grew year by year more slatternly and careworn. The local wine merchants, on the other hand, flourished exceedingly, and were unanimously of opinion that H—— was one of the best and most useful of men.

Not that the majority of the farmers in the Wheatland district indulged in port or in anything but cider, and even this was sometimes very sour. As all Germans drink beer, so all the inhabitants of Shropshire drank

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cider, and this, taken in moderation, is, no doubt, a fairly wholesome drink, though, after living for some years in a cider country, one gets to doubt the statement, sometimes made, that it is a non-intoxicant. Some of the cider I used to come across—made without any admixture of water—was about as strong as brandy. Any one unaccustomed to it was liable to be speedily overcome. I remember a Staffordshire J.P. and his brother, a parson and Christ Church man, who lived outside the cider zone, arranging to call at my house on their return from fishing near the Brown Clee. It was getting late, and I had almost given them up, when I saw half a mile away across the fields a pony-cart, such as my friend drove, trying a short cut to the house. Not finding a gate the pair charged an old disused fence with a ditch on the far side. Suddenly the trap disappeared, though I could still see the pony attached to it, and the heads of the occupants rising above the bank. After they had been there some time, without apparently attempting to improve the situation, I thought I had better go and inspect matters. I found them sitting placidly in the cart, which was at the bottom of the ditch, grinning contentedly. What with cider and the sun their jolly faces were a fine brick colour. They were quite overcome with the unaccustomed beverage, and I had some trouble in getting them out of the ditch, and still more in starting them off home at an hour that could be considered respectable.

As a rule the Wheatland farmers were a genuine lot of hard-working, sportsmanlike fellows. No one bothered about the colour of his tops—gaiters were the usual wear—or the cut of his coat; snobs, as I have said, were very few, and better still, there was no wire.

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The way horses regularly hunted with the Wheatland used to negotiate their fences struck strangers as novel, but it was well for them if their mounts could copy it. Dingles, their steep, rocky sides overgrown with black-thorn and young saplings, abounded; while the fences in the more open country were frequently left untrimmed for years. Indeed, but for the ancient gaps which were seldom stopped, and so became well-known to the initiated, it would have been impossible for the cleverest horse and rider—and both were sometimes very clever—to keep with hounds. If the Wheatland hunters had behaved as hunters do elsewhere, their riders would have had to carry not one but half a dozen spare necks in their pockets. But they soon learnt that there were places it would be impossible to jump. They crawled, or climbed up a fence, and gingerly down on the other side. If the fence could not be got over by crawling or climbing, some one (probably one of the horn-blowers) would set to work methodically to pull it down. I think two or three of these used to carry a small carpenter's shop in their capacious pockets, amongst the contents of which a saw would certainly be included. Every now and then a man on a racing-like three-parts bred hunter would cross the Severn from the Albrighton side of the country to have a look at the strange people some one had told him about. He seldom came twice. If, as was probable, his horse tried to fly his fences, he came to speedy grief. Then would he recross the river, the skirt very likely torn off his pink, and altogether in very different guise from that in which he had crossed it so gaily in the morning.

After the deposition of the horn-blowing committee, which had not given universal satisfaction, the hounds

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were taken by L——, a hard-riding, hard-drinking, hard-swearing customer, who provided capital sport. He retired, and Captain Browne, of sporting fame, and the owner of the well-known chaser, "Hall Court," came down to see if the pack would suit him. No doubt he made inquiries to which unsatisfactory answers may have been returned. Several members of the defunct committee of horn-blowers attended to meet him at the kennels. Said the spokesman—one of the "carpenter's shop" gentry—"We hope, if you take the hounds, Captain Browne, that you won't swear at us. Mr. L—— has been accustomed to swear at us; the language he used was horful, and we don't like it, Captain Browne."

"Gentlemen," replied the Captain, "I was in want of a pack, and I came down with the hope that the Wheatland would suit me. I find it won't. Mr. S——"—the spokesman—"tells me that your late Master used to swear at you, and that you hope I won't continue the practice. I can only say that if I had come here as Master, I should probably not only have sworn at you, but laid my whip across your shoulders. I wish you good-day."

The Captain's objections, any more than his whip, could not possibly have applied to the farmers who came out twice a week on their fifteen-pound cobs, and who were true sportsmen to a man. I shall never forget a run from the covert on the Shrewsbury side of Wenlock Edge, where we got into a country almost unknown, and whipping off at dusk—nothing having been seen or heard, for some time, of the huntsman—wondered how we were going to find our way home. Then there was the meet at Lodge Coppice, old Stobbs,

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the tails of his black swallow-tail coat pinned up in front of him, and his "hunter's" bridle mended with string, coming forward as Master of the Ceremonies. The fox would almost always make for the Clee Hills. You would begin with a gallop, to subside soon into a canter, from canter to slow trot, then to a walk, when you would dismount to ease your panting steed, soon to wish you had been less mercifully inclined. Farther and farther in front would stretch the hounds, till they and the fox disappeared by the cairn on the summit—the latter to be seen no more.

But few notables did us the honour of appearing with the Wheatland. T. Wadlow, the trainer from Stanton, had numerous cousins and brethren in the locality, and he was sometimes seen at our meets. I remember Lord Granville coming out one day when the hounds met at Aldenham, where he was staying with Sir John, afterwards Lord Acton. His lordship was in morning dress, as if on his way to a garden-party, and he trotted about on his staid old hunter, rising and falling most carefully, and looking through it all like the courtly old gentleman he was. I was riding a pony, and had put a light-weight friend up on the mare, as I had no expectation of a find. We were sitting on our horses in front of the Hall talking to some friends, when suddenly the mare looked round, and missed the hounds—or perhaps, being the property of a politician, she missed Lord Granville, who had already reached the far end of the long drive. She turned round like a shot, and started after them at a hand gallop. My friend pulled and pulled, but he might as well have pulled at a house. It was sometime before I saw him again, when he had had quite enough of his mount. I had forgotten



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to tell him that you could only stop her by talking to her.

In addition to two days with the Wheatland, from the meets of which pack I was seldom an absentee, I used, when I happened to have a spare horse, to get a third day on Saturday, on which day the Albrighton Hounds generally met in the neighbourhood of Bridgnorth. The Albrighton country on the other side the Severn was mostly light land, and my mare used greatly to appreciate the change from the stiff clay. She would take the bit in her mouth and fly all her fences at top speed, hoping perhaps that I should part company, as several times very nearly happened. She was keener with hounds than any horse I ever bestrode, and seemed besides to have a keener eye for the work of the hounds than most hunting men. Directly the hounds turned, she did the same. I should frequently have preferred to leave the line, either to escape a nasty fence, or to keep for awhile on sounder land, but she would not allow me to do so, and I soon found the only way for us to agree—as in cases when the grey mare is the better horse—was for her to have her way.

The Master of the Albrighton Hounds was Sir T. Boughey, who was at my tutor's at Eton, and also my contemporary at "the House." His jumping powers had not improved since those days, and he never dreamt of taking any, even the tiniest fences. It is wonderful what good sportsmen these non-jumping M.F.H.'s were; later on I came across two more—Mr. Ames, the excellent and popular Master of the Worcestershire, and Mr. Lant, who had the North Warwickshire. Neither of these ever, to my knowledge, crossed a fence without having it, as far as possible, pulled down.

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Only one chance have I ever had of being M.F.H. A Mr. Lloyd, who had been, I believe, a farm bailiff near Bridgnorth, but had since made a fortune sheep-farming in Australia, came home for a time, and took Dudmaston, a large house in the neighbourhood, from whence he attended the meets of the Wheatland. I think he was Master for a time; at all events, on the eve of his return to Australia, he put forward a claim to the ownership of the hounds. I was playing billiards at the Crown in Bridgnorth one Saturday after market, when the ostler came to the door, and said Mr. Lloyd wanted to speak to me. I went outside, cue in hand, and found him at the top of the steps. He spoke so fast that it was hard to understand him, but at last I made out that he was telling me that the hounds were his property, and that he wished to present them to me, as he was sure I should do the best I could with them for the country. If he did not assign them to somebody, the late Master would certainly claim them. I replied that, of course, I knew there was a dispute about the ownership, and that I should not care to have a row after he left. He was exceedingly vexed with me, but I was afterwards glad that I had declined. Hardly was Lloyd out of sight of land before the late Master declared his intention of selling the pack, and this he would have done if we had not subscribed £300. I rather think we had had to do this once before. As to the real ownership I am not certain. Lloyd was a strange character, and I should have wanted strong corroboration of his story before putting up with the unpleasantness that would certainly have ensued on my taking over the hounds.

Almost all Wheatland farmers were horse-breeders in

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a happy-go-lucky way, and apparently without knowing or wishing to know anything about breeding as a science. A farmer would find that a mare that had taken him hunting and brought him home safely from Saturday's market—no slight feat, as if the owner tumbled off going home, the horse was expected to stand by him till he recovered sufficiently to mount again—for about twenty years, was getting past work. "Oh!" he would say one day, when he chanced to open his eyes to the fact that she was worn out, spavined, very likely, and a prey to divers other ailments, "I'll breed me a foal from the old mare." It is not hard to guess what sort of a foal the old mare would occasionally present him with. The entire horses, too, that travelled through the district left much to be desired. Certainly there were no motors or cycles then, so there was a sale for all sorts and conditions of gees. The breeder would put his fifteen or twenty pounds in his pocket—where it would not stop very long—with a smile of satisfaction, never troubling himself to calculate whether it had cost him forty or fifty pounds to obtain it. A farmer would appear with the Wheatland, mounted on the progeny of a cart horse and a half- or quarter-bred mare, and there were people in those days to argue in the *Field* and elsewhere that that was the correct mode of breeding a hunter. Some of the mares were of a hardy and useful sort, that it would have been possible to improve into a valuable breed. Frequently, instead of the mare's breed being improved, she herself had to do what little improving there was. I shall never forget the enormous heads by which some of these hardy animals were handicapped. It is true, as has been remarked before, that the horse has to carry his own head, yet when brought to a walk half-way up the Clee Hill, with hounds

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disappearing over the summit, the poor animal must sometimes have wished his head were not quite so heavy. However, there is often a providential arrangement to neutralise one's disabilities. T. Wadlow's training stable at Stanton was not many miles away, and you might sometimes see a Wheatland farmer mounted on a thoroughbred that had been found too slow to race. In the heavy Wheatland clay they would soon get considerably slower, but still retain more speed than the natives. Ben Cooper, of whom I have already written, was of great service in providing the locality with hunters and trappers. The horse I had been driving had fallen, or was *hors de combat* in some way, when I would be told Mr. Cooper wanted to see me. There would be Ben, seated in his gig, and pointing with his whip to the noble animal [in the shafts that he had just brought from Stanton. The price would be twelve or fourteen pounds, and Ben had very likely got him for a fiver. These cast-offs were generally sound, but their tempers as a rule were detestable. I had one that might have made a good steeplechaser if he had had a little ambition, but whatever weight he might be carrying, he preferred to come in second. There are no doubt a number of horses too good-natured to care about taking prizes, and this fact explains some of the disappointments that good judges have to put up with. I tried this horse on the two-mile gallop in Apley Park, which in Mr. Whitmore's day the neighbouring farmers were allowed to use, and was at first greatly puzzled, as two or three stone made no difference to him at all. However, a sporting young farmer bought him from me, and had the pleasure of seeing him run several seconds at Albrighton and elsewhere.

While in America I had driven very few horses, not

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having had more than five or six during the whole time of my stay there. But when farming in England, what with accidents, chopping and changing, and the blandishments of old Ben Cooper, quite a number passed through my hands. The two best cattle markets were at Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton, respectively about twenty-four and twenty miles away, and both these I would attend once a fortnight. Shrewsbury cattle market opened about eight, so that one had to make an early start, and what with Wenlock Edge and another hill or two it was a wearing day's journey. But higglers and pig-dealers would take trappers off your hands when a little the worse for wear, while the first cost of a useful horse was small. Occasionally, too, what had seemed a middling article developed into something better and got sold at a profit. Many years later I happened to be lunching at an hotel in a town undergoing a visit from Barnum and Bailey's Circus, in company with a member of the troupe who was advertised to drive seventy horses at once. This was a bit of Barnumism, as they were driven like cattle in a ruck. I pretended not to know who was present, and expressed my surprise that any one should make such a fuss about driving seventy horses; adding that I had myself driven more than that number. The Yankee quickly rose to the bait, and after I had left the room eagerly inquired who I might be, as he had never heard of such a feat being performed until he undertook it. My son, who was present, explained, to the general amusement, that his father had driven them one at a time.

I tried my hand at breeding, if not quite so carelessly as the general run of the Wheatland farmers, yet without much success. For one thing, it was almost impossible to get a decent groom; if a man knew anything about

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horses he was sure to drink, and if he kept sober he was probably a fool. I had a lot of incompetents succeeding one another, and each signalling his departure by some blunder above the ordinary. Indeed, it was not till I left the Wheatland country that I did any good at breeding.

## CHAPTER XII.

### JOHN EYKE AND SACHAROMETER.

I HUNTED with the Wheatland regularly for some years, by which time my favourite mare was about thirteen years old, and it was time for her to breed a foal or let it alone. I had been very careful of her, frequently riding a cob or a pony till the hounds found, so that on a blank day she only trotted about with the boy on her. My lease was running out, and my landlord, John Baker, was getting old and an invalid, and desirous of disposing of his property. He gave me a year's notice, as he was entitled to do, and this, no doubt, was a bit of luck for me, as farming had been so good for three years that I should probably have been tempted to renew my lease, and then the seven lean years that were coming, without any prophet or interpreter to give notice of the fact, would have about ruined me. I went down, some few years after leaving, to have a look at the old place, and in the big rickyard where I had last seen over a thousand pounds' worth of wheat alone, was one little rick worth from fifteen to twenty pounds. Wheat growing on stiff clay was done for.

I settled at King's Norton, on the boundary of the North Warwickshire country, seven miles from Birmingham, a clay or marly soil with numberless coverts where horses got mired up to their hocks. No doubt, in her

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prime, my old mare would have found a way of getting over it, but it wasn't good enough to make the starting of a suitable stud eminently desirable. Moreover, the Birmingham hardware manufacturers hunted in gigs and shandrydans, in which they sat at the corners of the coverts, where the fox could get a good view of them, shouting and drinking gin from two-gallon jars. Occasionally I had a day with the North Warwickshire or the Worcestershire, but if a fox in the Worcestershire country ran my way the hounds would be whipped off, and the same with the North Warwickshire—and small blame to them—so that if I had a run I was sure to finish a long way from home. There were always foxes about my place, but, of course, they were never hunted; and one night they accounted for the large flock of wild ducks I kept on my pond. On one occasion the Worcestershire found in one of Lord Windsor's coverts near Bromsgrove, and the fox started for home, when the hounds were whipped off. My shepherd told me when I got back that the fox, with a couple of hounds at his brush, had taken refuge in an old drain near the house; so I suppose he was my friend of the wild ducks. Once the North Warwickshire ran a fox into the shrubbery by my house, and I never saw such a lot out with hounds before or since—perspiring betting men on broken-winded horses, publicans, butchers, and bakers out for a holiday.

It was not long before I determined to see what could be done with horse-breeding. I began by sending my old mare to "Buckenham," and this I dare say was an error of judgment which she repaid by presenting me with only a middling foal. Next year I plucked up spirit to take her down to John Eyke's at Stanton. I forget how I first made John Eyke's acquaintance. He was then a notable



## John Eyke and Sacharometer

breeder and doing great things with Sacharometer, his six or seven yearlings averaging, if I remember rightly, over a thousand guineas. Eyke was a sour-faced, crabbed-looking old chap, but not a bad sort. When I turned up with the mare he was delighted to see me, thinking, no doubt, that I was intending to put her to Knight of Kars, a moderate horse, that had, however, got a few winners. When I said she had come to visit Sacharometer he stared. "What's her pedigree?" he asked. I told him she was not in the stud book, and that what pedigree she had he wouldn't care for, as it was chiefly a trotting pedigree, though I had traced it down to Waxy.

"I couldn't think of it," he said; "I'll never put a half-bred mare to Sacharometer, and your mare isn't even half-bred."

"All right," I replied, "don't disturb yourself; I'll take her back. I suppose you'll give me some lunch first."

He gave me some lunch, and all the time was asking questions about the mare, and praising Knight of Kars, of whom I knew quite as much as I wanted to.

"Was she a good mare? Could she gallop?"

I told him she was the best I had ever known—which was not saying much—and that as for speed she was fast enough for any hounds; as she always went straight, she could take it easily.

Evidently he was trying to find a saving clause; he resembled many other people in not liking to turn away money. By the time lunch was over he was asking me if I would buy a brood mare, Black Cotton, a grandly bred one, her pedigree finishing up with Eleanor, winner of Derby and Oaks, but old, and in foal to Knight of

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Kars. I told him I didn't want any thoroughbred mares, and had too many horses already.

We went to look at Sacharometer, also the much-belauded Knight of Kars. Eyke then saw my mare, with which I think he was taken. Black Cotton pleased me; she was black, of course, and had a very short neck, so that when grazing she had to spread out her forelegs; you could tell her miles off. I then said that I must be going, when to my surprise he said, "You can leave your mare if you'll take Black Cotton at twenty sovs." I jumped at it; one can't expect to have everything one's own way in this world.

My mare had a colt foal by Sacharometer, but spoilt matters by dropping dead twenty yards from the dining-room windows when her foal was three weeks old. He grew up a spoilt child, and full of tricks. Sugar and milk were the chief of his diet, and properly so for a colt of his pedigree; and he throve on it. He was always rather small, and though he showed a lot of breeding, I did not at first think of training him. I kept him at home till he was four years old; I had nothing to gallop him with, and though my groom managed him fairly well, and got him to be quite clever at his fences, he began to get headstrong and tricky. Hearing of a young farmer who was training a few steeplechase horses at Umberslade a few miles off, I sent him there at twenty-five shillings a week. It was a very rough place, and poor galloping ground, and for these and other reasons I shortly removed him and sent him to William Holman, who was training on the top of Cleve Hill. The table land on the summit of Cleve Hill is of great extent, and it would be easy to lose oneself there, particularly if a sudden fog came on. It was no doubt excellent training ground once upon a time, but was

## John Eyke and Sacharometer

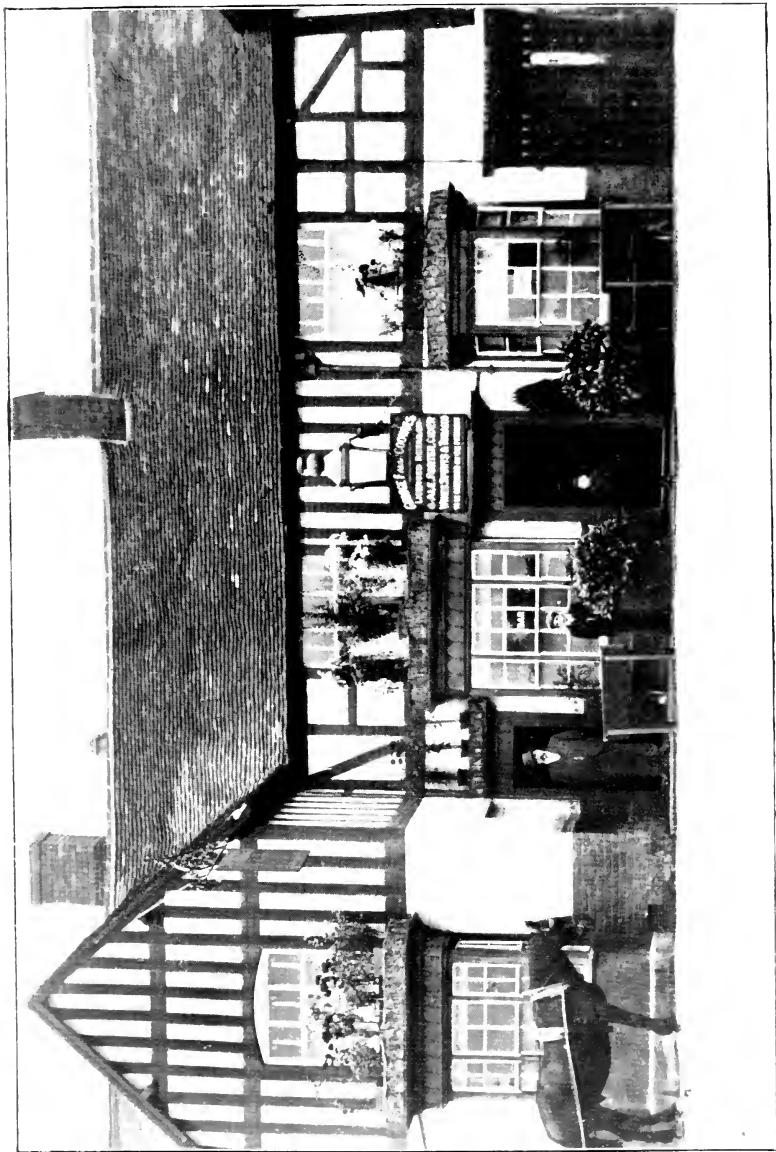
getting worn out owing to careless treatment. The colt had only been at Holman's a week or two when he was due to run at a steeplechase at Baschurch, value, I think, forty pounds. The entries included Goldfinder, who had recently won the biggest sum ever run for over a country. What brought him there I don't remember; I suppose little fish were sweet. I had asked "Mr. Thomas" to ride, but he declined, securing me, however, the services of W. B. Gilpin, whose first season it was as "gentleman rider." It was a fearfully cold day, and the race was run in a snowstorm, my colt beating the great Goldfinder in a canter; of course he had a pull in the weights. I went into the weighing-room, and found the jockeys with their hands frozen, crying with the pain, and swaying about with their hands thrust into their bosoms. Captain Machel came up to me afterwards and asked me how my mare was bred; he did not appear to think it possible there could be a half-bred descendant of Sacharometer. I remember noticing that Captain Machel wore a shocking bad hat; later I found that he never wore a good one, except perhaps on the lawn at Ascot, where I never happened to meet him.

This was Gilpin's first win, and he was much pleased, notwithstanding his frozen fingers. He won many races afterwards, but was unlucky in having some bad falls. He had a strange career. He was at one time in the Austrian army; when he gave up riding he went to South America or Australia horse-breeding, came back to England, and began to write—of all things. One day I had a book sent me to review—it looks as if I also had been writing—and found it was a collection of short stories by Gilpin, one being a description of the race in the snowstorm. I have long since lost sight of him.

## A Sportsman of Limited Income

Poor Sach was less fortunate than his jockey, as he never started again. Having developed a leg, the result, I imagine, of being over-galoped on ground that was getting worn out, he was sent to Tattersall's and sold for a hundred guineas, instead of the thousand I had valued him at after his victory. And so ended my hopes of a Grand National.

It had been some years since I gave a thought to the colt, the best, very likely, I ever had; but being in a Worcestershire village inn a few months ago, the landlord remarked that the man carrying on business at the little store opposite said he knew me. I looked across the road, and the name over the shop was that of my farmer trainer. He came in afterwards, quite an old man, which astonished me, till I remembered how many years had passed since I had seen him. Putting his hand into his breast pocket he brought out an old notebook, in which was the account of the Sacharometer colt; I don't know if he had carried it in his pocket all the time. He had just failed in business, he told me, and was off to Australia, to begin life again at about seventy. Poor fellow! I thought him either very plucky or very foolish.



OLD TIMBERED HOUSE AT KING'S NORTON, SARACEN'S HEAD INN.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### KING'S NORTON.

THE man who, journeying from Dan to Beersheba, finds all barren, or who on arriving at either terminus proclaims peevishly that there is no one worth knowing, has himself to blame. Shortly after arriving at King's Norton I discovered that my good genius had provided quite a number of "characters," and if I cannot flatter myself that I made the most of my opportunities, yet I certainly did not wholly neglect them. What in those days did it matter that your income was getting too narrow for the retention of the merest screw, that you had heard the horn of the hunter for the last time, except faintly and at a distance, that your gun was rusting—no, you would never let it rust—in its corner, as long as there was Jones, or was it Brown, to interest or enliven you with his quaintness, or his humour, or his honesty, or some other quality which distinguished him from the crowd. Alas! as other sports have been taken one by one from the man of limited income, so the student of character will soon find his occupation gone; not because, as with other joys, it has been annexed by the rich, who, thank goodness, never worried themselves about a pursuit which had no honours or money prizes to offer them, but because the quarry in the pursuit of which he delighted is extinct. Jones has

## A Sportsman of Limited Income

put off his smock, and with it a good deal of the manner which gave it distinction, and Brown has taken on the veneer of the bank or solicitor's clerk, which sits awkwardly on him, and of which he feels thoroughly ashamed. As the book-hunter has now to hunt more and more sedulously for his bargains, as the sportsman finds it harder day by day to pick up a good horse "for a song," so the dead level of education and dulness is depriving the man of limited means of the last stronghold to which he had betaken himself. Let him seek for character where he may, he will find every one built on the same, and that a commonplace if respectable model, like a row of plates on a dresser.

I soon had quite a number of friends, commencing with the old blacksmith who kept the Bull's Head (at which inn I had some sort of a meal after looking over the new farm), and gradually increasing till they included all sorts and conditions of men, from farm labourers to butchers, bakers—I don't remember a candlestick-maker—racing and betting men, an owner or two of the neighbouring factories and mills, several M.P.'s, a score or so of candidates, together with as many literary men as I could find; and these last were very few. In addition, I had a pack of beagles—so called—two-legged ones, whose quarry was any Radical politician who made himself temporarily obnoxious. Some of our runs were quite exciting affairs, and I early discovered that it was one thing to get the pack to the meet and quite another to control it after throwing off. Indeed, several times it got completely out of hand. On the occasion of the opening of two new Board Schools (unnecessarily erected, as was locally thought), the beagles broke up the meetings, intended to be congratulatory, in an uproarious way,



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which the oldest inhabitant had never seen and the youngest will never see again.

One of my neighbours, for many years an intimate friend, was Tom Pickernell—"Mr. Thomas" to the public, for a generation or so—from whom I never cease to regret that I am now severed by so many miles of railroad. This is not the place to dwell on the distinguished career of the first gentleman rider of his day, one of the least of whose claims to honour was that he steered three Grand National winners, and whose eventful story will no doubt be written one day by a more capable, though not more appreciative, pen than mine. And yet I don't know. I fear that the modesty that has stuck to him through his long and distinguished career will stand in the way of what would be a delight to so many. "Mr. Thomas" would perhaps allow that there were occasions when he was favoured by luck, or his opponents may have suffered the reverse; but that his victories were due to his own judgment and skill seems seldom to have entered his mind. My groom could never master "Tommy's" patronymic, so would announce him, on his arrival at my house, as "Captain Pickles," or sometimes as, "him as rides the cob." "Tommy" never professed to be much of a whist player, so on one occasion of his visiting me we organised a "nap," which necessitated the borrowing of three pounds in threepenny bits from the vicar, which that worthy man would have done better to bank, and so keep for a time, at least, out of the parish. As it was, a good many of these coins, so hated by parsons, remained in my possession, and were returned in the course of several years' contribution to the King's Norton offertories, while quite a number must have gone to King's Heath, of

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which church my guest was for many years vicar's warden.

A great contrast to "Mr. Thomas" was George Dawson, the famous Birmingham preacher—I forget his exact denomination—to whom I let my house for a year before going to reside at King's Norton. During that period I saw a good deal of him, though not at his "Tabernacle," at which he could never prevail upon me to put in an appearance. At that time—before the day of Mr. Shorthouse—a little learning, or the affectation of it, went a long way in Birmingham, and Mr. Dawson was literally idolised, as a statue was put up to him in close proximity to the celebrated Chamberlain Fountain, and of almost equal artistic merit. Indeed, there were about as many good sculptors in Birmingham in those days as literary magnates. Rightly or wrongly I formed a very poor opinion of George Dawson as a mere man—and without reference to his preaching—but no doubt he was spoilt by adulation and flattery, and considered himself quite a superior being. After he had left the house on the conclusion of his tenancy there was a disagreement as to some item in the account due, and he came to see me with Mrs. Dawson, with a view to putting things right—so he said; my own opinion is that he intended to give me a taste of his quality. Coming into the drawing-room, he spread out a quantity of papers on the table, cleared his throat, and commenced to harangue. He would probably have gone on all day, but I was extremely busy, and wanted to get away. Quite in joke I exclaimed, "Please do not preach to me, Mr. Dawson," when he sprang up, and, shouting, "I didn't come here to be insulted," made a rush for me with clenched fists. His wife, a fine woman in every sense of the word, made another rush for her

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husband, whom she pulled down in his chair again. I said nothing, but feeling there was little glory, under the circumstances, to be gained from a pugilistic encounter, walked out of the room, leaving him to declaim, if he chose, to my wife. I forget how the dispute, which was a very trumpery one, was settled, but I never held any communication with him again, and he died shortly after, full of honours. A portrait of this eccentric "worthy" still hangs in the reading-room of the Birmingham Conservative Club. *Que diable allait-il faire . . . ?*

On the appearance of a recent book of reminiscences, which contained some remarks, not wholly laudatory, on parsons, I was reminded by several clerical critics that there are still a number of good parsons extant, and that even the sporting parson is not quite as extinct as the dodo. One old friend in the shires informed me that many parsons had their one day a week with the hounds; a fact that I was delighted to hear. If he is the truest sportsman who, while setting his duty before everything, still contrives to extract some pleasure from adverse surroundings (as a bee will find honey in, apparently, the most unlikely places), I think I must give the palm to a parson, Yarranton by name, who lived at Wythal, a small parish cut out of King's Norton, with whom I was for many years on terms of friendship. He was getting on in years when I first knew him; a dark man of by no means striking appearance, but with a kindly face advertising the warm heart within. The income attached to Wythal was very small, barely sufficient, indeed, to maintain the vicar, his two sisters, and the wonderful cream-coloured pony which did its best to enliven an existence that otherwise all the piety in the world would scarcely have made enjoyable. He was one of the very

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few parsons in the neighbourhood who had the pluck to hunt occasionally, feeling, no doubt, that while participation in the sport was of benefit to himself, his example could do no harm to the neighbouring parsons who had neither the skill nor the manliness to emulate him. He was exceedingly short-sighted, which may have accounted for his sometimes taking a fence which no one else seemed to relish. I remember once being out with the Worcestershire hounds when the field was stopped by a stiff fence out of a covert near Hewell, which, when he had got the dwellers out of the way, Yarranton, sitting well back, negotiated alone.

But he had yet another interest outside his clerical work which he took even more seriously than hunting. This was chess, at which game he was *facile princeps* in Worcestershire. On the eve of an engagement he would drive his pony to Worcester, sixteen or eighteen miles, win his game, and return home the same night. The hunting parson, equally with him who has a love for collecting beetles, is only to blame when he allows his hobby to interfere with his duty; this was never the case with my friend. In those days the Religious Education question was being fiercely fought, and schools were being erected throughout the parish by a Board pledged to oppose it. One of these schools was quite needlessly erected at Wythal, with a view, no doubt, to closing the Church School. Yarranton kept his school going to the last, with the effect that the newly erected Board School remained nearly empty. I told him often that I thought he had done enough for honour, and that, since the Board School had been erected and could not be pulled down, while the staff had to be paid by the ratepayers, it was time for him to give in. But I could

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make no impression on him. It was some time after that we defeated the Radicals in a stand-up fight, and returned Religious Education to the parish and the neighbourhood.

On the occasion of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, after much correspondence and delay, notifying a welcome increase in his stipend, he paid a round of visits to the friends who had assisted in obtaining it. His appearance at my house was delayed for some days, which he accounted for by saying that he had waited until he could present himself in a new hat. I had certainly never seen him in one before, and it was also the only occasion on which I ever heard him refer to his penury—now happily diminished.

The world would be a more cheerful place both for parsons and their clients if there were a few more to follow the example of this man, who, on a limited income, and while giving the closest attention to his clerical duties, found time and energy for two such different phases of sport. All work and no play makes Jack an exceedingly dull boy; but it must be allowed that an equal to the cream-coloured pony might be hard to find.

There must have been something in the air of Wythal, since the squire, Robert Mynors, was no less an original than the parson. Instead of chess his hobby was the rendering of the odes of Horacé into English verse. He would write saying that he was going to try his hand at such or such an ode, and challenging me to do the same. In a few days we would exchange our attempts, or meet and compare notes. He used to scribble his verses illegibly on the inside of an old envelope, or the back of a circular, a procedure which Pope followed

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when writing his Homer, and which may therefore be a proof of genius. His paraphrases had a narrow escape of being published. A literary man to whom I once showed them took them away to study, and wrote shortly afterwards to say that he supposed that there was no harm in his sending them to his publisher; but to this I demurred. Some of Mynors' work was admirable, but occasionally he introduced a little too much of the rather grim humour for which he was noted. I once had the pleasure of hoaxing him. I put Dibdin's "Tom Bowling" into longs and shorts, and when my brother Robert had corrected a false quantity or two—my Latin verse-making having got a little rusty since my Eton days—I sent it to Mynors; a proof, I told him, that the sailor, in the days of Rome's greatness, was as highly thought of as in our own time. I think he smelt a rat, but he was unable to locate it. His brother, however, a parson of sporting rather than literary propensities, happening to call, twigged it at once, owing, no doubt, to the refrain, which in Ovidian poems must be allowed to be unusual.

I was for some years vicar's warden at King's Norton, and my colleague was a neighbouring farmer; for a wonder a successful one, but then he had a *spécialité*, being an indefatigable maker of cream cheeses. During our time of office we had a trying time, as people had a way of coming back from California or elsewhere, where they had been for a generation or so, and then fighting to regain their old seats from the parishioners to whom they had been allotted since their departure. This I would not allow, and my colleague loyally assisted me. "Whatever you do I am sure will be quite right," he would say. I was not sure about that. For some

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time I would not permit any one to enter the church on Sunday before I made my appearance with the key, to the great disgust of the Californians, who were prowling about waiting to "jump" the seats.

My colleague was rather given to economy in his farming methods, and one day, during the hay season, I found him in my back yard inspecting a large consignment of beer which the brewer's men were lowering into the cellar. The sight caused him to become oblivious of the object (whatever it may have been) of his visit. I took him into my study, and seated him in my arm-chair, when he began at once about beer. "I wonder you can go on like that," he said. "What may that beer cost you?" I told him sixpence a gallon, which I thought fairly cheap, adding that I was obliged to give my men beer during the hay season, or I should have to get the hay in myself. "Quite right," he said; "but I get mine a good deal cheaper than that. Indeed, we brew it ourselves. I'll tell you how we make it." I took up a pencil and a scrap of paper, and prepared to profit by the intelligence; I was never above taking a hint.

"First of all," he began, after a pause intended perhaps to whet my curiosity, "I get a thirty-six gallon cask, then I take half a crown's worth of sugar. Got that down?"

"Yes," I said, and waited for the next item. I waited in vain. My colleague was lying back in my easy-chair, the tips of his fingers joined together in front of his face, and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"Well," I said, wishing to recall him to business, "what next?" He looked up as if surprised. "There's nothing more," he said.

"Nothing more!"

## A Sportsman of Limited Income

"Ah yes, I forgot. G——, the hop merchant has, samples time and again he doesn't want. He gives 'em to me, and I sprinkles 'em in. My, it's prime!"

"But do you mean to say you put nothing more into your—whatever you call it? It's not beer."

"Well, since you're so particular, my wife if she sees anything tasty lying about she pops it in."

A picture of this lady, whom I knew to be a clever and devoted wife, finding here a duck's head, there a sheep's trotter, and generously giving up her claim to these dainties in order to advance the reputation of her good man's famous ale, rose before me.

"But do you mean to tell me that the men drink it?"

"Some of them Irish," he proceeded, without noticing my question, "they likes it old, so we brews it a bit earlier and corks it up for them. My, it's prime!"

"But what do the men say about it? Doesn't a man die of it every now and then?"

"I never heard any complaints. Only, one day I was peeping through the chink in the barn, and I saw the old cowman come up with his mug, and take a drink. *He made a wry face!*"

I looked carefully at my colleague, and fancied I discerned the least little tremor about the corners of his mouth, as if he were keeping back a smile. Was it possible he had been hoaxing me?

We had our annual Conservative dinner late in the year, when one of the two or three Conservative candidates who were wooing the constituency, I think it was the late Mr. Sampson Lloyd, made a speech on agriculture, of which he seemed to know very little except that the farmers' daughters played the piano all day, while their fathers drank "sherry wine." The farmers were awfully



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disgusted. "Now," I said to my colleague, who was of course seated by my side, "I'm going to get up and put a stop to all this nonsense about extravagance, by telling that man how you make your harvest ale. Do you mind?"

"Whatever you do I'm sure will be quite right," was his calm reply.

It was not till some time later that I made the acquaintance of the hop merchant who incidentally assisted at the manufacture of my colleague's famous harvest ale. I had, however, studied him from a distance, and had found him a joy and delight. We had not, in those days, started a choir in King's Norton, and the psalms were negotiated in the old-fashioned way, the minister and the congregation voicing alternate verses. Old G——'s pew was just in front of mine, and I always, when the thirteenth day of the month fell on a Sunday, paid careful attention to G——'s rendering of the sixteenth verse of the 68th Psalm: "Why 'op ye so, ye 'igh 'ills?" One got the idea they ought not to 'op without his permission, and no doubt he thought some flattering allusion was intended to his business, while on Whitsunday the "encore" would be put down as a personal compliment. Later on I had the pleasure of witnessing the summary if somewhat truculent fashion in which he settled a dispute that had somehow arisen about his pew. Old G—— was an enormous man, and two or three of his sons were equally gigantic. The pew had been "jumped" by a family of weaklings, when G—— came into church with his family, and, seeing a few inches unoccupied near the entrance, motioned to one of his sons to take possession. The young man squeezed in and sat down, when his brother

## A Sportsman of Limited Income

followed suit. Lastly came old G—— himself, with the result that the family of squatters, “pa, ma, and all,” were shot out from the far end of the pew into the aisle.

G—— had a few acres of land, and having an old mare that, I suppose, had drawn him for many years about the country on his hop-selling excursions, he went in for horse-breeding, with the result that she one day, to his great delight, presented him with a foal, with which, after weaning, he was at a loss to know what to do. I had at the time a yearling for which I wanted a companion, and I told G—— that if he liked to send the colt to me I would let him run with mine, asking him only a nominal sum. He accepted my offer with *empressement*, and appeared, somewhat to my astonishment, on the first Sunday after the colt's arrival at my farm with a wagonette full of his Birmingham neighbours and friends, whom he had called together to rejoice with him over his yearling. There was nothing I disliked more than to be disturbed on my “day of rest” except by an intimate friend. The party entered the house before leaving, and sampled my sherry and cigars, of which I possessed such a moderate store that, after a few of these visitations, I reluctantly had to request G—— to find a companion for his colt elsewhere.

We had numberless reminders of our near neighbourhood to Birmingham, the chief being the indefatigable prosecution of business, to the occasional neglect of matters which were no doubt considered less urgent. I remember once a villa resident and Birmingham maltster rather too evidently considering his business arrangements for the week when his thoughts should have been elsewhere. Walking up the nave on Sunday, he paused at

## King's Norton

the entrance to his pew, and proceeded to divest himself of his coat, which he folded up, and put carefully away on the seat. He then looked up towards the roof of the church for his office coat which he, no doubt, expected to see hanging from the usual nail. Missing it, he gave a startled look round, and, taking his coat from the seat commenced to put it on again, while his face grew almost as red as the flannel shirt that had been some time *en evidence*.

A local "character" was Isaac Bate, a bluff, good-natured, but exceedingly cute business man who, when I first knew him, had succeeded in accumulating a large fortune from very small beginnings. He was the survivor of three brothers who started brewing at a small local "public" and gradually increased their business till it included an admirably constructed brewery, for a long time the largest and best in the neighbourhood. He was fond of racing, and at one time owner of Meter, by Sacharometer, which he and his friends considered capable of making a good show in the Derby. A disagreement between Mr. Bate and T. Wadlow as to the wisdom of starting the horse in the Derby after he had been lamed by some accident was, I believe, the cause of the removal of Mr. Bate's horses from Stanton, the owner wishing to give the colt's numerous backers a run, or perhaps only a trot for their money. Mr. Bate farmed a large extent of rather moderate land near King's Heath, and on one occasion, when I was calling at the brewery, he showed me a large herd of cattle crowded together on a small field, which he informed me were "my Frivolity heifers." His friend and neighbour, Mr. Lyndon, had recently (1869) won the "Middle Park Plate," and Mr. Bate had chosen this mode of investing his winnings. Mr. Bate

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fed a considerable number of cattle, and it was his delight, when one of these was getting "ripe," to stand at a little distance and pitch coppers on to its back. If the coppers declined to stay there the beast was considered capable of further improvement; but there may have been days when Mr. Bate "pitched" better than others.

I used to drive into Birmingham, and was sometimes very late in leaving the club—it was whist in those days, not bridge. There were no lamps outside the borough boundaries, and as I generally had a fast trotter it was rather risky work. Once I heard something coming, and a trap went by with a slight click; on reaching home I found my step had been taken off. It happened once that I was for some reason without a trapper, and was restricted to the services of a steady, slow-going cob that I had hired or borrowed, when a young solicitor who lived near me, asked me to drive him home. He was a little elevated, and when we had got a mile or two, "I wonder," he said, "that you drive such an animal. I could kick my hat faster than this." I smiled to myself, knowing that the cob, though very slow on level ground, had the knack of going down-hill like lightning, a talent that would have more than doubled his value had everything—as some are of opinion—been going downhill. Coming to the steep hill by King's Norton Station I gave the cob a cut with the whip, and we flew down it at about twenty miles an hour. The man of law was dreadfully scared, and would have jumped out—I think he had quite forgotten about kicking his hat—when there would very likely have been one less lawyer in Birmingham—possibly no great loss. (Generally speaking, there is no greater mistake than jumping out of a trap when horses are bolting or unruly.

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I was once going in a brake to a cricket match at Hagley ; the horses ran away, when the majority of the team—of cricketers—made for the door, and jumped out on to the road. The jumpers were afterwards easily recognised by the absence of buttons on their waistcoats.) The brother of the young Birmingham solicitor was a great friend of mine, and frequently stayed at my house. We used to drive into Birmingham on market day and put up at an inn frequented by farmers, at which the stabling and the ostler could be relied on. There is no place in the world, I should imagine, where there is more difficulty in getting a horse properly seen to than in Birmingham. It mattered little to me that the whisky at this inn was of a very indifferent quality; on arriving I would order two glasses for the good of the house, and both of these my friend would kindly consume, thus getting a good start for his day's work. Towards evening we would meet at the inn by appointment to drive home, when he would have to finish up a day that had probably not been conducted on strict temperance principles by drinking the two glasses of whisky that would be brought into the room while the ostler was fetching the trap round. It was about a fortnight after the adventure just related. We were driving home, and had safely negotiated about three miles, when my friend observed—I suppose the remark was a family one—"I wonder you drive such a beast as this. Why, I could——"

"Get out and kick it," I interrupted, knowing what was coming.

"I'll bet a sov.," he went on, "that I can get home on foot quicker than you can drive."

"Done with you," I said, stopping the cob, which there was very little trouble in doing.

## A Sportsman of Limited Income

My friend took off his coat and waistcoat, folded them up quite neatly, placed them in the trap without a word, and disappeared in the darkness. I jogged on, and in about a hundred yards passed him, breathing hard. He tried to hold on to the back of the trap, but I rapped his knuckles, and he fell behind. I went on at my seven miles an hour, and a little faster downhill, got home, had my dinner, and was smoking a pipe in my study, when my friend, still in his shirt-sleeves, opened the door. His white face streamed with perspiration. "What a — fool I am," he said, and I could not help agreeing with him.

Naturally, I chanced on a queer acquaintance or two. Perhaps the queerest was "the diver," a business man who lived two or three fields away, but ceased rather suddenly to be a neighbour in the usual acceptation of the word. He was a quiet, gentlemanly man, with a charming wife and family, and had shown a kindly interest in our parochial matters. One day we heard the sad news that the canoe in which he had gone out paddling from some Welsh watering-place had been found empty, except of water, and that our poor friend had been drowned. The family was condoled with, and appeared in church for several Sundays in regulation mourning. After a time strange rumours began to get about. Smith—as I will call him—had been seen in London, and elsewhere, but without his beard. I put it all down to gossip, till one day it was definitely stated that he had come up in Australia, where he was now establishing a flourishing business. This surely was a record "dive," and throws into the shade the recent attempts at swimming the Channel. The wife and family put off their mourning, and after a decent interval went out to rejoin



KING'S NORTON CHURCH.

[See page 169.]





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the head of the family; utilising for the purpose the rather commonplace services of an ocean liner.

Recently, dining at a hotel in a southern watering-place, I overheard a conversation relating to the disappearance of a local bank official, whose yacht had been found capsized in the Thames. The owner was mourned for as lost, but a few weeks afterwards he was seen walking about Dover as if nothing had happened. This had been looked on as a record performance, but, on my relating the above anecdote to those present, it was sorrowfully acknowledged that the local diver could not hold a candle to ours.

When people have learnt to use caution before taking up a new friend or a new dog the world will be a much more pleasant place, except for the cur. I, the preacher, have made a mistake or two, of which the following was the least expensive. A young Birmingham man, to whom I had shown some civility, returned it by favouring me with a little too much of his company. I might have felt flattered had I not referred his appreciation to a liking for an excellent brand of cigars which I happened, for a wonder, to be possessed of. One evening he boasted that he had smoked six of them. I thought him very greedy, but invited him to come again the next evening and smoke some more. It was neck or nothing, for in another week he would have made an end of them. In the morning I went to a Birmingham tobacconist—the mayor at that time of the borough—and bought for one shilling ten huge cigars, on which, when I had carefully dried them before the fire, I placed, no doubt to their pride and glory, the labels taken from my prime Havanas. The young man spent the evening with me, and on leaving informed me that he had gone one better than on the previous occasion,

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as he had smoked eight cigars, which he supposed would cost me over five shillings. "Not quite so much," I said, "as I bought them for you at B——'s at ten a shilling; and hope you'll take the others to smoke on the way home." He turned round, walked out of the house, and I don't think I ever met him again.

A miller used formerly to be a character, he is now almost as commonplace as other people, but a King's Norton miller could hardly be expected to be commonplace. Ours, besides being a bit of a character, and an excellent judge of wheat, a quality which I had frequent opportunities of appreciating, was a good sportsman and a capital shot. One market day I was to drive him home from Birmingham, and arranged to meet him at the inn in good time, as he believed in "early to bed." It happened I went to the club, and got so interested in whist that I forgot all about the miller, who, as he told me afterwards, walked up and down in front of the inn till it was time to catch the last train. When I started for home about one, I found an enormous packet of fish in the trap which I was to deliver, *en route*, at the mill. I had a skittish horse, which was always trying to pay me out for buying him on a steeplechase course after a defeat, and as the miller's family were all in bed, the delivery was no easy matter. However, I got out very gingerly, and picking up some stones threw them up at the barred window of the miller's bedroom. After some delay he appeared at the window in his night-shirt, a truly wondrous garment, a sight of which amply repaid me for my trouble. If only Caldecott could have seen it! I threw the fish up to him; he made a clever catch, but unfortunately had protruded his hands one on each side of a bar, and so was unable to get the parcel into the

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window, while too careful to let it drop on the stones below. It was not till after breakfast that I remembered his predicament, when I at once hastened to his relief, but found he had already been set free, no doubt by one of his men coming to work in the morning.

As a "character" the miller was not fit to be named in the same day with his brother, a man of far less local importance.

People used to be always writing—I've done it myself—about "the last smock." Recently I've lived in a place where they are as scarce as blackberries in autumn, so that when Joey—who is locally credited with being the last smock-wearer—retires, there will still be a few smocks for people to write if not to read about.

Joey would be a character anywhere, but that he should exist near the up-to-date city of Birmingham is nothing short of marvellous. He has a little grass farm of thirty or forty acres. His custom is to cut the grass himself, make it into hay (a task which in a wet or showery season frequently reaches into October) load it on the cart, unload it—as the rick gets higher, he climbs with each forkful up a ladder placed on the cart. The price of hay had not appeared to suit Joey for some years, and his small farm was literally almost covered with ricks; some of them of quite patriarchal age. One day he surprised his neighbours by tying a load, and putting it on a cart, to which next morning he harnessed the old horse, and proceeded to Birmingham. Arrived at the market he had no difficulty in disposing of his load at a good price. "I suppose," a neighbour remarked to him on his return, "you'll be going again." But Joey shook his head.

"When I wanted to sell my hay they wouldn't have

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none of it," he said spitefully; "and now as they wants it I'm d——d if they shall have it." And they didn't.

There is no place where rabbits are fonder of breeding than under a rick, and under Joey's ricks they simply swarmed, not greatly to the owner's benefit, who was no sportsman. This, however, was far from being the case with his neighbour and brother, who was a capital shot, and found it convenient to be able to secure a couple of rabbits with a right and left, and without going many yards from his front door. One day he visited the ricks as usual, only to find the rabbits conspicuous by their absence. It was soon known that Joey had called in the rabbit-catchers, and though the miller said nothing, he no doubt thought the more. One day Joey appeared at the mill, and putting his hand under his smock brought out a wash-leather bag.

"I've got some money," he said, "as I wants you to bank for me. I don't like keeping of it in the house"—he had indeed been attacked and nearly murdered in his cottage a few months before.

Sternly the miller eyed him. "Them," he said, "as cotched your rabbits can keep your money for you."

Joey departed crestfallen, to reappear in a few weeks. "I've got a letter from my landlord as I wants you to answer for me. You know I ain't no scholard."

"Better ask them," replied the still unappeased miller, "as cotched your rabbits to write your letter for you."

No long time passed before the miller could count on having his right and left as confidently as ever.

While I was at King's Norton I had two or three wet hay seasons, one of them so bad that I was haymaking for eleven weeks, and began to think I should never finish. On the first of September I had eight acres uncut. The

## King's Norton

grass was over three feet high, and, as there was very little cover about, it was frequented by all the partridges in the parish. I was disgusted when my bailiff insisted on cutting it. There seemed no chance of getting it properly dried, so it was hauled off and put under a shed in the yard. I don't know what I should have done with it had not a man turned up who wanted some cheap substance in which to pack bedsteads for a Birmingham firm, and for quite a long time I enjoyed the sight of him and his son twisting hay ropes on the premises.

It was one of these wet hay seasons that started the shortlived rage for silos. The first I ever saw was on Mr. Muntz's estate at Umberslade. His method was a little crude. I was walking over the grass land with a farmer on the estate who was training in a small way when I saw some long, low mounds covered as if they were mangold heaps. The farmer said Mr. Muntz was accustomed to dig long trenches, fill them with grass, and cover them with earth. I gathered that the stuff was pretty bad, but my informant may have been prejudiced. Later I knew several farmers who made a success of silos, but the smell was unendurable if put up near the house.

At agricultural shows were to be seen for a few years some costly inventions for drying hay. One was a plan for heating barn floors after the manner of malt-houses. The wet grass was to be carted off the field and spread for ten minutes or so on the floor, when it would—so the showman averred—be ready for the rick. The few hundredweights of hay provided on the show ground would be wetted and dried some scores of times in the course of the day. Then the newspapers took up the matter. How silly the farmers were not to follow the Hungarian—I think—custom of drying hay on ropes

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stretched between poles. This would certainly have appealed to the proprietors of rope-walks. However, the next few hay seasons were fairly fine, and the craze died out; silos and other even less promising methods were forgotten, and, indeed, he would be very unwise who should try any of these experiments while there was a chance of getting together a rick of sun-dried hay.

Connected with hay was a class of men, hay-tyers, who worked up the ricks for market, and some of them were droll characters. Hay-tying was, for a skilled hand, a profitable calling, since, however low the price of the material, the wages of the hay-tyer never suffered diminution. Many of these men from being mere day labourers got on in the world—more would have done so had they been temperate—and took to buying ricks and marketing them. This saved farmers who sold a good deal of hay a lot of time, and wear and tear of horses and wagons. Jimmy—as I'll call him—was one of those who had made money. He was shrewd, though his shrewdness was not assisted by the merest rudiments of education. He frequently bought a rick from me, and I used to tell him the date on which I wanted the money, giving him time to work off the rick before paying for it. One day payment was due, and Jimmy had not turned up; he had never disappointed me before. Between ten and eleven, as I was thinking of going to bed, there was a row at the door opening into the yard. My groom had gone home long before; I went to the door, and behold Jimmy, truly at the eleventh hour. He was not one of those who had risen through temperance, he would “swear off” sometimes, but even then would make an exception in favour of some special favourite, notably rhubarb wine, on a bottle or two of which—I imagine this to have been an

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exceptional experience—he could manage to get “for-rader.” On the present occasion he was evidently indebted to something stronger. I helped him up the steps, and into my study, when he brought out his bag of money, and emptied it on the table for me to count. The amount was in the neighbourhood of £100, mostly in sovereigns, but a great part in half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences. I told him he was drunk—a fact of which he may have been already aware—and that he had better take the money home with him, and come back in the morning; but to this he would not agree. “I’sh all right,” he said, looking round for the rhubarb wine, which he knew was all I would allow him. On thinking it over, I decided to keep the money rather than let him start home with it, and perhaps lose it on the way. It took some time before it was found to be correct. Then Jimmy had his rhubarb wine, and got up to go. I assisted him into the yard—he weighed about sixteen stone, and was lame from catching his foot in the wheel of another trap driving home one night—and then looked for his horse and trap. These he had left in the drive, and after a prolonged search I found them in the fir trees a hundred yards or so away. I brought the trap back and helped Jimmy to mount. It was worse than lifting a sack of wheat. Directly he got the reins in his hands he started off at full gallop, through the gate at the far end, with a sharp turn into the high road, and then I heard the mare racing away as fast as she could lay legs to the ground. There were no gas lamps on roads in those days, and it would have been thought very effeminate to carry lights. Jimmy was indeed a terror to quiet and timid travellers. Luckily he drove a white mare, and you could sometimes see, as well as hear, him coming. But this is by the way. Jimmy

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was strictly honest; he would not have told you a lie, or robbed you of a penny for—well, for more whisky than would have been good for him.

Truly, the exodus from the land does not include everything. Honesty has stayed behind; afraid perhaps to risk the journey. No roguery, no smart tricks of business astonish us to-day; but I think—considering the way in which many fortunes have been made—that there is room for a little wonder at the absolute honesty which still characterises the vast majority of farmers.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### HUNT MEETINGS IN THE SIXTIES.

**I**N the sixties any one possessed of a capital of twopence halfpenny could get up a steeplechase meeting, and, if he saw any advantage likely to accrue, bolt with the entries, which would serve to increase his little store—though perhaps to no great extent. Some of these country meetings at which farmers used to appear in the saddle on horses of their own breeding—occasionally no doubt a rather remarkable pedigree, if it had not been “unknown”—their “colours” a red or grey flannel shirt, and with loose cord hunting-breeches coming up to their armpits, were very droll affairs. Yet these gatherings made bright spots in dull lives, were productive of good sport—as distinguished from racing—and attended by men who, judged by their opportunities, were as a rule genuine sportsmen. It must be allowed that the possession of a mare that could breed something a little better than the ordinary—not necessarily of the first quality—was a questionable advantage to a farmer. One I knew whom success in local races tempted to fly at higher game, and to illustrate in his own person the fable of the iron and the earthenware pots. His two sons, nothing loth to escape from the dull routine of the farm, followed their father’s example, with the variation that, having somehow become possessed of a pony rather out of the

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common, they travelled the country from north to south, picking up the little prizes then run for at Galloway races. Meanwhile the farm, left to itself, quickly began to deteriorate, and this coming to the ears, or, more probably, the eyes of the landlord, he simulated a keen desire of starting a breeding-stud, for the inauguration of which nothing seemed so suitable as his tenants' two brood mares and their offspring. My friend, in default of horses wherewith to pursue his favourite sport, once more took to looking after his farm, though I noticed the corners of his mouth drawn down for some time after from self-pity. I never heard that the landlord made any mark with the new stud; but doubtless he had his reward in the saving of a favourite tenant. There were some good landlords in those days, as, indeed, I dare say there are still.

Occasionally these local meetings witnessed divergencies from the strict code of honour (and steeplechasing), which a laudable ambition may have accounted for, if it could not excuse. I remember arriving rather late on the course at Albrighton Hunt Meeting, just as a race was concluded in which a Buckenham mare that I had sold to a friend living in the neighbourhood was beaten about a hundred yards by a grey horse entered by a sporting local farmer, and ridden by one of his sons. I condoled with my friend, who informed me with a grin that it would be all right, as the winner would be disqualified. This happened about a year later, when it was proved that another and far better animal had been substituted for the original entry. The Albrighton Hunt Meeting, now a thing of the past, or finding a poor substitute from the breeder's or farmer's point of view in the gate-money meeting at Wolver-

## Hunt Meetings in the Sixties

hampton, was one of the best in the country. Several good horses made their *début* thereat, notably New Oswestry and Bredon Hill, both of whom were expected to be hailed winners of the Grand National. The former was scratched owing to some disagreement between owner and nominator, while Bredon Hill unfortunately broke down. I had taken one thousand to twenty, some time before the race, and arriving in Birmingham late one night on my return from a visit, I engaged a "night cab" at the station to take me home, a distance of seven miles.

The horse, it appeared, had just been taken up from a yard where he had been luxuriating on pulped turnips and mouldy hay. Going up a little hill at Bredon Cross, about three miles from my house, he stopped dead. I thought he would have burst, and I with some difficulty persuaded the driver not to persevere with him. Getting out of the cab I started to walk home with my bag. Arriving about 3 a.m., I told my wife that Bredon Hill would be found to have broken down, and this I saw, in the morning's paper, had really occurred.

When I was in Shropshire there was an old-fashioned meeting at Much Wenlock, which still survives in a slightly modernised form. In my time there used to be four races, two of which were run before dinner. Then came an adjournment of three hours or so for refreshment, after which the meeting was resumed. The farmers used to do themselves fairly well at and after dinner, and I remember once to have seen the Master of the local pack, the Wheatland, lying overcome with his potatoes and fast asleep under a haystack adjoining the course, his jolly red face upturned to the sun. There was also a hunt meeting at Bridgnorth, which still

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survives, with a change of venue. A difficulty once arose as to the old course on the Wheatland side of the country. The incumbent of the parish in which the course was situated had a tiny piece of glebe a few yards broad, which jutted out into the course as a watering-place pier juts into the sea. Shortly before the date of the annual races the parson (who was some sort of a sportsman, as he hunted regularly with the Albrighton Hounds) developed what I will suppose was a conscientious objection to racing, and declined to allow his morsel of glebe to be included in the course. This he no doubt imagined would put an end to the races, the finish of which was in close proximity to his churchyard, and his opposition would have been comprehensible if the race meeting had been held on Sunday. It was eventually decided to coast round the obstacle, which must have made winning an impossibility for hard-mouthed horses. Next year the parson, being approached by a local magnate, withdrew his veto.

Perhaps the strangest hunt steeplechase meeting I ever attended was the Weobley Hunt in Herefordshire, yearly run over land occupied by a farmer named very properly Bull. He was a big fat man with enormous brick-red cheeks, a quantity of chestnut hair, and a large red nose which stood out boldly between two little bright eyes almost hidden between the mountains of fat. Squire Bull was accustomed to walk delicately, as if he were another Agag, placing each foot down as gently on the turf as if he expected to find it red-hot, and indeed he was a martyr to gout. There was an inn in the village whose proprietor would doubtless have been glad to turn an honest penny or two on the occasion, but Squire Bull took the wind completely out of his sails by

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keeping open house during the two days of the meeting. His place was in the centre of the cider country, and his cider—though I was by no means unused to good brands—was the best I had ever known. It is often said that cider conduces to sobriety, and if so old Bull's cider must have been an exception. To the best of my recollection his guests were not expected to require spirits or malt liquor, and, indeed, the man who was not satisfied with the cider must have been very exigent. The steeplechase course, as was usual in those days, was a perfectly natural one; a little too natural indeed as Bull, who was judge, clerk of the course, and everything except horses and jockeys, was a slovenly farmer, and occasionally neglected to mend the gaps left from the previous year.

Some of the little meetings at that date were almost entirely free from the betting "evil," as it is *de rigueur* to call it. I once took a mare, Grey Gown, to Ross, where she had been entered for two races, one twenty pounds in value and the other forty. J. Holman was against the mare running for the larger stake, till I showed him that the same horses were running in both events. We easily swept the board, and cleared out the ring, the amount laid by the two professionals present (one of whom, George Ingram, afterwards developed into a big bookie) being no less than six or eight pounds!

It was a long time before much improvement was noticeable in the quality or management of the smaller local hunt meetings. When I moved nearer Birmingham I found quite a number of them in my immediate neighbourhood. There was—and is—a steeplechase meeting at Hall Green, which was naturally greatly

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affected by the Birmingham roughs. The clerk of the course was James Page, father of the well-known steeplechase jockey who won the Grand National on Mr. Brayley's "Cassy Titty," as the mare was styled in the ring. On one occasion the roughs stormed the boarded enclosure. I well remember the curious sight of a few hundred exceedingly dirty hands suddenly appearing above the boarding. It was anything but pleasant to find oneself, a minute later, surrounded by the owners of the hands, who were certainly among the most villainous-looking inhabitants of our island.

Mr. Page also officiated at Henley in Arden, where the gaps in the natural fences were unmended from year to year, and the horses had to jump in and out of the churchyard. In the centre of the course was a curious oblong hill, by lounging from end to end of which you could see the races from start to finish. I once saw a laughable affair at this meeting; a match between two very bad horses, ridden by two not quite first-class jockeys, one of the riders being a youth from Beardsworth's Birmingham Repository. The two started very gingerly, each rider being apparently afraid of his mount, probably not without reason. At the third fence both horses refused. Eventually one of the animals, a mare, was got over, and having made the circuit of the course, she came upon her opponent still at the fence where he first refused. The despairing jockey seized what he may have thought would be a last chance, and rushed his horse at the fence alongside the mare, with the result that he got over and the mare stayed and took his place.

There was now a chance that the horse would win, though he had a lot of ground to make up, and advice,

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gratis, was shouted from the hill to the valley below, by the adherents of either jockey. Fence by fence, and not without many refusals, the horse got gradually nearer and nearer, while the rider of the mare, the young man from Beardsworth's, kept spurring and whipping in his desperation, and to no purpose, for his mount had quite made up her mind not to have any more jumping. Hearing at length a shout from the hill that told that his enemy was safe over another fence, and would soon join him again, he turned the angry and excited mare once more away from the fence to get a good gallop at it for the hundredth time. He may have struck her a little harder than she thought was quite fair, or she may have been determined to bring the affair to an end, at all events, she took the bit in her teeth, and ran away round the field the reverse way of the course. The field was a large fallow, and round and round it the unfortunate jockey was carried at top speed till at last the mare stopped from sheer exhaustion. By this time the hundreds of spectators were rolling about on the hill in agonies of mirth; but it was no joke to the jockey, who when the mare at last came to a standstill was unable to dismount without assistance, and whom I had expected every moment to see fall off, when he would almost certainly have been dragged round the field. Whether the match was won by the other rider I am unable to say; and I doubt if any one cared a straw about the event. I never remember seeing the young gentleman from Beardsworth's in the saddle again.

There was an old-fashioned meeting then held at Sutton Coldfield—long before the institution of the unfortunate "Four Oaks Park" racecourse—and it was here, I think, that John Sheldon, afterwards such a popular

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clerk of the course made his *début*. The entries for hunt meetings in the neighbourhood of Birmingham were required to be made at a sporting public-house near the Birmingham Market Hall, and here farmers and others would attend to discover what opposition they would have to meet. If, as frequently happened, about 11 p.m. the regular "gentleman rider" from a neighbouring training stable put in an appearance with his entry, the farmer, supposing him wise enough to do so, would go home, keeping his fee in his pocket.

Mr. Sheldon, in his early days, was not accustomed to limit his labours to those generally appertaining to a clerk of the course. At some meetings he would officiate also as starter and judge. When he had started the horses on their first round of the course, he would jump into his shandrydan, whip up his horse, and make the best of his way—the last part with the horses close at his heels—to the judge's box, into which he would barely have time to shut himself before they went by. He was one of those who appeared to be of the opinion that silence was golden, and indeed he may have been more or less indebted to it for his success. It is hard to find much fault with a man who never says anything, and quite impossible to contradict him. I remember he used to sit at the end of the table at the Coach and Horses, or whatever was the name of the house, and when you handed him your entry he would pocket it without a word. I have still a lively recollection of the quality of the whisky one drank, or made a pretence of drinking at that establishment. Mr. Sheldon was a fat little man, who used to cock his hat over his right eye, or on the bridge of his nose, stick his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and look good-humoured, which he probably



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was. When at "Four Oaks Park" or elsewhere, an indignant owner who had a dispute with the stewards accused the clerk of the course of taking part against him, that official, after disarming the infuriated racing man with a sweet smile, would walk away without saying a word. He had a talent for organising—hardly the strong point of farmers or country gentlemen. It was not then thought a crime for farmers—who had not yet been relegated by the decree of the rest of mankind to stop at home and enjoy rusty bacon and sour cider—to own a "hunter," nor had hunters' races yet fallen into the disrepute that afterwards overtook them. Mr. Sheldon began by assisting the inexperienced rustics in matters of management and financing. Then came the gate-money meetings, and the success of one or two of the first of these encouraged a mushroom growth of them all over the country, and led many people to think they had hit on an easy and legitimate mode of raising money. But the gate-money meetings were frequently commenced with an outlay that made permanent success improbable if not impossible. Mr. Sheldon was no doubt the best man that could be found to manage the new meetings—or, rather, the old ones on a new footing. The unfortunate "Four Oaks Park" had the seeds of failure in it from the commencement, and it would have required a greater than Mr. Sheldon to bring success to the venture. For one thing, some of the stewards were quite impossible, and could only have been exalted into such a position on account of the money they had put into the scheme. I was for some years a member of the "Four Oaks Park" Club, and I can recall one steward at least who would have been unfitted for the post of shopwalker in a third-rate millinery establishment. It was soon seen that—

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whatever may be the case now—there was actually no sporting population, in the best acceptation of the word, to depend upon. It was depressing to find no one in the palatial stand but half a dozen or so of fishmongers, covered all over with gigantic diamonds as if they were scales.

Since Mr. Sheldon's death his place has been filled by his son, who has proved himself a capable and popular Clerk of the Course under somewhat changed conditions. I regret that of late years I have seldom been a witness to his ability.

## CHAPTER XV.

### GENTLEMEN RIDERS AND HUNTERS' RACES ON THE FLAT.

A NECESSARY preliminary to starting a horse in a "Hunters' flat race" was, as many will remember, the obtaining of a certificate from a Master of Hounds or his secretary that the horse had been regularly hunted. This was quite understood to mean nothing more than that the animal in question had been ridden to the meet (where it was usual to call the Master's attention to his presence), three or four times. A horse could be utilised in a "Hunters' flat race" without being in any sense an adept at fencing, and indeed without ever having seen a hurdle in his life. In fact, all fences were carefully avoided lest a scratch or a blow should interfere with the horse's training. Owners, indeed, used to get very impatient of the farce of sending their horses to the meet, and, in cases where they were on friendly terms with the Master, would cut the performance exceedingly short. After winning a "Hunters' flat race," the weight would be gradually increased till it got to be prohibitive, except in the case of such horses as "Quits," which were remarkably scarce, and to whom two or three stone made no difference, since they could continue winning with thirteen stone and over, against all comers, until they broke down. When the weight got too much, the owner of the "Hunter"

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could, if he chose, turn his attention to "Selling Hunters' races on the flat" with the risk, if he won, of having to buy his horse in for as much or more than he was worth. In a few cases where a horse had a long and successful experience of "Selling Hunters' races," there was generally something special in his appearance, or the guise in which he was presented to spectators in the paddock to account for it. Few people are sufficiently courageous to buy a horse that "stands over," even though he may have done so from a foal. Sometimes the horse with his forelegs swathed in bandages was really on the point of breaking down, occasionally he may have presented a fictitious appearance of unsoundness. Yet even so one day "Selling Hunters' races" would prove no longer available, when the "Hunter" would be forced to take up with the hitherto neglected art of jumping. At first his fencing essays would be confined to hurdles. If successful the weight would be gradually increased as before, when the owner might, if he chose, once more avail himself of "Selling races." At the conclusion of these nothing remained but for the "Hunter" to learn to jump. Then he could, if he was fortunate, go through the same process as before, finishing up his "Hunter's" course with selling steeplechases, after which there would be nothing left for him but handicaps, at which he would not probably be fitted to shine.

Naturally the certificate business lent itself to a vast amount of humbug. From some Masters of Hounds the obtaining of a certificate, even when one had gone out of one's way to oblige by quite an exceptional number of attendances, was like extracting a tooth. Some, more good-natured, or more careless, would give certificates to their friends and even to others without worrying about

## Gentlemen Riders and Hunters' Races

the matter. I have been told by a friendly M.F.H. that if I would ride my horse over and put his nose against the kennel door he would at once send me a certificate. It followed that in a country at all given to "Hunt races" one Hunt would be avoided by these non-hunting "Hunters," while another would be patronised by quite a number. Even if the M.F.H. was amenable to reason, the secretary would sometimes interfere to try and make a little money out of the affair for his Hunt. I had a mare once for whom I required a certificate, and being a subscriber to the North Warwickshire Hunt I sent her several times to the meet—of course with the usual non-jumping orders. When I thought she had had enough of it I asked my friend Tom Pickernell to ride her over to the meet at Solihull, call the Master's attention to her, and say that she had been out several times, and I was going to send for a certificate. T. P. turned out very smart in hunting costume, and was interviewing the Master when the hunt secretary interfered and told Mr. Tommy that he had made a rule never to give any certificates unless a five-pound note was sent with the letter. He said he would make no exceptions to this rule even in favour of a regular subscriber. If, however, I wanted some certificates he would give me any quantity at five pounds apiece. I was at the meet, and Tom Pickernell rode up and told me what had happened. I thought it an awful piece of impertinence, and said I should send in a form of certificate next day, and if it was not signed the matter would appear in the sporting press. However, the Master signed and returned it at once without more to do.

The novice who, when he had succeeded in getting a good horse, and a certificate duly signed by a friendly M.F.H., thought himself secure of success in "Hunters'

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“races” was hulloing before he was out of the wood. In reality his troubles were just beginning. He had still to find a “gentleman rider,” and this, for one who was probably unacquainted with the best, or perhaps even the worst of the genus, was frequently no light undertaking. Naturally the leading “gentlemen riders” would not desert their old friends for a stranger, or get up on a horse they did not consider likely to do them credit. Sometimes the novice would get a half promise from a “gentleman rider,” and on arriving at the meeting would find him conspicuous by his absence, or sporting some one else’s colours. The best thing to do then was to take the horse home; instead of doing so he would perhaps put up one of the wastrels who were lounging about the weighing-room, with results that he—and his horse—would remember for many a long day. Fortunately most of the stables that went in at all for steeplechasing and hunters’ races had a “gentleman rider” attached. This useful person was sometimes a brother or relation of the trainer. T. Wadlow had a cousin farming somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wenlock Edge who used to appear at the little Salop meetings, to the confusion of the sporting farmers, and was generally successful. Indeed, his superior jockeyship would almost have enabled him to win on a fairly bred cow. One of the Stevens’ was at one time qualified, as also was a son of William Holman of Cheltenham. Many “gentlemen riders” were gentlemen, but of no use at all on a horse, while others could ride well enough, but were anything but gentlemen. The really good, reliable riders who could be depended on not to throw away a race were exceedingly few and generally engaged weeks or months in advance by some steeplechase magnate, so that the man with the inferior horse was frequently still

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further handicapped by having to put up an inferior jockey. How these men managed to win any races at all was a marvel ; they certainly won very few.

My first introduction to the "gentleman rider" was anything but promising. I had been out one day with the North Warwickshire Hounds near Solihull, and had noticed a farmer riding a good-looking chestnut horse that fenced remarkably well. We exchanged a few words, when he told me that, notwithstanding his jumping prowess, the horse was anything but a comfortable conveyance, and that he had bolted two or three times that day. Being at the Birmingham Repository a week or two afterwards, I read my friend's name in the catalogue as owner of "Euphrates, ch. g. 6 yrs." Looking the horse over, I found he improved on acquaintance, and I decided to try and buy him. He was bought in at the auction, and I afterwards got him for a small sum, about thirty pounds, I think ; he certainly looked worth three hundred. I heard there was nothing against him except that he would always bolt when he got a chance, and, of course, it was easy for me to decide that he shouldn't have one. He was in good hunting condition, and galloped in good form. My groom, however, was afraid to let him go, as he didn't see the fun of being bolted with. I had ridden one or two ordinary pullers, so told him one day to lengthen the stirrups, and I would give him a gallop myself. Before I could get settled he was off, but he jumped so cleverly that I soon saw that I was perfectly safe, and I was almost sorry when he stopped, with a view, as his custom was, to getting ready to bolt again. I entered Euphrates in a farmer's steeplechase at Sutton Coldfield, and then began to look round for a jockey.

At that time I had not owned a steeplechaser since

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my Oxford days, and I had to thank my new purchase, if for little else, for introducing me to the "gentleman rider," who was afterwards to be a source—well, not always—of trouble and anxiety. I was unacquainted with the leading "gentlemen riders," and had I known one he would certainly have pleaded a previous engagement when asked to ride Euphrates. At that date I may have imagined that one "gentleman rider" was very like another, whereas they differed more than chalk from cheese. When a Staffordshire friend, whom I accidentally met, told me that one of these wonderful beings was staying at his house, and that he thought he might be prevailed on to ride, I straightway went off to interview him. Mr. Jim, as I will call him (I afterwards discovered he had been a middling rider, but was getting shaky), pooh-poohed me when I told him he had better come down and ride the horse before the race.

"He's an awful puller," I said.

"Haw," said Mr. Jim, "if that's all, I think I understand all about pullers."

I tried to impress upon him the fact that Euphrates was just a little bit out of the common, but soon saw it was no use trying to pierce his self-conceit.

Mr. Jim duly appeared at Sutton, and my groom didn't like his looks. He tried to utter a warning but was cut short. The jockey mounted, for a wonder without any trouble, and I then gave him a last bit of advice.

"Keep your hands down when you jump the preliminary hurdle;" quite a number of second-class gentlemen riders in those days used to throw up an arm to balance themselves when taking a fence.

The horse walked off like a slug, which was a way he had, and Mr. Jim had actually to hustle him into a canter.



## Gentlemen Riders and Hunters' Races

In jumping the hurdle up went Mr. Jim's right arm; Euphrates gave his head a shake on landing, and off he went. I was half prepared for this, and was soon running with the groom across the course to see what could be done to stop him as he came round. At the turn, however, was a steep grass bank, about twelve feet high, the boundary of the gardens of some recently erected villas. This was just in Euphrates' line—he could have gone up the side of a house—and up the bank he bounded gaily with Mr. Jim. They crashed into some cucumber frames at the top, and then, as usual, Euphrates stood stockstill.

"Ride him down sharp," I called out from the bottom of the bank, "or you'll be too late;" the horses were just preparing to start.

Mr. Jim, trembling as if with an ague fit, dismounted among the cucumbers, and called to the groom to climb up and take the horse. I climbed up also, and found Mr. Jim in the centre of quite a little Exchange of Birmingham manufacturers with their friends, who had come to look at the racing—"trustees and aunts and uncles." Such a row and threatening, with all the rigours of the law, was never heard before. When they had finished, or, perhaps, only stopped to take breath, the groom got the horse down the bank easily enough.

"Up with you," I said to Mr. Jim; "there's just time;" indeed, the starter was waiting for us. But Mr. Jim had had enough of it.

"I think your horse is a little nervous," he said. So he was, and so, no doubt, was the rider. I never saw or heard more of Mr. Jim.

I afterwards discovered a jockey, a cross between a "gentleman rider" and a professional, who "had never ridden for hire." This was allowed then, but I think it

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was stopped long ago, and rightly too. It was quite usual to have an objection when the man who had never ridden for hire won a race from the man for whom he had ridden under the same description—and who had paid him—the week before. Indeed, I soon found out that there was not much to choose between “gentlemen riders” and the class who had “never ridden for hire,” except that the former were rather more exorbitant in their charges. You had to put them on ten pounds, and if they lost, as they frequently did by disobeying orders, or having no knowledge of pace, they wanted money to get home, and very likely to have a night in town on the way.

My new jockey could manage to keep Euphrates from bolting, but he was, naturally perhaps, afraid to let him go. So he had some nice rides (for there never was a safer conveyance over a country) without profit to me. Indeed, Euphrates never won anything, though he always ran well, and fenced magnificently. The worst of it was that my man was by no means averse to beer, and, notwithstanding repeated warnings, could not resist “having a glass” when bringing the horse home. If he got the first glass down safely he would celebrate the feat with another. Usually the horse seized the moment when he put out his hand for the first glass to bolt, and on several occasions he found this also a good opportunity for getting rid of the man. I once lost Euphrates for three days—of course I knew he was as certain to come back as a bad shilling—though the groom turned up all right, and then heard of him some miles on the other side of Birmingham, where some good Samaritan sportsman had taken him in, clothing and all. Neither horse nor groom was ever a halfpenny the worse for their escapades, of which, however, I began, after some time, to tire. I can't

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remember what became of Euphrates, but suppose he went back to the Repository, as was the case with the great majority of horses that were bought there. No doubt he played his old tricks in a new place, and, very likely, some new ones in a bus.

Clearly, if I had had to put up with riders of Mr. Jim's calibre, I should have done very little good at steeple-chasing. But, chiefly owing to my friend "Mr. Thomas'" good offices, when, later on, I got a good horse or two, I was sometimes able to secure a jockey who, if not quite in the first rank, was yet fairly capable. The best "gentlemen riders" then were "Mr. Thomas," Messrs. Crawshaw, J. M. Richardson, E. P. Wilson, C. J. Cunningham, Brockton, and another or two. Mr. Crawshaw, perhaps in his day as good as any "gentleman rider" or most professionals on the flat or over hurdles, and the only one I had to do with who indignantly declined to be "put on" the usual tenner, was once so obliging as to ride for me; but on that occasion he was unsuccessful.

His mount Barmstone had been a notorious rogue on the flat, though one of the fastest horses in training when in the humour. Thinking he might run more generously over hurdles, he was put in a hurdle race at Cheltenham. At the last hurdle he was winning easily, when suddenly he put his ears back, and refused to try any more. Mr. Crawshaw, thinking he would just win, did not use his whip, and was beaten by a neck on the post. The next day Barmstone had the same horses to beat, and was for playing the same game, when Alfred Holman's whip on his ribs was heard all over the course, and he left his horses as if they were standing still.

There were several good horsemen, of whom George Lowe (who rode principally for Wadlow's stable) was a

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type, who were without, and apparently not too desirous of acquiring a knowledge of pace, which deficiency, when their mounts were of approximately equal merit, put them at the mercy of their better educated opponents. George Lowe, than whom a nicer or more straightforward young fellow never breathed, rode for me several times, with varying success. On one occasion he rode Spreading Sail in a "Hunters' flat race" at Shrewsbury, and though I was by this time well aware of the uncertainty of racing, I made sure of winning the race, as the mare was then in great form, and had a good deal the best of the weights. I tried to impress upon George that he should get away as quickly as possible, and keep going, as his mount would stay for ever. He soon got twenty lengths in front, his two chief opponents, Messrs. Crawshaw and Spence—both admirable judges of pace—keeping well in the rear, and allowing him to think he was making the running. The two closed with him at the run in, taking him in completely, and both beating him on the post. I told George that if I had had a shot-gun when he came jogging past the stand at half-speed the first time round, I thought I should have shot him. He was much grieved at his mistake, and confessed he "had not made enough of the old mare."

A long way behind such good honest fellows as George Lowe came the ruck, and how some of these managed to qualify was a marvel. They turned up from everywhere, but chiefly from slums and public-houses. There was an awful case of a "gentleman rider" who had a public-house—hotel he called it—at C——, and owned two or three screws, which he was accustomed to manipulate himself. Immediately after dismounting he would change his clothes, and appear, with name emblazoned on his bag, in the betting ring. Truly a nice state of affairs!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### BLACK COTTON AND HER PROGENY.

BLACK COTTON'S foal by Knight of Kars had now arrived at what in a well-conducted animal would have been years of discretion. There were few if any mares in England better bred than Black Cotton. To quote a letter from John Eyke: "She is by Faughballa [*sic*], brother to Birdcatcher, dam Fantastic by Touchstone, Revival by Pantaloon, Waterloo out of Eleanor, winner of Derby and Oaks." And if Knight of Kars was not all that John Eyke fondly thought him, still he sired a good many winners, and might, not impossibly, sire one more. Gun Cotton, as I had named the colt, was a big, dark brown horse, and William Holman (who had some good horses, one or two of them belonging to the Duke of Hamilton) expected great things from him. Afterwards I wished he had been less sanguine.

William Holman, who was then getting into years, was a fine, straightforward man, with a good knowledge of training, inclining, I should say, to old-fashioned ways. I remember once going round the stables at Cleve and coming upon a horse whose loins were quite raw from a recent severe blistering. The horse, I was told, had had inflammation, when a hill sheep was killed, and the skin applied hot to the horse's loins. I doubt if this remedy is in vogue now in fashionable stables, but it was efficacious

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at least in taking the skin off, and the cost of a hill sheep was very small.

William Holman had a large and very fine family of sons, the majority of whom were, as was natural, good riders. The best of them was that "popular idol" George, who so nearly won the Grand National on the Doctor, who was unlucky in having to meet the Colonel, a horse of quite exceptional merit. William Holman retired soon after I went to Cleve, in favour of his son John, who could ride a bit, but was apparently never very anxious to distinguish himself between the flags. As a trainer he was greatly the inferior of his father. John did not stay very long at Cleve, but removed to Calne in Wiltshire, an out-of-the-way place, but with some good galloping ground and it was there that Mr. Brayley, after years of patient waiting, trained his Grand National winner. I don't know whether it was the bacon (the hedgerows in the neighbourhood of Calne presented a strange appearance, being hung for miles and miles with bacon bags) or the solitude, but John could never do any good there. Another son, Alfred, who in his day was a good rider, still trains near Cheltenham.

As I said, I should afterwards have been glad if William Holman had been less sanguine as to Gun Cotton's future. Without having any serious accident, something was always happening to put him *hors de combat*, just as he was expected to distinguish himself. He was given to playing tricks in his box, and would rear up, and paw the plaster off the ceiling. On the eve of a big hunters' race at Aintree he developed a wart just below the fetlock joint, which, though of no ultimate importance, prevented him from running. He was a fine fencer, but had to be stopped in his preparation for the National

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on account of an accident in the stable. He had been tried so well that I was loth to give him up while hope remained. William Holman was very likely right in thinking that, with luck, he would have proved himself a good horse: he had less difficulty in proving himself an expensive one, and unfitted for a sportsman of limited income. But it must be remembered that the charge then made by all but the more fashionable trainers was only twenty-five shillings a week. It is now fifty shillings, which makes it impossible to get one's expenses at steeplechasing, with so many races whose value is not more than forty pounds. This necessitates betting, when the state of that man may be worse than before.

Black Cotton's next foal was by Paul Jones, then located at Mr. W. E. Everitt's stud farm at Finstal, near Bromsgrove. Mr. Everitt had quite a large establishment, which used to be visited by a number of men connected with racing and breeding. It was within easy reach of Droitwich, a place noted for the cure, or supposed cure, of sufferers from rheumatic gout, and other kindred ailments. I remember on one occasion I had been walking round the farm with Mr. Everitt, when, on approaching the house, we met a footman bearing on a salver a card inscribed with the name of Mr. Thompson. The owner of the card, a tall, fine-looking, grey-haired man, was to be seen a little in the rear. "Thompson!" said Mr. Everitt to me; "who is he?" I looked at the card. "The great Yorkshire breeder," I said; "father of Gig Thompson"—so he had been nicknamed at Eton—"the gentleman rider." Mr. Everitt, the most hospitable of men, welcomed his visitor cordially, and the butler was at once interviewed with a view to

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celebrating his visit with the production of a special brand of champagne. Mr. Thompson informed us that he had driven over from Droitwich, whither he had been sent to be cured of his rheumatic gout. He appeared to enjoy his visit, no doubt a change from Droitwich, which he had found exceedingly dull. I never heard how the new treatment agreed with him, but it is unlikely that it had been prescribed by his medical man.

The following is an illustration of how little some owners know as to what their horses are doing.

When *Stitch of Canvas*—as the daughter of Paul Jones and Black Cotton had been named—was three years old I leased her for her racing career to Miller Corbet, a well-known Kidderminster solicitor, who had an idea that he was fitted to shine on the turf. That he may have been so is possible, but he had no time to spare for a profession that demands as much attention as the law, or perhaps even a little more. The mare was sent to Malton to be trained, and ran once or twice in the north without either disgracing herself or doing herself much credit. Staying in the winter-time with a Yorkshire parson, whose living was about fifteen miles from Malton, I thought I would go over and see her. The parson and I turned up one day about lunch-time at the big hotel in Malton, which was kept by the trainer. The place was absolutely empty of guests, and indeed there appeared to be very little in it but an abundance of port wine. It was a bitter cold day; there had been no fire in the coffee-room on our arrival, and we found it impossible to warm either ourselves or the doubtless choice vintage brought up from the cellar for our approval. It was some time before we were permitted to see the horses, and on





MR. E. P. WILSON.

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being escorted at length to the stables I found Stitch of Canvas unable to walk out of her box, having had a bad attack of humour on her return from a race meeting at Redcar some time before. One of her hocks was nearly the size of her head, and one fetlock joint much enlarged. She had a ragged coat, and did not appear to have been groomed for some time. To my inquiry as to when she had last been out of the stable, "You will have seen," the trainer calmly replied, "the statements in the sporting papers as to her work." And indeed I had seen reports that she was galloping regularly. I was greatly shocked at seeing the mare in such a state, and said I would take the responsibility of having her boxed down to me at once. I suppose some trainers in those days thought their clients absolute donkeys, but no doubt they have since got a little sharper. From that day I ceased to place the slightest confidence in "training reports," believing, perhaps wrongly, that they are written by a penny-a-liner in Fleet Street for purposes of deception; but there has been plenty of time since for improvement.

I took Stitch of Canvas back, and for some time looked on her as fit only for breeding; and it was quite a year before I thought it might be possible to train her for a hunter's flat race. The fetlock joint remained so much enlarged that it was a marvel how she avoided hitting it. She first ran in a little race at Bromyard, which she lost through being amiss. Bromyard was a queer course, up and down some steep chalk hills that reminded me of the cliffs on the coast of Kent. There was an amusing affair here when, on a dispute arising as to the height of a "Galloway," Mr. E. P. Wilson, who was to be for many years in the front rank of gentlemen riders, treated the local officials rather *de haut en bas*. The Bromyard

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people stood on their dignity, but the matter, a storm in a teacup, was soon got over.

Stitch next came out on the old course—a very bad one—at Sutton Coldfield, and here recommenced my troubles with “gentlemen riders.” Mr.—it should have been “Lord”—D——, who consented to ride, was a young man of good family, and I presume well off, but he nevertheless asked me to put him on a tenner, as if he were the merest pauper, and my experience (not a very wide one) has been that, with the exceptions that prove the rule, “gentlemen riders” require what amounts to a much larger fee than could be claimed by a professional. Mr., or Lord, D—— was told not to win too far, so he raced away and won by forty lengths. Inferior “gentlemen riders,” besides having no knowledge of pace, are always far too conceited to dream of riding to orders.

Stitch of Canvas ran several times with varying success—at her best there were only one or two “hunters” that could beat her—when I sold her with a contingency, and it was when again running at Sutton Coldfield that a curious thing occurred. The mare had been carefully kept out of the paddock, as she was looking very well, and we had no wish to shorten the odds. Mr. Arthur Yates had a mare in the race, ridden by “Mr.” Rudd—there were two Rudds, brothers, one a jockey, and the other a “gentleman rider.” To my surprise, when I went into the ring, I found Stitch of Canvas at evens, and Mr. Yates’ mare at three to one. This was awkward, but Stitch looked so well that I backed her for a pony. Walter Holman was riding, and notwithstanding the fact that she was spurred more on that occasion than in all the rest of her life put together, Mr. Yates’ mare won by many lengths. I couldn’t make it out; but more was to come.

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I did not go near the weighing-room after the race, not being given in those days to suspecting fraud, and was surprised to hear shouting when the horses were being weighed out. Walter Holman came running up: "We've got the race," he called out. It seems that Mr. Yates' mare had carried a stone overweight, and had still been able to win easily. The matter was never cleared up or explained in any way. The fact that no one thought that Mr. Yates had any part or knowledge of the affair only made it more inexplicable. It was said that Stitch of Canvas was backed by Mr. Yates' party, who thus pocketed their bets on the race. The matter was to have been brought before the National Hunt Committee, but nothing came of it. But the oddest thing was that though the mare must have been on that running a very good animal, she never earned brackets.

Some little time after I heard that Stitch of Canvas was to be put up to auction at Cheltenham, having a screw loose somewhere. I went down, and bought her back for twenty pounds, and could not see that she was a halfpenny worse than when I sold her. I started training her at home, and entered her for a hunter's flat race at "Four Oaks Park," which meeting had been started a year or two before. Being for some reason disappointed of my jockey, I asked a big, strong man (one of the unemployed, who was lounging about the weighing-room, and whom I knew slightly) to ride her. Stitch had taken to pulling hard, and no wonder, and I told my "gentleman rider" that he must be careful or she would play him a trick. It seemed I had hopped on a second edition of "Mr. Jim." It was once more, "Oh, thank you very much; I think I know all about pullers." Whether this was true or not he was certainly to know something

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before he had finished. Stitch bolted with him in the preliminary, big and strong as he looked, as if he had been a child. She made the circuit of the course, when I walked out and stopped her. When the race came off she bolted again, but only lost by a length or two, being pumped out just before reaching the winning post. She was never to be trusted again after discovering what she could do with such a big, strong jockey—as she may have thought him. I kept her at home, and she got very clever at her fences, and a young fellow who was staying with me, a fair rider, seemed to have acquired the knack of holding her. One day, however, he turned in his saddle as he landed over a fence, to see how a Galloway of his, coming behind with a stable lad on him, shaped at the jump. Stitch seized on the chance as cleverly as Euphrates could have done, and bolted in earnest. I forget how far she went before she was pulled up, but she was not one of those pullers who have had enough of it after a mile or so; and no doubt that gallop was the cause of her shortly afterwards breaking down.

In the meantime her own sister had not satisfied her purchaser, though I kept telling him she wanted time, and he asked me to take her back, which I did. After running unsuccessfully at Worcester in a Hunter's flat race, she made a second essay at Warwick, where she won the Great Warwickshire Hunter's flat race in a canter. I had the best of the weights, but she must have been a good mare that day, as she beat "The Scot" (afterwards purchased by the then Prince of Wales, with a view to winning the Grand National) and several other good horses. I went early to Birmingham, and sent "my commissioner"—a well-known, honest, if bottle-nosed billiard-marker at the rooms in Stephenson's Place—to

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see what he could do. He went down to Dale End, and returned, saying he could only get three to one, and those odds (luckily, as, it happened) only to ten pounds. Thinking I might find things even worse when I got to Warwick, I told him to take it. I was surprised on reaching the course to find my mare at ten to one. It required some courage, but I pulled myself together, and that was, I think, the best day I ever had on a racecourse, though I should have had another or two had I not been handicapped by inferior jockeys. I returned from Warwick in time to attend a political meeting at Alvechurch, where I had promised to speak. My friends were surprised to find me in better form than usual, but perhaps if some of our needy, place-hunting politicians could always manage to have a similar experience to mine before holding forth, their oratory might be more inspiring than is often the case.

I had a great liking for Warwick, and when attending the meetings there I used generally to drive over from King's Norton, and put up with a sporting old fellow named Newsome, who rented an old manor-house and a few acres of turf from the Earl of Warwick, and who one day surprised me by saying that he had formerly been a tenant on the Swinton estate, with which my family were connected. On entering the house his usual greeting was the question—in a muffled voice, proceeding from the cellar—" '34 or '47?" I used generally to declare for '34, when the sound of the drawing of a cork would be heard, and the whole house would be impregnated with the bouquet of that famous wine, of which my host seemed always to have a bottle or two remaining from his more prosperous days, and which he was already decanting for our after-dinner delectation. Dining a few days ago at

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a rather second-rate London restaurant I was amused to see that the list on the wine card included my old friends '34 and '47, of which vintages I imagined the last bottle had been drunk long ago.

Spreading Sail afterwards lost the Claremont Hunter's at Sandown—for this I was advised not to start her, as she was the only penalised runner—but won the Ludlow Cup, and two or three smaller races before running at Shrewsbury (the last races on that course), when she would have won easily enough had G. S. Lowe, who had previously ridden her at Warwick, known a little more about pace. The week after she won again at Warwick, this being her first appearance over the sticks. It is odd how lucky I was at Warwick, having hardly ever lost a race there. Warwick had at one time a bad name for the tricks that got hunters' races temporarily into such disrepute. Every one will remember the mound there; it was impossible to see what went on behind this, and it was strange sometimes, on the horses' reappearance, to note the change in the order of the runners.

There is the story of Tom Oliver, who was riding a steeplechase at Warwick in a snowstorm, when he stopped behind a hayrick on the side of the track, and joining in the second round, won easily. But no doubt many stories have been fathered on Tom Oliver, as Sydney Smith used to be credited with all the jokes.

Not long afterwards I chopped Spreading Sail for a grand-looking horse by Lowlander, belonging to Mr. W. B. Partridge, who should have won the Grand National with Timothy Titus. Low-water, as I named him, was unlucky. He was sent over to a steeplechase at "Four Oaks Park" in charge of a stable boy, to get a certificate, under the new rules, for hunters' flat races. Holman



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sent a note to say that the horse had been coughing, and had not had a gallop for some days, but was better and quite able to get the course, and that the stable boy could ride him all right, though, of course, he could not win. My friend, Tom Pickernell, was acting as judge, and I told him I only wanted a certificate, whereupon he replied that he would stop in the box till dark if required. This, however, proved unnecessary, as, at the second fence all the other horses refused, when Low-water cantered on by himself, taking his fences like a well-seasoned hunter, till he arrived at the fence where the others were still refusing. One of these managed to get over with him, but as Low-water had a mile to the good he finished very much alone. The horse looked exceedingly well, insomuch that a number of people backed him, which of course I didn't; which shows that luck is sometimes better than knowledge. Mr. Young Graham, the Yardley breeder, admired the horse, and went so far as to ask his price, but, as in the case of the Sacharometer colt, I would not have sold him for anything. He was only to run once more, and again unbacked. This was in a farmer's race at Worcester, when he was a little shin sore, and didn't care about the hurdles. I sent a friend into the ring to put fifty pounds on, but he returned saying they were asking for odds. When I sent him back again it was too late. The horse was very sulky, and got nearly a quarter of a mile behind, but of a sudden he began racing, when he speedily caught his field and won in a canter. Shortly after I had the horse home for a time, and my friend Joe Parker, the well-known Birmingham vet., coming over one day, strayed into Low-water's box. "Do you know," he asked, when he came into the house, "that Low-water is going blind? In fact, he has lost the sight of one eye already."

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This was true, and there went another good horse. Considering that I never had more than a couple of horses, and generally only one, I don't think I did so badly, and any one who has a good horse and an honest trainer, and who is able to resist backing other people's horses, of which he knows nothing, cannot do very much harm.

About this time instead of my running horses, people began to run me for offices of all descriptions. There was a little fun—with long intervals of dulness—to be got out of these affairs, or—with the exception of politics, to which I was devoted—I should soon have given them up.

I subjoin a few samples of the sort of thing for which I had to be thankful.

Some of the gentlemen elected to the County Bench presumably for political services, were a curious lot. Numbers of men pushed themselves on, so to speak, by proclaiming past services which only existed in their imagination, or by promising great things for the future, when they were apt to disappoint expectations, very often taking no further interest in county matters when they had obtained the desire of their hearts. I once attended a political dinner on the borders of my parish, adjoining Birmingham; the chair was taken by a newly made J.P., who had some works in the neighbourhood and was going—he said—to interest himself in politics. I had the honour of being seated on his right hand, and was surprised, after dinner, when the speech-making was about to commence, to see the chairman's head clerk come in with a sheaf of typewritten documents which the chairman set himself to study. Imagine my joy at discovering that these were the speeches he was to deliver during the evening. He was, unfortunately, or fortunately, rather careless in shuffling these documents, and some of them

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got out of place. He would calmly rise and begin reading from a typewritten page; when he had got half-way he would stop, "Ah! I find I am reading the wrong speech," and then go through the pack till he came to the right one. The odd thing was that the audience, composed principally of working men, did not seem to think it anything out of the way.

When a Liberal Unionist was first brought forward for Mid Worcestershire I was anything but pleased, as Liberal Unionists formed but a very small portion of the constituency. Subsequently I changed my mind in deference to Lord Salisbury's wishes, and as a local meeting was taking place in my village in favour of a Radical candidate, I thought it a good opportunity for advertising the fact. The Radical candidate was a little quack doctor, and he had recently been accused of writing something about the Liberal Unionist candidate which was not strictly true. When he had finished his speech I went up to the platform and charged him with bringing a false accusation against his opponent. "It's a lie," said the little man quite boldly, when I sprang forward, putting out my hand as if to seize him by the throat. He collapsed into the corner of the platform, and his adherents came round me, making a furious row. However, nothing came of it, and next day I saw a paragraph in all the local papers, "Tory J.P. assaults Radical candidate." This of course was just what I wanted. I had not the slightest intention of harming the little doctor, who was afterwards relegated to the obscurity from which he had temporarily emerged.

At the institution of County Councils I was in favour of farmers coming forward, thinking they would be the best people to look after the country districts, and that

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they might be trusted not to err on the side of extravagance. This last would no doubt have been the case, but whether from want of the necessary leisure, or because they felt shy of opposing the "nobility and gentry," who, with one accord, sought election on the new body, very few farmers came forward. Still fewer were elected, and these, with an exception or two, were failures, their ideas never seeming able to soar beyond their parish boundaries. An old farmer, who used to make long speeches on the most peddling matters, raised a discussion one day on the Highways Committee about a culvert which, it seemed, was unused, and which it appeared to be his chief object in life to fill up with stones. This went on till lunch-time without the farmer being appeased. He joined our party at the usual lunching-place; the Evesham district had been favoured that year with a big crop of plums, and in consequence an enormous plum tart made its appearance on the table. To this he paid great attention, taking the stones out of his mouth and placing them on the tablecloth beside him. When he had finished the tart I asked him if he was keeping the stones to fill up his culvert. He blushed. "Beg pardon!" he said, as he shovelled them on to his plate, where they made quite a nice little cairn.

There was occasionally a little amusement to be obtained from the meetings of the King's Norton School Board. The examiner from the Board of Education was an Irishman, and no doubt a capable official, but his usefulness was greatly minimised by his brogue, which was something terrific. On one occasion he gave our school a bad report, and this greatly upset the schoolmaster, who was thereby placed in danger of losing his situation. To mend matters, he brought me the draft of a memorial which he had drawn up for presentation to the Board.

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In this he stated that the reason for the unfavourable report was that the children could not understand what the examiner was saying. He instanced the word "garden" which the children had been accused of being unable to spell, and which the examiner, he stated, had pronounced "ghearhding." It took me some time to persuade our schoolmaster that no good would be done by presenting the memorial, in which, as author, he took considerable pride.

These things were all very well, though occasionally rather wearisome. I have seen very little racing for some time, but given a good horse and a good jockey, I should enjoy a visit to a racecourse again ; without these adjuncts I had rather stop at home.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### SCENES ON RACECOURSES.

ANY one who on a racecourse gets tired of watching the racing should turn his attention to the "bookie," than whom there is no one who would better repay study. Scarce a betting man of the first class but might have made his mark in any other line, save perhaps as parson or minor poet, and of these there is already an ample supply. The cunningly tentative offers, the quickness with which they are withdrawn, the brief lapses—to an old customer, and between two paroxysms of concentrated blasphemy—into the country gentleman must surely amuse if they do not instruct the most prejudiced anti-sportist. In addition to quick wits the bookie must be endowed with lungs of brass and a constitution of iron, or he will succumb to a cold caught on the "Heath," or an equally disqualifying, if less deadly, "clerical throat," which it seems sacrilege to mention in such a connection. There are other causes of disappearance from Tattersall's ring which involve, it is said, the making a fresh start at the bottom of the ladder. It must require no inconsiderable amount of pluck to recommence climbing after being hurled from the coveted position on the topmost rung, but the resuscitation, if infrequent, is not unknown. Rumours too had reached me of a prison house in which these probationers were confined till their crimes—chief among which was the being found out—were burnt and purged

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away, and one day at Doncaster, when there chanced to be little in the racing to interest me, I started off to find it.

My way led through the paddock gate across the course. As I neared the centre of this the roar gradually subsided, till I was conscious of a heavenly calm. A few more steps and the noise recommenced with less concentrated clamour from the opposite side. A mounted policeman having vehemently objected to my movements, the sympathetic crowd by which the rails were densely lined of course opened readily to allow my passage. I pushed forward a few yards, strode over a second rail, and found myself in what may be described as a Tattersall's of the gutter. It is presumably from the élite of these outsiders that the aristocratic ring on the other side of the course is re-stocked—as a Parish Councillor used gradually to develop into a County Councillor or an M.P.—and the gaps so made are filled in their turn by failures from the other side. The acquirement of the leisure necessary to the evolving of new objurgations, unique in their combination of depth and volume, may be no slight set-off to the disappointment of finding oneself after much wearying toil in the exact spot whence one started years ago.

Though the personality of the "list-men" varied immensely, some being apparently good fellows, while others were clearly the reverse (or those who looked "good fellows" may have been the greatest blackguards), their paraphernalia were absolutely identical. Each was the proud proprietor of three sticks, which opened to form a sort of easel to support a canvas frequently adorned, in addition to a name in enormous letters, with the portrait—an ideal one—of the owner. These names were generally suggestive of aristocratic or titled descent. Either many scions of noble families have, in the dearth of other remunerative

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employment, taken to outside betting, or members of the profession modestly discard their own patronymic on appearing in public. There was not a Smith or Jones among the lot. What with the name and the portrait there was but little space remaining on which to hang a small black board. On this the proprietor wrote with a piece of chalk the name of the race, and the names—as far as he was cognisant of them—of the horses about to compete. I failed, moreover, to discover among these gentry signs of the conspicuous talent that would justify its owner's promotion, or even of such "astuteness" as might be expected to survive the fall which some of them may have undergone. When the "list-man" thought it time to commence business he ruminantly jotted down under each horse's name the odds he was prepared to lay. I had supposed that the men whom I had seen signalling from the paddock, as it were in a sort of magnified deaf and dumb alphabet, were acting on behalf of the outside bookies. It was rather a shock to find that the latter showed little anxiety to profit by information gained by this or any other means.

Half-way up the straight the "lists" got fewer, and the few were less patronised. I supposed there was an unwritten law compelling a novice to begin at the far end, and work his way, as vacancies arose, towards the winning post. Possibly, however, failure on the other side conferred a sort of degree. As yet I had not come on anybody who looked as if he were trying to climb up again after a fall, or was likely to succeed if he tried. I was beginning to surmise that for the fallen angels there must be yet another place of repentance, when I came upon "Pan of Birmingham."

"Pan" was a middle-aged man, probably about forty



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or forty-five, though an immense brown beard and moustache almost entirely concealed his features, and made it hard to tell his age with any exactitude. He was dressed in a new suit of tweeds. His canvas was for some occult reason—perhaps by way of informing people that “Pan” was his *nom de plume*—decorated with a rude design of the Prince of Wales’ feathers. If he had chosen his “stand” with the intention of commanding a view of the start for the two-year-old races, he was to be congratulated on his success, but from a professional point of view the spot seemed, to a novice, ill-chosen. Here, I thought, must be the latest fallen angel from the other side. There was absolutely nothing beyond him but the blank and unoccupied heath; so far was he indeed from the telegraph that it was hard to believe his information could be up to date, and, indeed, the odds he had chalked up against the horse for which the race seemed to me a certainty were exceedingly liberal. I laughed at finding myself tempted to invest half a crown, and again when I had a reminder that hesitation is as fatal—perhaps a little more so—on the turf as elsewhere. A countryman lounged up from somewhere, perhaps from the farm on the other side of the course, and produced from an avaricious nook under his smock a shilling, which he invested on the favourite—which was not Pan’s. I had thought the latter lethargic, but no snail could have drawn in his horns more expeditiously. He rushed to his board, as on an errand of life and death, and substituted a three for the figure seven, by which I had been tempted; then, still with his back to me, he mumbled in a tone of triumphant apology, “First come, first served.”

As Pan turned his back on me it came into my mind

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that I had seen him before. Some fallen leviathan, no doubt, who had come to grief, and was beginning again. But it was only his back that I seemed to recognise. The enormous beard that covered his face and flowed down far over his waistcoat was unknown to me.

My curiosity was aroused, and, waiting till the countryman had pocketed his eight shillings and sauntered off again, I was approaching him with a view to the solving of the mystery, when to my astonishment I saw that he was packing up his easel. The process was not a long one, and was apparently accelerated by his happening to look up and see me almost at his elbow. Putting the few light sticks that had supported his canvas under his arm, he ducked, with more agility than I had expected, under the rails, and was soon among the crowd on the other side of the course. I would have followed, but the course was being cleared, and the horses were already cantering down to the starting-post for the next race; and so for that time I lost him.

Yet if lost in one way, he was found in another. Something in his gait as he moved away amongst the crowd gave me the clue. Impossible! It can't be! But it was Tom — sure enough. It was years since I had seen or heard anything of him. He used to farm a few miles from me in —shire, and we had had many a day's hunting and shooting together. He was fond of excitement, and would frequently contrive to enliven the somewhat dull routine of farming by the introduction of something risky and akin to gambling. When this was impossible he took to attending races, but instead of racing helping to keep the farm going the farm had to pay for the racing. This it naturally objected to, so Tom got hard up. One day I was at



MR. THOS. PICKERNELL ("MR. THOMAS")

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— Races, and a horse that should have won was left at the post; it was the jockey's doing, I think. I came on Tom a few minutes later, and he was deadly pale; I guessed something had gone wrong. It was his horse that had been left, and I heard afterwards that he had put his last sovereign on the race. He gave up his farm and disappeared; I met him one day in Manchester, and went home with him. He seemed to have settled down as manager of a sort of Company of three or four women, none of them young, who made a living by pleating petticoats, a change of fashion having caused undergarments so treated to be in vogue with the daughters of the operatives. The Company had three or four sewing machines, on which Tom was now the best and fastest operator. I forget what he told me he could make in a day, but it was a considerable sum, and quite enough to have kept him comfortably, but I suppose he gambled it away. He must have tired of the life, and of the petticoats, and the women no longer young, for one day he disappeared again, and here he was starting "outside bookie."

Next day I could not find him on the course; I supposed he was keeping out of my way. But as I was walking in to town after the racing I came upon him. His eyes were fixed on the ground, and he started when I accosted him.

"Why did you run away from me?" I asked.

"Why can't you let me alone?" he answered, and I could see the blush rising outside the confines of brown beard.

"I'll let you alone," I said, "when you've told me what I can do for you."

"I was getting tired of cab-driving," he said, as if

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nothing mattered much, "and a fellow left me a few pounds. I thought I'd try this, but it's no use; I've done with it. I can't make 'ex's' at it." It would have done no good to tell him he'd gone the wrong way to work.

He told me where I could see him in the evening. He had a small room in a tiny house in one of the little streets vacated temporarily by the toffee-makers, presumably from a sporting desire to accommodate race-goers. Contrary to the usual rule, he looked much older without his beard.

I sent for a bottle of whisky, and after a glass or two I got him to laugh once or twice, but it was a dreary laugh, as if the machinery had gone rusty. We talked over old times; he didn't tell me what he was going to do, and perhaps he didn't know. "I've been a fool, and I've got to pay for it," he said quite cheerfully, and I suppose there is always a certain amount of pleasure in paying one's bills.

As I was going he got sad again.

"Thanks for coming, old chap; if you could do anything I'd ask you; don't worry about me."

I tried to slide some money on to the mantelpiece, but he wouldn't have it.

"None of that," he said, quite angrily.

I have never set eyes on him since, nor have I ever made another incursion into the realms of the "outside bookie." You see it is just possible that I might come across another old friend.

On one occasion, being at Doncaster, I was asked by Joe Parker, the before-mentioned Birmingham vet., to attend at Edmond Tattersall's ring and buy in Messrs. Graham's yearlings should they fail to make a certain price. Quite a number of them had been sent

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to Doncaster from what was in those days an overgrown stud. Messrs. Graham were then breeding from the Duke, whose progeny seemed to be in no great demand. I forget how many were knocked down to me at twenty-five pounds, but no doubt the spectators appreciated the parsimony and lack of judgment displayed by the stranger who seemed bent on picking up a stud for very little money.

Give a dog a bad name and hang him; I have never found Doncaster such a ruinous place to stop at during the St. Leger week as it is generally represented. But those who object to putting up at Doncaster have the choice of quite a number of places within easy reach. One of these is Retford, a rather quiet little country town with an excellent hotel, where to my surprise I found it the custom to serve "benedictine" in ordinary wine-glasses; a proof of liberality on the part of the landlord which some of his customers could, no doubt, have well spared.

A good deal has been heard of the "Yorkshire roar," and it would be possible to attend Doncaster for many years without discovering anything of the wild beast in it. I once heard it in all its ferocity. The late Lord — (then a magnate of the turf) ran a horse at Doncaster about twenty years ago, which became a hot favourite, and, "by the book," should have won easily. The horse got off all right—it was before the days of the starting-gate—but the jockey, — (retired), apparently made no effort to keep him in the front, and he came in a good last, the jockey's hand gracefully on his hip, as if he were taking a canter in the park. As he came back to the weighing-room an ominous growl arose which quickly developed into the "Yorkshire roar," divorced from the usual good-humour. A rush was made for the weighing-room, which the police unaided would have been quite

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unable to resist, and the owner and jockey would in all probability have been torn to pieces had not the entrance been guarded by a number of true sportsmen who, while objecting to the impudent pulling of the favourite, had no wish to see their county disgraced by an appeal to force which the perpetrators had yet richly deserved. The demonstrators were encountered with determination more than equal to their own, and the weighing-room was defended till the arrival of a strong body of police enabled the lord and the jockey, their faces blanched with fear, to leave the course, carefully guarded.

I have not been to Doncaster for three or four years, but before that time I attended pretty regularly, and never without seeing a group of three men in the dress of Roman Catholic priests, who remained all day in the betting ring, and apparently took the deepest interest in the odds. They attached themselves to one particular bookie, who may have felt flattered, but I doubt if he benefited much pecuniarily, though he may spiritually have been a winner, by their patronage. The sight was not a very edifying one. A contrast to the priests were the clergymen of the Established Church, of whom quite a number are to be seen in the paddock at Doncaster on the Leger Day. Fine, burly men, and looking a little old-fashioned in white ties, instead of the modern cut-throat arrangement. I don't think this sight is to be seen on any other racecourse. No doubt these parsons, like all "Tykes," were born with a love of sport, and, if kept within bounds, who would grudge them the distraction, no doubt an agreeable enlivenment in what must often be dull lives.

There is a little farm adjoining the paddock at Doncaster, the owner of which on one occasion provided a



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private Grand Stand in the shape of a haystack on the boundary of the course, and also a little amusement for one at least of the spectators. At first no one could have been more obsequious than the farmer, who was in attendance with a rather short ladder, which his patrons mounted gleefully after disbursing. The first-comers sat astride on the top of the rick, while the late arrivals seated themselves less securely on the sloping roof. It had rained overnight, and the thatch was slippery. Some of the tenants of the slope got scared, and dug their heels into the rick, but to little purpose. Others descended cautiously towards the edge of the roof to look for the top of the ladder; but this implement I had seen the farmer remove, and it may have been required on some other portion of the estate. On recognising the fact of its absence the unfortunates who had arrived so carefully at the edge seemed to lose hope. Soon after the panic reached the sportsmen who had been seated safely astride on the top, and they began to join the already demoralised people on the slope; these were pushed over the edge, and as they had attained considerable velocity, they shot out quite a distance into the farmyard. One fat woman landed with a thud that it would require a reporter for the halfpenny press fitly to describe. The droll thing was that the landlord appeared to have ceased to take interest in the affair, and probably he was by this time watching the racing from a less slippery location. By the time he had put new thatch on the rick, I should think he was a loser by his enterprise.

I was at Epsom to see Lady Elizabeth win the Derby—which, as every one knows, she didn't. Spectators of the fiasco could not believe their eyes, and never had a secret been better kept, since the fact that she had com-

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pletely lost her form was concealed even from the unfortunate owner. Could this jaded-looking mare, people asked, who never ran into her bridle, be the celebrated flier who had been favourite throughout the winter? It was for years confidently expected that some explanation would be given, that something would leak out, that the honour popularly ascribed to thieves would in this case, if never again, be found wanting; but a satisfactory elucidation is no longer possible, since all the actors in the affair have passed away.

The fact that my mother was the daughter of the Rev. Sir Robert Affleck of Dalham Hall, near Newmarket, caused me to see a good deal of racing that I should otherwise have missed. The sale of Dalham to the late Mr. Cecil Rhodes recently brought the place into notice, when some curious particulars were given as to the value of the estate in the days of Edward I. The present Hall was built by the Bishop of Ely, who sold the place in 1714 to John Affleck, Esq., and it remained in possession of that family till its purchase in 1902 by Mr. Rhodes. It is a fine sporting property, and during the lifetime of my uncle, the Sir Robert who succeeded my grandfather, I used frequently to visit there, and, in the days before "driving," one of the big fields (alternate strips of mangolds, swedes, kohlrabi, and common turnips) would provide sport for a whole day. Seated on a gate taken off its hinges and set against the hedge, you could watch the birds flocking back to the field till lunch was over, and it was time to begin again. My visits used to synchronise with the autumn handicaps at Newmarket. My uncle, though caring little or nothing for sport, used always to provide me with a good hack whereon to attend the races.

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Newmarket in the sixties and seventies was the most delightful place in the world for racing. There was nothing to pay, and every one could ride everywhere. Now, as I read in a sporting paper, "the heath all about the Stand is notable for a network of fencing," one of a number of so-called improvements that have been made of late years with a view to luring the British public, who, after all, would be more comfortable at Hurst Park or Alexandra Palace.

The "Bushes" Ring at Newmarket was an isolated circular enclosure of wooden palisades, of a height to permit horses to put their heads comfortably over it into the ring, and listen, if so inclined, to the conversation carried on by their riders with the bookies inside. Sometimes the conversation consisted chiefly of nods, and these may have been to them as good and comprehensible as words. I had ridden over from Dalham, and my hack had put his head over the palisades as if to the manner born, and no doubt he had been there before. For the ensuing race there were only two runners, and one of these was the property of "the Baron"—it was the time when to "follow the Baron" was thought the royal road to fortune.

Scarcely had my hack commenced to make his observations when a cob was edged in between him and his neighbour, and its rider was immediately approached by a bookie from within the enclosure.

"Want to back your horse, Baron?" inquired the bookie.

A nod from the Baron.

"Even thou.?"

The Baron nodded again.

"Another?"

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The answer was another nod from the Baron.

This went on till either the Baron or the Leviathan—probably the latter—thought he had had enough. The cob, a magnificent animal, never turned a hair, but I imagine my inferior steed must have turned a good many. It was five or six “thous.,” and on that occasion the Baron’s luck deserted him.

Besides introducing me to some excellent racing, my connection with Dalham caused me to have a distrust—I was nearly using a stronger word—of that able writer Macaulay, that I have never been able to overcome. My maternal grandmother was a daughter of Sir Elijah Impey, who might have been better remembered if the fact of being slandered by Macaulay had been a little more uncommon. Nothing could possibly have been meaner or more unsportsmanlike than the cool way in which that great man declined to acknowledge mistakes of which he must afterwards have been well aware; and he has, since my boyhood, been my beau-ideal of the literary snob. Sir Elijah’s character has since been cleared by Mr. Justice Stephen, who observes on the famous passage in which the great historian sums up the charges: “Every word of this is either incorrect, or a proof of ignorance both of the law, and of the facts relative to the matter.” He further remarks: “Of the attacks upon Impey, which I have done my best to refute, it is fair to say that they were in a review, of which its author, when he wrote it, probably did not know the importance. To him it was a mere matter of journalism, hastily put together from insufficient material. To the memory of Impey it was a gibbet. To the whole English nation it has become the one popular account of the early stages of the Indian Empire—the accepted myth. Slightly

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to adapt the famous remark of De Quincey in his essay on 'Murder as a fine art,' Impey owed his moral ruin to a literary murder of which Macaulay probably thought little when he committed it."

The Affleck family included a queer specimen or two. My mother's youngest brother went to Australia when quite young, and returned while I was at Oxford to sell the reversion of a sum of money coming to him on the death of Mrs. Harcourt, widow of Admiral Harcourt—who will be remembered as winning the Derby with Ellington—and owner of Swinton Park, Yorkshire. He then returned to Australia, and little was heard of him for many years, till, on the death of Mrs. Harcourt, it was found, to the general surprise, that Swinton was left to him. He came to England to take possession, and I saw a Yorkshire paper containing his brief speech on the occasion of his entertaining his tenants. Almost immediately afterwards he went up to London, whence he dispatched a telegram to my mother, who was keeping house for him at Swinton, saying that the ship in which he had arrived from Australia was going back, and he was going with her. He left a power of attorney with a friend to enable him to dispose of Swinton, and the place was shortly sold to Mr. Lister, afterwards Lord Masham. The greater part of the purchase money was paid over to Messrs. Parker, my uncle's solicitors—a member of which firm had boarded, from a rowing boat, the ship in which he had arrived from Australia—and the holder of the power of attorney permitted them to retain it, which piece of carelessness was no doubt the excuse those worthy men made to their consciences for bolting with the money. This was a sad loss, not only to my uncle, who, on reappearing from Australia, found himself

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as poor as before, but also to my mother, who had an interest in the estate. As her executor, I had afterwards the pleasure of receiving for a short time occasional dividends of one halfpenny till these amounted to two-pence in the pound, when the supply was suddenly cut off. When in town I used to see my uncle and his friend of the power of attorney sitting smoking their pipes in the hall of a London hotel, the latter soothing and apologising, and the former vowing he didn't care a d—; and I firmly believe he didn't.

The most sickening sight I ever saw on a racecourse was at Aintree, just before the race for the Grand National. I had been walking round the course, the reverse way, with a friend, when, about a quarter of a mile from the starting-post, we saw a poor hare, frightened out of her few wits by the noise and crowd, crawling timidly towards one of the fences, in which she tried quite unsuccessfully to hide herself. She was instantly perceived, surrounded by the roughs, caught, torn to pieces, and eaten alive—fur and all—by these representatives of the British working man, who fought for each dainty morsel more furiously than hounds for the last remnant of reynard. This happened some years ago, since when the working man has eventuated into our ruler. So at least we are told by those who hope to get something out of him—skilled practitioners these who can get blood out of stones. It is to this class that some sanguine people imagine Tariff Reform is likely to appeal; it appears likely their preference will be for free food. “First catch your hare,” wrote the worthy Mrs. Glasse, who would have had no *raison d'être* if all culinary processes were to be afterwards dispensed with. I am squeamish enough to hope (since the practice would be objectionable in a Royal

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Highness) that our rulers have given up eating live hare, and the assurance would give me more confidence in the future of the Empire than I am able to feel at present.

No one can have attended many steeplechase meetings without witnessing some shocking bad riding, of which one or two instances may have occurred in the Grand National itself. I have seen a Grand National won by a "gentleman rider" who, however good he may have been with hounds, was an absolute duffer between the flags, and one could but wonder how far the horse would have won by in more capable hands. Sometimes at a little country meeting one would see a bit of riding almost approaching to genius. I was once at Stratford-on-Avon when the course was flooded, and slippery with liquid mud. There was, of course, a water jump (though it was not needed), and in the chief steeplechase the first horse slipped on landing, when his rider went over his head, and rolled about in the mud. Mr. Brockton came next, and his horse also slipped on landing, whereupon his rider joined the previous arrival. Next came Mr. E. P. Wilson, and seeing what had occurred he lay back, his head almost on his horse's quarters, and so was saved from the mud-bath in which the others were wallowing. I travelled on my way home as far as Birmingham with Mr. Brockton, and as he had not removed any of the mud from his face, I was able to judge of the constitution and stiffness of the soil of Stratford-on-Avon, as well as if I had been farming in the locality.

A great deal has been written about the number of falls in this year's Grand National, and one writer accounts for it by the riders not sitting back enough. "Riding a chaser with your knees up to your eyes isn't

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the way to get over Liverpool or any other country." It will be allowed that the methods of Mr. Wilson and Mr. Brockton—fine rider though the latter was—were very dissimilar. Other writers blame the fences, though these were no bigger than of old. Loose horses are, of course, responsible for a number of accidents, and there are epidemics of steeplechase accidents as of other things. It seems to have been forgotten that at the big steeplechase at Bristol many years ago, when that city made a shortlived attempt to outbid Aintree, sixteen or seventeen horses—speaking from memory—fell out of about twenty runners. This was accounted for by a fall of rain making the previously dry course so slippery that few horses could keep on their feet. Pathfinder was an unsuccessful competitor, and on my saying to "Mr. Thomas" after the race that I supposed he thought little of his chance for the Grand National, he replied that, on the contrary, he thought he should win, which, as every one knows, was the case.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE DECAY OF HORSE-BREEDING.

SINCE I commenced farming a great change has come over horse-breeding. Times had got too bad for the old-fashioned haphazard style in favour with the majority of farmers. Not that much had ever been made of it, but while other matters were fairly prosperous on the farm, the profits or the reverse of the horse sales were not closely considered. It was a poor horse that could not be sold at a price for some purpose, and it did not take a very good one to make £30 or £40. The many accidents occurring to trappers, frequently on the return from market, were minimised by the number of small tradesmen who were always on the look out for a blemished steed. Or you would send to your pig-dealer saying you wanted a sow and pigs, when he would very likely go away with your broken-kneed or otherwise injured trapper tied behind his cart, in lieu of cash. Looking over my old farming accounts I find numbers of poorly bred three- or four-year-olds sold at £40, and a few lucky ones at £60 to £80. Recently the dearth of suitable horses for army purposes has been brought into notice, partly perhaps owing to Mr. Haldane finding himself obliged to bring horses from Colchester to Manchester for the mounting of his new army. But though from motoring and other causes the supply may

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have decreased in the last few years, it is a mistake to think that since the Crimean War we have ever had a horse supply commensurate with our needs. About thirty years ago there was a sudden war scare—whether with America or not I forget—and the Government hastened to send buyers to all the agricultural centres to secure horses and hay. Amongst other places a great number of horses were sent to the Birmingham Repository to be inspected. From these the Government agent selected a few, at about £40, but the vast majority were quite useless for the purpose. Indeed, it was droll to see what sort of animals farmers considered suitable for cavalry or transport. Really good horses to-day are worth more than ever, but, with the exception of Shire horses—a fashionable craze—very few people breed horses. Farmers for the most part gave up breeding when they gave up hunting, and there is now such a feeling of insecurity as to *meum* and *tuum* that few people would care to start a breeding establishment, except for racing purposes, before knowing what is likely to happen in the future to capital.

Even in the old days it was quite possible to have too many horses about, and it was almost as easy for a farmer to be devoured by his equine friends, as, on some estates, to be eaten up by rabbits. I was fortunate in having the fact that I was keeping too many horses brought to my notice in rather a droll way. A young farmer came to my house late one evening on some parish business, after my groom had gone home. I went to the door, and told him to put up his horse and come in. Some time passed, and as he did not appear I went out into the stableyard and shouted to him. A voice from the cowshed answered, "I can't find a place to put my horse in!" I mentioned

## The Decay of Horse-Breeding

several stalls and boxes, but, apparently, they were all full. At last I told him to turn one of the cart-horses into the yard and put his nag in his place. He did so, and next morning I got a wiggling from my old wagoner, who found his favourite horse standing in the rain with his nose over the yard wall. Before my friend left me I promised him room for his horse next time he came. I found on looking round that I had about thirty horses, counting mares and foals, and I decided on immediately reducing my stud ; but it was hard to see where to begin. However, the doctor settled that matter when he called next day. His first words were, "Have you got anything that would suit me for a few days' hunting?" I had a thoroughbred mare, very good-looking, that I had picked up, and with which I intended winning a hunter's flat race or two. I led her out of the stable to the gate of a long grass field adjoining the drive, slipped the halter, gave her a cut on the quarters, and she galloped off in fine form. The doctor was delighted with her looks, and next day brought the money in a huge bag, a few sovereigns, and a lot of half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences. It was ages since I had seen so much silver. The doctor tumbled about a bit that season, but he never complained. Next week I answered an advertisement from Jack Goodwin in the *Racing Calendar* ; he came down and bought three or four two-year-olds for South America. What with local fairs, the Birmingham Repository, and another doctor or two, in three weeks' time I had got rid of about twenty horses, and I never allowed myself to be overcrowded again.

I have since done little towards the improvement or the reverse of our horse supply ; long ago I gave up farming, except on the smallest possible scale. I feel as strongly as ever on the subject, but cannot help seeing

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that most of those whose influence or example would be of any use have ceased to bother their heads about such things as our horse supply—thinking perhaps that in a week or two we shall be all sailing in the air like seagulls—or our food supply—the tramps will fetch it all right for us from overseas—or indeed about any of the matters which one used to hear people say were bound up with our nation's greatness. Can we be surprised that the working classes, seeing the disregard of the rich, decline to excite themselves about ships, or armies, or Empire?

## CHAPTER XIX.

## TRAINERS AND PUBLISHERS.

AFTER all, a man may be a sportsman without having his heart set on winning the Derby or Grand National, or even on making a century for his county. The truest as well as the most fortunate sportsman is he who can find his sport in that state of life in which he had been placed and in which he has to remain. To bear may be to conquer our fate, but how much more complete the victory if we can enjoy it. But for being animated by a determination to find sport in whatever you had to put your hand to how impossible the practice of some dull but useful profession would become to any but the most phlegmatic of men. As it is, we frequently see a man going about what appears to us an unpleasant business with a contented and smiling face; he has found something akin to sport in it. To do well what one is best fitted for would seem to be a good receipt for a sportsman, did it not happen that many people do evil things remarkably well. And, indeed, what is sport to a lawyer or an undertaker may be something quite different to his client. Yet all sportsmen have one thing in common, since, to be any sort of a sportsman, you must run to win, and for this reason there is more or less similarity in the sports affected by different classes of people. At a first glance the two professions of publisher and trainer would seem

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to have little in common. There are members, no doubt, of both who prefer the sport to be found in their business to any other that could be provided. The points of resemblance have escaped notice for the reason, very likely, that few people—Lord Rosebery is a notable exception—have had to do with both. Who could or should be happier than the successful trainer one day graciously patronised by His Majesty, the next playing Triton to the minnows on the village green; and no doubt he prefers other people's horses to his own—as some one once said of wines. Who could, or should, be happier than the successful publisher, whose discrimination, or that of his "reader," has brought out some famous books, from which he has received as much honour and more profit than the author?

Both the trainer and the publisher are supposed to take raw material from their clients with the view of converting it into a mutual source of profit, and, unlike the publican, both are allowed to pick their clients. You ask the trainer, quite humbly (unless you are a man of some note on the turf, or elsewhere), to be so obliging as to allow you to become a source of income to him; and the man with a MS. to dispose of has frequently to make a long and weary round before he can find any one to stable his literary steed. The more famous the trainer, the more successful the publisher, the greater are the chances of refusal. But the man unable to place his horse or his book in the best hands would often do well to make a hack of the one and a bonfire of the other, since a bad or indifferent trainer or publisher is likely to be equally fatal to either *débutant*.

The trainer's profits accrue from his weekly bills, with sundry additions, and the publisher's (to a man with a

## Trainers and Publishers

bad head for [figures or a better knowledge of human nature) may also be calculable.

The first-class trainer would not dream of taking a bad horse into his stable, or even a good horse, the property of a man he knew to be a rogue; just as there are publishers who would refuse to bring out a book likely to be harmful, though to do so might prove a profitable speculation. Many good customers have been asked to remove their horses from a training stable with a good name to lose, because of some real or suspected sharp practice. Yet the number of rich people who fancy that owning a horse will bring them into notice, and of authors who wish to see themselves in print, have made it almost necessary that there should be trainers who will take in any sort of horse from anybody, and publishers who will bring out any book, however rotten and absurd, "on commission." Of these the latter are the greater nuisance, for while the bad horse, with his curbs or what not, may remain in the stall—"eating his head off," and the sooner he performs that difficult operation the better—the bad book has to be published and, so to speak, appear at the post, even if it is certain to die speedily away in the ruck.

Trainers are always styled "astute" by the penny-a-liners—as a miller is always "worthy"—and the epithet is equally applicable to publishers, who are (with the exception of the numerous failures) a little too much "men of business," while their customers are not enough so.

But, as no two men are exactly similar, there are almost as many divergences as points of resemblance between the two professions. When a trainer worth his salt has agreed to train a horse he looks after its well-being in every way. If it wants shoeing, or a dose of

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medicine, he doesn't wire the owner to come down and fit on the shoes, or administer the dose. Publishers do little or nothing except to lend their name—sometimes, no doubt, a loan of considerable value—to the venture, and receive the money. They never read books, or, at least, so they tell you. All that is left to the “reader,” who may even read for several firms, in which case the author, in going to a new publisher, may be mistaken in imagining that he is getting a fresh opinion. I came across a “reader” once who must have been employed (as if he were a sort of dust contractor) by a whole street. When a book is accepted by a publisher the author has to see to the arrangement; he must correct the proofs and—if he does not wish the book to be unintelligible—put in the stops; which last (as the fashion of “stops” is constantly changing) one would have thought the publisher might have found himself capable of superintending.

When the trainer has a horse likely to win a good race he does not stop his corn just on the eve of his engagement, as if he were a pig destined to the butcher. Some publishers, when the bin (which may have had very little in it to begin with) is empty, stop the corn—*i.e.* the advertising, etc.—just when another bushel would have meant success. The horse—the book, I mean—which yesterday was feeling so strong and well, looks into its manger. There is nothing there! What can this mean? All day he waits for the boy to bring him his usual feed; if not that, yet a lock of hay would be better than nothing. In the morning he is deadly sick; but nobody comes near him. The niggardly publisher has buttoned up his pocket, having succeeded in recouping himself for his outlay. In a few days the horse (the book) is dead, and will be heard of no more.



## Trainers and Publishers

I used to know quite a number of trainers, some of whom are unfortunately dead. My recollections of the majority are that they were always in new silk hats. I used to wonder in those days where all the old silk hats went to, but, no doubt, after wearing them once or twice the trainers handed them over to their clients. Most of them were also genial, a sign, no doubt, that the cares with which they were burdened were other peoples'. Perhaps the most genial trainer I ever knew, and one of the best hatted, was Teddy Weaver. He was fond of attending little steeplechase meetings not too far from home, and was for some time very successful at Worcester, and other meetings in the Midlands. I well remember his smiling face at the window of the railway carriage in which I was leaving Warwick after winning the Great Warwickshire Hunter's flat race in 1880. "A useful sort for a farmer to breed," he remarked, beaming on me rather sarcastically—I forget whether he had a horse in the race—and I agreed with him.

T. Wadlow, whom I first knew from his being occasionally seen with the Wheatland Hounds in the sixties, is the only trainer I never saw in a silk hat; and I have also seen him without the genial smile generally affected by the profession. He kept his own counsel to a degree beyond that which is, and should be, the custom of a trainer, and practised quite a Spartan economy of words. Coming across him one day at a steeplechase meeting I asked him, rather audaciously, perhaps, if he would find a temporary job for a young friend of mine, a gentleman rider, who wanted to learn something of training. Mr. Wadlow looked at me hard—he was then very short-sighted—slowly unbuttoned his long, heavy, brown ulster, hunted leisurely in his inner pockets for his glasses, found

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them, put them on, scrutinised me through them, replaced them in their receptacle, rebuttoned his ulster, and walked away without speaking.

I have known about as many publishers as trainers, and while the former may be presumed to wear silk hats when seen abroad, I have never had to complain of any excess of geniality on their part. This very likely because in their case a smiling face is not considered, for some business reason, a paying asset, or because a sedentary life saps the springs of mirth and good-humour. In fact, there are publishers and editors whose wish seems to be to strike terror into the hearts of would-be clients by a display—it is to be hoped a fictitious one—of ferocity. One editor I knew who had a spring chair; I am almost certain it must have been a spring chair; from this, when he wished to overawe his interviewer, or felt offended by some remark which, as it was intended to be jocose, had escaped his comprehension, he would suddenly be sent high towards the ceiling. When he came down again he would apologise, as though wishing you to believe the machinery had been inadvertently started, but it was not long before he was off again. To see a long, ungainly body glowering over you wrathfully was trying to the nerves, and the first time I came in for this manifestation I was quite taken aback. On the second occasion it fell very flat, or rather, perhaps, the publisher went up like a rocket, and came down like a stick. I have never yet met with a trainer who had a spring chair.

## CHAPTER XX.

### BIRMINGHAM THIRTY YEARS AGO.

**B**IRMINGHAM when I first went to reside in the neighbourhood was a curious place. It had an evil odour in the country generally, and this fact visitors may have thought unnecessarily advertised by the presence in the principal streets of goats (four-in-hand, and harnessed to little carriages) whose fragrance the natives doubtless preferred to veritable eau-de-Cologne. The town was, and, alas ! still is adorned (?) with a number of inferior statues of not very superior people, in defiance of the dictum that the arts of the statuist should be reserved for the dead, and that even after death fifty years should be allowed to pass before ratifying any decision previously arrived at as to the worthiness of the suggested recipient of the honour.

As a proof, were such necessary of the wisdom of this course, it may be mentioned that scarcely any original of a Birmingham statue who died before the unveiling of his statue has left any memory behind, while the one notable living exception is now an entirely different person from him whom it was intended to immortalise.

The Royal Standard used in those Republican days to be flying all over Birmingham, and without any special reference to the comings and goings of the queen or the rest of the Royal Family. To bring it from its place of

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retirement—for it must be allowed that it was not always *en evidence*—it was not even necessary that Mr. Chamberlain should be holding a political meeting, or presiding at a dinner of Jews'-harp makers, or some other prominent local guild. It would have been quite impossible to persuade the gentlemen who were responsible for the management of the Conservative Club (of which excellent institution I was for many years a member), that they really should not fly it over the club premises unless when some member of the Royal Family was present, and that it should be hauled down on the departure of Royalty. A friend of mine, a major of Marines, recruiting-officer for the Midland district, was also a member of the club, and his indignation and disgust at what he considered an insult to a symbol he had been taught to revere were quite moving to witness. Not that they moved the citizens of Birmingham, to whom a flag was, and I suppose still is, a flag and nothing more.

I was once walking down New Street with the above-mentioned major, now colonel, when a young solicitor, a mutual acquaintance, came out of a shop with an overcoat on his arm. This he calmly handed to my friend, with the request that he would help him on with it. "I'll see you d——d first," said the punctilious servant of Her Majesty, turning away in a huff.

I once made a small sensation in Birmingham, than which nothing was further from my thoughts. I was at the time sending some miscellaneous articles to the *St. James's Gazette*, and travelling one morning up to London without any one to talk to, I wrote in pencil my impressions of "modern Birmingham." Arrived in town I put them into an envelope, and sent them to

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Whitefriars. I stayed one night in town, and next evening on my arrival in Birmingham bought a *Mail* (the evening paper), when the first thing I saw was a leading article headed, "As others see us," dealing, in what was meant to be withering sarcasm, with my remarks which, it seemed, had appeared in the *St. James's Gazette* on the previous evening. My critic assumed that the writer was a fashionable Londoner who had just paid his first visit to Birmingham, and had been greatly shocked at its vulgarity and outlandishness. I can never, even at this distance of time, recall the affair without laughing. If only the indignant writer of "As others see us" had known that his enemy was farming in King's Norton instead of "swelling it" in Regent Street!

Between thirty and forty years ago the Birmingham working man, if not a sportsman, as he probably considered himself, had yet a love for some sorts of sport, of which rabbit-coursing may have been the chief and most reputable. For higher forms of sport he has never developed a taste. No doubt when the "Four Oaks Park" meeting was inaugurated it was thought that the vast population in and about Birmingham would at once render it a success, but, contrary to expectation, the working men did not seem to care for horse-racing.

When I was a member of the "Four Oaks Park" club I attended a coursing meeting there, out of curiosity. Once was amply sufficient. Out of some little plantations tame hares, stiff from confinement or rheumatism, were whipped, to be snapped up after a course that was generally brief, and the exhibition, though sickening to me, seemed greatly appreciated by a great crowd, probably composed of the same class of people whom I saw eat a live hare at Aintree. I suppose there were

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(and are) numbers of sporting clubs in Birmingham, each with a numerous clientele ; but these were for the gentry with brown leather bags, and their names—or some other person's—in appropriate brass letters, who left Birmingham early on Tuesday morning during the racing season, to bellow and roar during the week, and, to give them their due, generally to “settle,” in every betting ring from Land's End to John o' Groat's.

Soon after the inauguration of the unfortunate “Four Oaks Park” meeting people discovered, what they might easily have learnt before, that bookies were more numerous in the neighbourhood of Birmingham than backers. At “Four Oaks Park” (which I presume it was a point of honour for them to patronise) the former simply swarmed, and to do any business they must have had to make bets with one another. Dog eat dog. The number of firms made up of the two sporting families of Wilkinson and Collins was quite confusing, and sufficient, one would have supposed, to supply the needs of half the country. One and all have, I believe, ceased, financially, to exist, yet they all appeared at one time to be on the road to wealth. I never had any reason to complain of any of them, and so far as I know they were as fitted to survive as any other of the genus. With Dyke Wilkinson especially I had several transactions. Once at Warwick I had Spreading Sail in a hurdle race, and John Holman, her rider, being rather fearful of her refusing, advised me to have some one by me whom I could send into the ring when she had safely negotiated the two first hurdles. Dyke was so obliging as to undertake this office, and though the mare jumped well enough, John Holman kept in the rear till the last hurdle, when he came out with a rush and won easily. He was greatly disappointed when I told

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him I had only got three to one after all his trouble in keeping her so long in the rear.

Dyke Wilkinson was a fair type of the clever Birmingham man, insomuch that, like a Yankee—who is one day a shoemaker or liquor merchant, and the next, perhaps, a farmer—he could turn his hand to anything. Not only was he a bookmaker, but he had at one time, I believe, a successful business in Birmingham, and was also a literary man—of sorts—and ran a suburban paper. He was a Radical in politics, and when the Conservatives were fighting the King's Norton School Board Election on the religious question, he printed an article in which he questioned my fitness to be a member of the Board. I was a little hurt at the attack, and, taking the paper with me to a meeting at Moseley, I gave those present a brief sketch of my career—Eton, Oxford, Militia, America, farmer, churchwarden, member of this and that Board—and asked what I had done to make me unworthy. I ridiculed the local Liberal party that had to take its views on Religious Education from a Birmingham bookie, and, tearing up the paper, threw it over my shoulder with, "So much for Dyke Wilkinson and his dirty rag." Meeting Dyke shortly afterwards I told him what I had said. "I heard," he replied most good-humouredly, "that you were very funny about me and my paper." Truly the soft answer turneth away wrath! A few years ago a friend sent me a book written by Dyke, whom I had not seen for many years, containing anecdotes—some of them very interesting—of his experiences. The book was exceedingly well written, and I wrote to Dyke to congratulate him on it. The next day, oddly enough, I met him in the Strand, and we had a little talk about his book and other matters. We were

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to have met again, but I have never seen or heard of him since.

The "Stork" in Corporation Street was a sporting house, rather, perhaps I should say, that a portion of it, familiarly termed the "smoke-room," was for certain portions of the day allowed to be more or less monopolised by a bookie and his clients. I do not remember the bookie's name—indeed, I am not sure that I ever had the pleasure of meeting him—but his clerk, D——, was own brother to a big trainer whom I then knew very well, and this fact gave a greatly needed air of stability to the concern. Thither used to flock on the eve of a race all the Birmingham punters who wanted to lay a sovereign or two, and the sporting farmers from a distance who were paying business visits to the town, which they hoped by a little speculation to make more remunerative. In this hope they often succeeded, in so much that, on settling day, D—— had frequently to pay out more than he received. I for one was so lucky in my transactions with the firm that I was quite ashamed of myself.

On the morning of the 1886 Liverpool Grand National, I found myself obliged to go to London on business, instead of betaking myself to Liverpool, as I had intended. I had been over a few days before to see Mr. E. P. Wilson, and had been much taken with the appearance of Roquefort, a previous winner, with whom, barring accidents, he hoped to score again. Arriving early at New Street Station, I was about to send up a note to D——, telling him to put a pony on Roquefort and a fiver for a place on some wretch whose name I have forgotten, when I met on the platform a sporting ironmaster of my acquaintance, who expressed his surprise that I was not at Liverpool. I told him that I had business in London,



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but that I was just sending up town to put a pony on Roquefort.

“Don’t do that,” he said earnestly; “he won’t win. I can tell you a better thing to do. Back Old Joe for a place. He’s certain to get one, and what’s more, he might win. I’ve backed him for a place only.” I laughed at him, knowing but little of Old Joe, of whose merits, however, I ought not to have been so ignorant. But my friend had evidently such faith in his tip that I hastily tore up my note to D—, and wrote another telling him to put me five pounds on Old Joe each way. I then got into the train, and proceeded to Euston. From Euston I walked across to St. James’s Street, where I lunched with the man who had appointed to meet me, and, after a whisky and soda, lit a cigar, and struck off on foot for Euston again, without having spent one penny piece in the Metropolis. Arrived at Euston about six o’clock, I bethought me of the Grand National. Going to the bookstall I asked for an evening paper, but they were all sold out, nor could the stall-keeper remember the name of the winner, which he said he had never heard before. Suddenly one of the young Master Smiths jumped up from somewhere, got his head over the counter, and squeaked out, “Old Joe, sir.” I chucked him half a crown, and went home rejoicing. Old Joe started, I think, at forty to one, so, without reckoning my economical fit; I had had a fairly good day. T. Skelton, the winning jockey on that occasion, had a very bad time after his health forced him to give up riding. He married a daughter of Trevor, the well-known landlord of the Swan Hotel, Lichfield, and a great man in the coursing world. T. Skelton took a hotel in Kidderminster, near which place I was then living, but

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he could not make it pay. He might have done so if he had abjured betting or been a little less incapable of spotting winners. He succumbed to a combination of ailments, the effects, no doubt, of wasting years before. He was an excellent landlord and a good fellow in every way. After his death I never cared to put up in a Kidderminster hotel.

To return to D——, and the Stork. I was crossing New Street one day, and stopped in a street "refuge" to avoid a bus. A man joined me there whom I had not seen for years, and insisted on my backing Bendigo for the Eclipse Stakes, 1886. It was getting late in the day, and D—— rather demurred, but eventually settled all right.

Less expensive to D—— was my meeting, on the morning of the Cambridgeshire of 1884, with Mr. W. E. Everitt, who got into the carriage with me as I was passing through Bromsgrove on my way to Birmingham. He said F. Webb had told him after the Cæsarewitch that Florence could not lose the Cambridgeshire. I had not had a thought of betting on the race, but trusted to his judgment, and, going down to the Mill at King's Norton in the evening to see the paper, was pleased to find my confidence had not been misplaced. Farming was very bad in those days, and rates exceedingly high, so that a few twenty-pound notes always came in useful.

When visiting the Stork I had often noticed a door on which was painted in large letters the legend: "Mr. M——." From thence I had several times seen emerge a large fat man with a red face and a long brown beard, who I supposed was a dry goods traveller, or something of that sort. Probably the proximity of D—— had over-

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come any objections "Mr. M——" may have had to betting. It was shortly after I had become possessed of Low-water, who had not yet been out, but had been doing very well at his fences. He had been entered at a little meeting near Bath, and, being in the Stork a few days before the race, I was told that "Mr. M——" had backed him for a pony. I thought this an awful piece of cheek, as I had never spoken to the dry goods man in my life. On the day of the race "Mr. M——" came up to me on the course with outstretched hand. "I hope we shall win," he said blandly. I wondered what would happen next. However, I went the round of the course, which was in an unfinished state, and parts of it very hard going. The stake was a small one and not worth the risk; I was therefore able to inform "Mr. M——" that "we" were not going to run. He looked fairly disgusted, and I suppose that on this occasion, at any rate, D—— had the pleasure of receiving a pony from "Mr. M——," or taking it out in dry goods.

The Birmingham Annual Horse Show was at one time one of the best in the country; for some reason it was discontinued long ago. A good deal of its success was doubtless due to its excellent management by the well-known and popular auctioneer, Mr. Lythall. I sent a number of horses there at different times, and even if one failed to obtain a prize, a good animal could always be well sold. Attached to the Horse Show was an exhibition of agricultural implements, at which Birmingham manufacturers were accustomed (for the benefit, no doubt, of their friends the "Apron Farmers"—as it was the custom to dub Birmingham manufacturers who were interested in agriculture) to exhibit marvellous products, the outcome, apparently, of zeal, unassisted to any great

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extent by agricultural knowledge. Strolling round the collection one day I came upon an invention which fairly made me gasp. In front was a small plough with an arrangement for depositing the seed in the furrow, which was followed by a harrow, which was succeeded by a roller, so that the whole wearisome routine of ploughing, sowing, and covering up the seed, which the ordinary farmer is glad to be able to complete in several quite distinct operations, was to be got over at once, a great saving, no doubt, of time, trouble, and expense. What struck me as most admirable was that the machine was intended to be drawn by the farmer himself, so making a radical and acceptable change by the total abolition of horse labour. Not only was I delighted with the benefits that might be expected to arrive to farmers, but I quickly saw potentialities in the invention that had possibly been overlooked by the proprietor. I noticed the latter, a fat, pousy little man, strutting about his "stand" with a look of pride on his features, which I had no difficulty in referring to the coming revolution in ploughing and sowing. I at once entered into conversation with him, and it was not long before he was in the shafts of the machine, and trotting so gaily down the boarded floor, that I could easily guess that visitors to the show had not previously paid him much attention. When he returned to his "stand" with his paraphernalia in tow, I was pleased to see that he was a little overcome by his exertion. I said farewell, after passing my encomiums on his ingenuity, and then spent some time in accosting farmers with whom I was acquainted—then a goodly number—and exacting a promise from one and all not to leave the show without trotting out the patentee of the new implement.

I paid several visits to the "stand" during the after-



THE CHAMBERLAIN FOUNTAIN, BIRMINGHAM.

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noon, and was pleased to see the inventor generally either starting on his journey or mopping his face on his return. I could see his features, fairly good-humoured-looking in the morning, were getting clouded over, and that he would not be able to stand it much longer. At this critical moment I saw an old friend approaching, one of those who had given me his promise to visit the inventor before leaving. He was a large farmer on the Apley estate, whom I had first known when residing in Shropshire. He was bluff and outspoken, and as he was much too stout to look with favour on the substitution of farmers for horses, he might be trusted to enunciate his opinion of the invention with some vigour. I quickly withdrew into an alcove to watch the sport. He came up, and after a few remarks, which I could see savoured of ridicule, made the usual request for a trial. As the inventor was harnessing himself for about the hundredth time before trotting down the course, my friend burst out laughing. Removing himself from the machine with what little energy he could muster, the proprietor hastened to vent all the rage he had been storing up for some hours on my unhappy friend. "Call yourself a farmer! You are a —, —, —" and I almost thought he was going to proceed to violence, but he was probably too fatigued. My friend got away as soon as he could, but not before the usual Birmingham crowd had collected, which jeered at him in the outspoken Birmingham vocabulary. I came smiling out of my alcove, when my friend gave me a look in which was more anger than sorrow. "I am very much obliged to you," he said, "for letting me in for one of your jokes." But he was soon laughing heartily again.

In those days a mob could be raised in Birmingham

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more rapidly and of greater size than in any other town in England. Perhaps the most effectual way was the exhibition of a small Eton or Rugby boy in a tall hat, which, as tall hats were seldom seen in Birmingham on men, and never on boys, quickly brought together a rude and demonstrative crowd. Next in efficiency would be a gaitered dean, or other church official, if possible with the peculiar curly brimmed hat bound up with cords. In these days, no doubt, a bishop may pass without arousing any feeling but the respect which is his due. Yet there may still be ways of getting a crowd together as quickly as may be desirable.

Without presuming to object to the cry of Tariff Reform, I have seen recently that the keeping out of foreign manufactures might easily develop into a premium on incapacity or ignorance, and especially do I think that farmers would have a right to complain of a prohibitive clause against American machinery. Almost all the really useful inventions of agricultural machinery originated in America, where native ingenuity was stimulated by the high wages demanded by the labourers. At the time of my return from America nearly all the mowing and reaping machines used in England were importations; the few cases of attempted improvement by English firms were costly failures. I suppose if all foreign machinery was kept out, the result would be that men with the crude ideas of the stout little Birmingham patentee would have quite a good time, and perhaps, in the absence of any more practical genius, English farmers would accept the inevitable, and horse labour would be abolished, even without the aid of the motor-car. I remember when I first commenced farming in England, trying to get a farm wagon built on Yankee lines, as I considered the English



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farm wagon a great deal too heavy and solid. When farming in South Shropshire I once attended a sale near Shrewsbury, where I purchased a cart horse and gears, and, as a wagon went very cheap, I bought it, as they say, "to take the horse home." Arriving at Wenlock Edge on my return, I found the horse, though a big, strong animal, unable to drag the heavy wagon up the hill, and I had to hire another horse to assist him. I never got my Yankee wagon built, however, and soon forgot all about it, and gave up crying for the moon. I am sure if an English maker had undertaken the job he would have spoilt it by preferring his time-honoured customs to any suggestions of mine.

It is hard for any one who has known Birmingham as long as I have to credit the stories that have recently been dinned into our ears as to the decay of the British manufacturer. I have been witness to the gradual rise of numbers of young men who from quite humble positions have gradually developed into managers, and later into owners of "works." These seemed fairly content till the idea of keeping out foreign competition presented to their minds—oblivious of the dog that dropped the bone to grasp at the shadow—an even rosier prospect. The curious thing is that I don't seem to remember any failures—though, naturally, some have succeeded better than others—except when there was absolute unfitness in the aspirant. About thirty years ago I remember a mayor of Birmingham counting on his fingers the few men in the town who were possessed of a hundred thousand pounds. If I am not mistaken he got no further than nine. I think if a true estimate of the wealth of the chief Birmingham manufacturers could be arrived at to-day it would scarcely bear out the view of those

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who think our trade is decaying or has actually disappeared.

There are still, wonderful to relate, to be found in Birmingham a few survivors of the old race of shopkeepers, who were a very different class from their successors. One of the two brothers Evans, the well-known tobacconists, is still to the fore, and, I am glad to say, hale and hearty. Messrs. Evans' place of business was for many years, long before the Arcades were thought of, in New Street, opposite the old Hen and Chickens—then the best hotel in Birmingham, and frequented on market days by the big corn-dealers and farmers. A great deal of business was done, as was the custom in many market towns in those days, in the street, and on wet days Messrs. Evans' shop would become "the Exchange" for the nonce, to the profit, no doubt, of the well-known and highly respected proprietors.

Birmingham used to be, and perhaps still is, noted for the vast number of industries that had taken up their abode there. Of these, fifty years ago, the manufacture of Jews' harps was supposed by outsiders to be one of the chief. Later there were reports that it had suffered considerably; but I have reasons for hoping that the industry is still extant. Travelling the other day with a lot of boys returning to school, one of them brought out a Jews' harp—it must have been more than sixty years since I had heard one—and began to perform. Finding that all the boys were possessed of these instruments—most of them indeed had quite a number, and they appeared to be able to discover some difference in the tone—I asked them to give me a concert, which they obligingly did. Jews' harps must, I think, still be in fashion, as not one of these boys appeared to be indebted to Jewish

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parentage for his choice of an instrument which the old gentleman in one of Thackeray's *Roundabout Papers* termed "the little harp of his people."

Though there has of late years been an increase in the amount of local literary talent, Birmingham still seems an unlikely place for the production of song-writers. It may be news to some people that the author of the well-known hunting song, "We'll all go a-hunting to-day!" so admirably illustrated by Caldecott, hailed from Birmingham. He was a Mr. Williams, a good sportsman and local secretary (I believe) to the Worcestershire Hunt. I knew him very well, but it was long before I had the slightest idea of his authorship, which he was far too modest to boast of; and he was one of the last people I should have credited with the rare talent of song-writing.

Being for many years a member of the Birmingham Conservative Club, I naturally knew some of the past generation of Birmingham men, and the majority were, I think, good fellows in their way, and a complete contrast to the present race, who hunt, shoot, motor, travel, and amuse themselves after the manner of well-to-do people elsewhere. The days are gone when a client, calling on his solicitor, is shocked on being informed by the clerk that Mr. Smith has gone a-hunting, and there are, no doubt, men hunting from Birmingham who "go" about as well as people from what some would consider more likely localities. Still the "pink" does not make the sportsman; and some of the old-fashioned Birmingham manufacturers who stuck closely to business, and never dreamt of hunting or shooting, may have been better sportsmen at heart than some of their successors who, after posing as local Nimrods in the hunting-field, put off the sportsman, together with the scarlet coat—in

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which case the latter is only a very misleading kind of veneer.

I once met a Birmingham man, a type of the old-fashioned manufacturer, whom I had known for some time, on the ground of the Warwickshire Cricket Club, and noticed a cloud on his usually cheery face. It was just as "the Skipper" was returning to the pavilion after making an innings that would be reported on the morrow as "the turning-point of the game." No one would have guessed from my friend's appearance that he was the exact antithesis of "the Skipper," and had never—not counting cards, of which he had some elementary knowledge—played a game in his life. He was regretting, I felt sure, that he had never had a chance of exhibiting this special sort of prowess, or the happiness of being thrilled by such cheers. And yet he was strong, stronger perhaps than "the Skipper," with as quick an eye too, and certainly not lacking either in pluck or determination.

I don't know whether he was aware that I had noticed his gloomy face, but shortly afterwards he took me on one side, and told me his story. "The man who never played a game"—there are very few of them nowadays—was born in Birmingham, the son of a hard-working mechanic. The father earned good wages in a small factory where was produced a commodity, long since superseded, but then in general use among sportsmen. Aided by temperance and economy he was enabled after many years to set up in quite a small way. When the son—my friend—was twelve years old he had to work hard in his father's shop from morning to night; the only difference between him and the hired man being that he had no holidays and no pay.

When running an errand—and he literally had to run,

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not to dawdle, as did other errand boys who rejoiced in a weekly wage, and a master less than kin—or standing at the cottage door in the dinner interval, “briefer far than youth’s delight,” he would notice one morning that hopscotch had yielded to whiptop; or by the relinquishment by vagrant boys of the sport of kicking one another’s caps about, and their taking instead to setting up the famous three sticks which Englishmen are reported to set up in all corners of the earth immediately on their arrival, he would be conscious of the advent of summer.

Gradually the little business throve, and all this time the son’s nose was kept, by no means metaphorically, to the grindstone. It was a great day for him when, in his twenty-fifth year, he was taken into partnership, and soon after he hit on or acquired an invention that at once superseded the time-honoured *spécialité* of the firm, and made a revolution in the trade. The father was getting old, and averse to sweeping reforms, but, by the new partner’s energy, changes were introduced, till bit by bit a big factory rose on the site once partially occupied by the old cottage, to become one of the chief sources of employment to the artisans of the town. Long before this happened he was too deeply immersed in the business, besides being too old, and no doubt also too proud to serve a second apprenticeship—this time at learning to play games.

In the course of business “the man who never played a game” had been all over the world, and in addition to making acquaintance with the cities of many lands, and the minds, or rather, perhaps, the requirements (as far as they were in touch with his business) of their inhabitants, had acquired a rough polish in place of the bluntness for which formerly he was conspicuous. His shrewd

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common sense, added to a kindly heart—to say nothing of his wealth—had caused him to be sought after and appreciated in his native town. Nothing seemed wanting to complete his happiness, and he was the last man one would have expected to complain of a crumpled rose leaf. Yet that he was aware of one it was impossible to doubt, as he complained to me that he had never played a game.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### LONDON FIFTY YEARS AGO.

LONDON has of late years got to be a very different place from what I remember it fifty years ago. I seldom visited it in my Oxford days, though the trip presented no great difficulty, and at least one undergraduate at "the House" used to go up to town regularly every week during the term.

London was then a dirty hole, and whatever London ratepayers may think of the extravagance of the County Council, that executive body has, no doubt, made the Metropolis a far more agreeable place for country cousins than in the old days. This at least was the case before the advent of motor-buses. London now stinks of petrol, while one's ears are deafened by the perpetual rattling and shrieking. But, after all, the annoyance and danger a country visitor has now to undergo in London is no more than he has to suffer at home.

In old days though there was a great scarcity of decent restaurants, a few were better than anything to be met with at present, when there is such a dead level of German waiting and Swiss cookery, that it is hard to say that any restaurant—of course with an exception or two—is better (or worse) than a few hundred others. In the fifties every clubless man used to dine at the Wellington,

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formerly Crockfords', in St. James's Street, and there were so few people that there seemed always room for everybody. Nowadays there are millions of people whose finances seem equal to a feast at the Carlton or the Savoy. People who did not patronise the Wellington or the St. James's used to dine at what we should now call "hole-and-corner" places. Of these they became habitués, and the waiter in the course of years got to know the peculiarities of his dozen or so of guests so well, that it was quite unnecessary for them to give any orders. The dinners at these places were good, and if there was but little change, you knew what you were eating, which is not always the case now. The German waiter—with the best intentions—is frequently unable to understand your wants, as recently when, after a great deal of trouble, I could get no nearer to seakale than "Worcestershire Sauce." It is quite a common thing now for ingenious writers to tell us how we are to be invaded in three or four years' time. It seems to me that if the Kaiser wants to take London—which I doubt—he has but to send over a few thousand soldiers, and arrange for their gradual absorption as waiters in the Metropolis. At a pre-arranged signal they would drop their napkins, and, leaving the guests to look after themselves, would march—what should they march on?—but that would be a matter for their employer to decide. There would not be a sufficient number of troops to hold them in check; but we may hope that a loud cry of "waiter" from the unfortunate guests might lead our invaders to throw down their arms and take up their napkins once more.

A great friend of mine at Eton and Oxford, but who has been dead for many years, was D. E. Holroyd,



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(brother to the late Earl of Sheffield), who used to dine regularly at the John of Gaunt, in Rupert Street. He never ordered any dinner, but on his arrival the waiter would bring in a fried sole, which would be washed down with a glass of sherry. The sole was followed by mutton cutlets, which were succeeded by apple fritters. I called on him one evening to say good-bye when I was leaving for America. He was then half-way through his sole. In about five years I was in London again, and thought I would look up my old friend. I called at the John of Gaunt about eight o'clock in the evening to hear something of him, and the first man I saw in the coffee-room was Holroyd; he had just arrived at his apple fritter, and I told him I thought he had been long enough over his dinner.

Simpson's still survives, but has, as every one knows, recently undergone a transformation, and the "old boxes, larded with the steam of forty thousand dinners"—a good number of which were mine—are no more. I have heard a *laudator temporis acti* complain that the change is not an improvement; but I am unable to agree with him. Long may Simpson's survive to protest against the Swiss-Italian dinner with its tasteless succession of flabby morsels, each exceedingly like the other. I am probably one of the oldest frequenters of Simpson's still alive, having been taken there when a boy, in the forties, by a cousin of my father's, one Alfred Coxon, a barrister from Pump Court, and a curious character. He was then almost a stranger to me, and he succeeded, notwithstanding the excellent dinner, in making me very uncomfortable. I was at that time ignorant that he had a mania for imitating or caricaturing the peculiarities of leading counsel and judges, and would

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give his entertainment quite regardless of time or place. On this occasion he commenced one of his anecdotes in the middle of dinner, and at the sound of the shrill falsetto in which these were always narrated, the clatter of knives and forks suddenly stopped—he had already laid down his own—and I became aware that every eye that commanded a view of our box was fixed on my entertainer—and theirs. About twenty-five years later he came to stay with me in Shropshire; his liver was out of order, and he had been recommended walking exercise. He insisted on my joining him in his peregrinations, though, as I tried to make him understand, I was already provided with a sufficiency of exercise on my farm. Once we found ourselves at Much Wenlock, about ten miles from home, on market day, when he stopped in the middle of the street to give one of his performances, which included a good deal of action. I had no idea there were so many people in Much Wenlock, and all of them roaring with laughter at the shrill sounds, as of a Punch and Judy show, emitted by the little red-faced man, in a swallow-tailed coat, and with a paunch such as Punch is pictorially credited with. Many of the audience I knew, and for a long time afterwards I had to answer questions, mostly intended to be jocose, as to what sort of funny person I had got hold of.

Evans' in Covent Garden was *the* place for supper, though, perhaps, even for the taste of those days the entertainment was not sufficiently varied, the glees, which were admirably rendered, recurring a little too often. For this and other reasons—amongst them the rigid exclusion of the fair sex—a similar entertainment would to-day have no chance of success. I can fancy the look

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of disgust with which a frequenter of the modern music halls would listen to that once famous glee,

*“Integer vitae scelerisque purus,”*

of which, no doubt, he would find the sentiment and the language equally unintelligible. Paddy Green and his snuff-box have been often enough described. Sidney, a heavy comic singer, in more senses than one, wrote his own songs, and improvised rhyming descriptions of any one present who, to his somewhat sleepy eyes, seemed worthy of the honour. These rhymes were of the sort of which Thackeray gives a specimen in the *Newcomes*, on the Colonel's visit to the Cave of Harmony. His description, however, of the latter place can hardly have been intended for Evans', where Captain Costigan would certainly not have been allowed to sing the ditty which the honest Colonel found so offensive. Moreover, Thackeray mentions Welsh rarebits, whereas kidneys and baked potatoes were the *spécialité* at Evans'. "The Cider Cellars" may have answered to the description, or "The Coal Hole" where "Chief Baron Nicholson" prostituted talents that might have brought him more honour and, I should imagine, more money in a different line.

The most popular music halls in those days were the Canterbury and the Oxford. These, as every one knows, still exist, but have long lost their pre-eminence. There are more music halls now, but the talents of the performers may not have increased in equal ratio. I know very little of modern popular songs; some of the old ones were sufficiently absurd; a few created a furore. "Villikins and his Dinah" arrived at the honour of inspiring one of Punch's cartoons, of which Disraeli

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was the hero. "The Cure" was the most popular comic song I ever heard. The point was to combine singing and dancing, and, no doubt, the two performers were kept in admirable condition during its run. For a short time all the world, even the paralytic part of it, was jumping, or trying to jump *à la* "Cure." I have quite recently seen an obituary notice of "The Great Mackney," whose name recalls "In the Strand," "Sally, come up," and other once famous songs; but I don't think any of them equalled "The Cure" in popularity.

Being at a popular watering-place about this time, with two friends, of whom one was about seventy years old, we were walking along the parade in front of the houses when it was suggested that we should give an exhibition—minus words—of "The Cure." At a given signal we would all jump round in a circle, alighting with our faces in the direction from which we took off. If I remember rightly it was an operation at which amateurs soon got giddy; for an old man of seventy the circumgyrations were simply wonderful.

Perhaps the difference between ancient and modern music halls is more in the singers than in the songs. I think some of the singers in the old days were destitute of humour and so were able to preserve their own gravity. Sam Cowell, a famous singer at the Canterbury, never smiled, and that went a good way towards making you laugh. It is the evident fact that modern singers think themselves so excruciatingly funny that makes one unable, or perhaps unwilling, to agree with them.

The most notorious place of amusement in London was the Argyll Rooms, situated in Windmill Street. This was not a very moral, or rather, perhaps, it was a very immoral establishment. It was kept up in great

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style by the proprietor Bignel, who officiated in uniform every evening as Master of the Ceremonies. Bignel was equally well known to the votaries of the turf as to those of pleasure, being a bookmaker with a reputation for about the average amount of honesty. The band of excellent performers at a time when good music was rarely to be heard except at a concert or the opera, was in itself a considerable attraction to Windmill Street. Though dancing went on till the small hours the management was as good as is possible at such places. In the present day the L.C.C. would, of course, refuse to sanction the existence of any place of the kind, yet the substitutes are in many cases questionable aids to virtue, while the fact that the modern gilded youth is averse to saltatory exercise is not of itself a proof of any improvement of his morals.

Looking back on what was euphemistically called the hotel accommodation of the Metropolis, it appears to have been *nil*. It is hard to say where people coming to town for a day or two found any place to put up in. Certainly there were fewer people. The Charing Cross Hotel was thought a wonder when it was first erected. There was the Golden Cross, "then a mouldy sort of establishment in a close neighbourhood," where David Copperfield had his memorable meeting with Steerforth; Morley's; an hotel or two in Jermyn Street, for ambassadors and the like; but where common people went is a puzzle. There were, however, a few dozen of tiny hotels scattered about London, each capable of accommodating from half a dozen to a dozen guests. At one of these, Fladong's, in Holborn, which was monopolised by country parsons, I dined several times during my Oxford days; my host's son being with me at "the House." One day

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after dinner the old gentleman expressed a wish to see the Argyll Rooms, when I suggested that before doing so he should at least make some change in his habiliments. With this he agreed, and leaving his voluminous white tie, baggy frockcoat, and enormous cotton "gamp," to be assumed by his son, he went forth gaily in the latter's cutaway coat and coloured neckgear.

During the days of the late Mr. Spurgeon's popularity it was the custom for any one staying in London to fill up an hour or two by paying a visit to his Tabernacle. I went once with a country parson to see what was rightly accounted one of the sights of London. Paying our shillings, we were allotted seats not far from the platform, on which the great preacher was wont to walk to and fro while discoursing. Before the commencement of proceedings an attendant lit a dozen or so of candles placed at intervals on the front of the platform. I remember little of the sermon, but towards the conclusion Mr. Spurgeon made an allusion to the uncertainty of human life. Starting at one end of the platform he ran swiftly along, blowing out the candles one by one as he passed them. Mr. Spurgeon was very fat, and by the time he had blown out the last candle he had little breath left wherewith to explain his somewhat unclerical gambols. But the fact that he made no mistake, and that none of the candles survived his attack, convinced me that the scene had been carefully rehearsed before being acted.

Few of the changes that have taken place in London during the last fifty or sixty years are more remarkable than the change in the status of the Jews. Thackeray used to amuse himself, and some, at least, of his readers, at the expense of that ancient people in a way that in the



THE NELSON STATUE, THE BULL RING, BIRMINGHAM.

[See page 255.]





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present day would be considered outrageous. At the head of one of his *Roundabout Papers*, "Auteur de mon chapeau," published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1863, is the picture of an Israelite wearing several hats, whom he described as "an itinerant vendor and purchaser of wardrobes. What you call an— Enough! you know his name." Some time about the middle of the last century I had rooms for a short time on the ground floor of a house in Jermyn Street. Quite a procession of—not to mince it—old-clothesmen used to pass along the street, uttering at intervals their melancholy and monotonous cry of "Clo'," and some of these in their anxiety to do business would knock at the window when I was breakfasting. One of the most importunate I once told to go to the devil, when he replied good-humouredly, and touching one of his hats, "After you, sir." I doubt if any of his more showy descendants would show equal suavity. The number of hats worn by some of these peripatetic tradesmen even at that early hour was quite startling, but what it must have been at the close of a successful day's business I can only imagine. I have often been in Jermyn Street of late years, but without meeting any old-clothesmen, and I must suppose that the profession adhered to under such difficulties for some thousands of years has been suddenly relinquished for something that brings in the "monish" a little quicker. Mr. Kipling has given us some information about the "River of Gold." Very probably the sons of the itinerant dealers who used to rap so hungrily at my window are posing among the autocrats of literature and finance. Perhaps, after all, the old-clothesmen whom everybody used to laugh at were as honest as the new generation of critics and financiers.

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It is impossible for any one who has knocked about the world to be much in London without coming across one or two "strays" whom he knew in different circumstances, and who have come to the Metropolis either to hide themselves from their old friends, or from a wish to see something of them, themselves perhaps unseen. These strays frequent the neighbourhood of the restaurants they used to patronise in happier days, and which their more fortunate, but perhaps not more deserving, friends still frequent. As you pass on your way to lunch, looking, I trust, jovial and well-fed, they peer at you from a narrow cleft between two palatial buildings that is utilised as a hiding-place, or, if it is your special stray, he glides ghost-like to your side, sometimes raises his shabby hat, but seldom says anything. He has told you everything he has to tell long ago. A strange thing about strays is that they have a strong resemblance one to another, so that frequently when in search of a particular member of the guild you cross the road, only to find that you have been deceived by a family likeness. Nor were you alone mistaken. The downcast eyes are raised, there is a glad look in them for a moment, which quickly passes when it is recognised that you are not the man they were seeking. You can but hope that the owner of the shabby bowler hat and the worn covert coat you seemed to know so well belongs to some one else.

There is little difficulty in accounting for the family likeness. As certain misfortunes, or shall I say failings, are chiefly responsible for the state of straydom, so identical characteristics have caused the patrons to bear at least a family resemblance to one another. These characteristics (like the complexion, so common fifty years ago, of port wine drinkers which was frequently the

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appanage of a good fellow, and "no man's enemy but his own") are getting daily more rare. They include a little more good-nature than wisdom, a dislike to see any one go under, a disinclination to believe the worst. The richer people get (and every one, save the writer, seems to be getting rich) the more anxiously do they look after the welfare of number one. Soon the strays will have no patrons, and I wonder if the fact will serve to reanimate them for one more struggle, or sink them yet deeper in the mire. Even the most thoughtless possessor of a stray must be conscious of a responsibility never, perhaps, experienced before. He will go out of his way in doing some commission with which he was charged to pass — Street, or the poor fellow will be feeling anxious—hurt, perhaps. I frequently meet in London a man whom I formerly knew in the days of his prosperity, now long passed. He was a great jockey, rode the winner of one of the "classic" races, received in one year over two thousand guineas in fees—this was in the days before winning jockeys received presents as a matter of course—was lost sight of, and is now in London living (?) on five shillings a week. How he manages I cannot guess. Why he is left destitute without a friend I don't know; did I wish to know there are still a few who would be able and willing to enlighten me. I manage sometimes to go and look for him; the search is not a long one, for if he is on his usual beat he is beside me before I have seen him approaching. If he does not appear I wonder if he is dead, and if so, whether I ought to be glad or sorry. If I mention his name to an old turfite he usually remarks, "I thought he was dead long ago"; and dead to all intents and purposes he is.

I was walking down Piccadilly a little while ago with

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a young and successful business man when I mentioned that very probably a client of mine who had seen better days would be jumping out on me—we had arrived near his usual ambush.

“For G—’s sake,” said my friend, turning white with horror, “don’t introduce him to me.”

## CHAPTER XXII.

### CHANGES IN SPORTS.

#### DECAY OF COUNTRY STEEPLECHASE MEETINGS.

SINCE I was a boy there has been plenty of time for a good many things to come and go, and this has been the case with country steeplechase meetings. Of these there were very few in my young days, afterwards there were quite enough, if not too many, and it is now some time since the stringent regulations of the National Hunt Committee dealt the death-blow alike to good, bad, and indifferent. Some, no doubt, were quite unfitted to survive. Steeplechasing, equally with racing proper, has got into a profession, and people who still cling to it from a pure love of sport are every day getting fewer. But of old even small landowners and farmers who were fond of sport might keep a horse or two, hunt one or even two or three days a week, and shoot over their own holdings, without looking forward to bankruptcy as a necessary ending to their career. The man who once took delight in breeding, training, and riding his own horses in his own neighbourhood over a natural, sometimes a little too natural country, must find some other way of amusing himself; or, if he is bent on continuing at the game, he must send his horse to a trainer at fifty shillings—it used to be twenty-five—per week, and then travel a long

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distance, probably to one of the numerous racecourses in the neighbourhood of London, if he wants to see him run ; where he will certainly feel like a fish out of water, and his horse most likely be outclassed. Instead of assisting at a meeting of country gentlemen and farmers, actuated by friendly rivalry, he will join a mob composed of "astute" owners, silk-hatted trainers, jockeys, betting men, some sportsmen, more sporting-men, hosts of miserable punters, welshers, and pigeons—these last to develop shortly into a more predatory fowl—who are watching the same horses jumping similar fences to those they jumped yesterday, and (unless it should chance to be Sunday) will have to jump again to-morrow. Country meetings, from the racing man's point of view, were poor affairs no doubt, but their destruction was a blow to true sport. The "followers" of the racing army have increased in number, but who can say that a tithe of them are worthy of the name of "sportsman"? In many thousands of cases, where it is impossible to become a racegoer, people who never saw a racecourse or a racehorse bet S.P., and would equally enjoy a bet, which will soon be available, on the favourite of two or three motor-buses racing up the Strand.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRICKET.

It is pleasing to note that the years that have practically swept away country steeplechase meetings have dealt more kindly with cricket, whose votaries, amateur or professional, have opportunities never dreamt of by the cricketers of sixty years ago. The days are passed when country folk had to rest contented with looking on at an annual match of the sort described by Dickens in the

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game between All Muggleton and Dingley Dell. Almost every one nowadays has a chance of seeing some good cricket, without going outside his county. The working classes, except in a few places where a love of sport is either unborn or extinct, flock to the county matches generally played alternately on the grounds adjoining the chief towns; and there is no doubt that this system of "movable feasts" has done much to popularise the game.

Almost all country towns nowadays support a cricket club, and it is unlikely, in these days of keen rivalry between counties, that a youth of any promise will be allowed to waste his talent on the village green. The lad who with dauntless breast withstood the erratic bowling of the blacksmith or the baker on the bumpy common, may aspire one day to play for his county, if not for "All England," "and read his history" in the eyes of as many of his countrymen as can find places on the crowded seats of the Oval or Lord's. The position of the professional cricketer may seem to some an unenviable one, and he has, no doubt, occasional worries to surmount, yet there may be harder lots than making one's living by a game one enjoys and is an adept at.

Some people are so clever as to see in the numbers of young men content to act the part of spectators at the matches played on the grounds of Birmingham and Leeds signs of the decadence of the race. But these crowds might surely do worse, and it is impossible for every one to find a place in a game that includes only eleven a side. It is something that, with all the excitement, there should be so little rowdyism, and hardly any betting. Any one attending for the first time a big match at one of the great centres of population would be surprised to find

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how keen is the interest of these lookers-on. They seem able to distinguish every player of note, however distant his county, as soon as he appears on the steps of the pavilion ; and if he has, as is not unlikely, a nickname, they will shout it out not rudely but fondly. They appear to know his favourite hits as well as the opposing captain, and to appreciate the changes in the field made for his discomfiture. The prowess of men on their own side is welcomed with discriminating applause, and failure in the case of an old favourite who has been so unfortunate as to make but a few runs, or even to "bag a brace" is greeted with groans and swear words—these last not at the player but at his "luck." Many of them have attended the match to see some favourite player, as racing men attend a race meeting to back a particular jockey.

My recollections of cricket go back to the days when Kent used to play "All England" during the Canterbury Week. The increase in the population of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and other counties that followed on the development of the cotton and other industries has long since made it impossible for Kent to retain her isolated position at the head of affairs. The first sign of her coming inability was her being granted the assistance of two players from outside the county. Even this help did not long avail her ; but that she has not fallen far is proved by the gallant way in which she recently gained the County Championship.

Among the players I remember in my early days, Alfred Mynn stands out pre-eminent. Whether his bowling was faster than that of any modern player is impossible to say, but he had the strength and weight, without which no fast bowler can last more than a season or part of one. It used to be said that lookers-on could



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not see the ball after it left his hand till it had passed or been hit by the batsman. Perhaps this depended to some extent on the eyesight of the spectator. The long-stop twenty yards or so behind the wicket with top hat, and pads underneath his flannels, would be thought a comical figure in these days. I have often seen Box keeping wicket, and I never remember him standing back; but when Lilley does so it is, no doubt, for a good and sufficient reason. It is, of course, hard to say how A. Mynn, Box, Felix, and a few others would compare with the best players of to-day when wickets are so carefully seen to.

Later there were the tours of the "All England" and "the United" elevens, whose custom it was to play twenty-two "of — and district," when the latter were generally defeated with ridiculous ease; a local player who was so fortunate as to make even the smallest score being looked on as a hero. It is not hard to say what would happen nowadays to an eleven that should venture to play twenty-two of any of the leading counties.

There has been of late years an immense increase in the numbers of professional cricketers, than whom there are no nicer or—using the word in its best sense—more gentlemanly fellows to be found anywhere; and this says a great deal for the class from which they are generally recruited. One's chief regret is that the strenuous work of the present day, with so little rest between county and other matches, wears them out so soon. In old days "pro's." lasted to an age that would now be considered quite patriarchal. As for amateurs, even under the present stress some of them seem immortal.

The real danger to cricket nowadays lies not in the lack of appreciation, but in the game being taken too

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seriously. I can only suppose when I see "the Skipper" of the county team wearing a look of angry or, perhaps, rather of pained disgust, that he is over-estimating the importance to the county—and perhaps more or less to the Empire—of success in the match which is causing his generally good-humoured face to wear such a fiendish scowl. He should remember that even should the game against Blankshire be lost there would still be cakes and ale. What a number of good qualities are needed for the making of even a fairly successful skipper! Not only must he know his own men thoroughly, but he must be able to diagnose swiftly the adversaries he meets for the first time, and while doing his best to guess at their favourite hits or special "breaks," should be careful to gain some knowledge of their failings. For every man, for every player there is the irresistible temptation and the fatal ball, if demon and bowler can only discover and offer it at the right moment. It seems droll that, in addition to being endowed with pluck and common sense, a skipper should be expected to keep his temper under control, since this particular virtue is not considered absolutely necessary to a general or a premier; to these last, indeed, a reputation for being able to lose command of it has frequently been found invaluable. Nor would an M.F.H. who should allow his best hounds to be ridden over without turning fiercely on the aggressors be successful or even popular. But the captain of a county team has not the last privilege of the worm.

Perhaps of all the difficult questions a skipper has to determine the hardest is to know when to resign office. He may still be able to play cricket—more likely he isn't—as well as ever; but he ought to be playing, or rather doing, something else. One cannot—though to this rule

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there is apparently an exception—play cricket for ever, and a day comes when it is too late to take up a new rôle. But even if he could go on for ever there is something absurd in a middle-aged man, grey about the temples—when in a fit of forgetfulness he takes off his cap the sun shines pleasantly on his bald head—sporting like an urchin of twelve or fourteen.

I confess I can't see a man, whose college days are left far behind, still playing games more religiously than an Eton fourth-form boy without wishing he had something else to do. The world is very full, no doubt—though not so full as some folks fancy—and the professions mostly overstocked. But the fuller the world the more work to be done in it by those who take the right way. It is not necessary to be a wine merchant, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or even a parson; of these the supply seems fully equal to any possible demand. But there are ways of employing one's self, and doing some good in one's generation, that are still open to all. Byron, of course, is quite out of date, though there are a few survivors yet who think that he said some good things, and that of these the following is not the worst :

“Many of the ills o'er which man grieves,  
And still more woman, spring from not employing  
Some hours to make the remnant worth enjoying.”

Skippers are, as a rule, such good fellows that one does not like to see them preparing for themselves a future that will not be thoroughly enjoyable. Perhaps, like the Red Indian, they are looking forward to a continuance after death, and under better conditions of the sport they so love.

. . . quæ cura nitentes  
Pascere equos eadem sequitur tellure repostos.

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A heavenly ground, and—to use the words of one of them the other day after a wonderful “century”—an angelic pitch ; and if that is their desire I heartily wish they may get it.

### WET-BOBBING.

While the ancients were not addicted to steeple-chasing (having, very likely, the objections by which some moderns are moved, to seeing their money in the air), and cricket, had it been brought to their knowledge, would, no doubt, have appeared too puerile, the “art,” as it may even then have been considered, of rowing was necessarily held in high esteem ; and we are not without some knowledge of the way in which their aquatic contests were conducted. It would hardly occur, in the present day, even to the most enthusiastic amateur oarsman who had recently succeeded to the family property, that a regatta was a fitting way of commemorating the anniversary of his father’s death ; yet we must feel grateful to Æneas for giving Virgil the opportunity of picturing the methods of the rival crews, whose enthusiasm appears to have equalled that of the young men who annually take part in the Oxford and Cambridge race. It is matter of regret that Virgil omitted to give the weights of the crews, which it would have been interesting to compare with those of the present day. There was, no doubt, some rough-and-ready way of coaching, but it is unlikely that much dependence was placed on style—no amount of “skill and dexterity” would have brought “feathering” within the bounds of possibility—and the stalwart propellers of barges on the Thames are probably still the exponents of as much “form” as was fashionable in those days. Yet there is very little

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new under the sun, and possibly Æneas' winning "ship" was provided with shorter oars than her rivals, in which case the last year's victory of the Belgian crew was foreshadowed. Virgil's crews appear to have been "rowed out" at the finish, and this was to be expected, as we read that one at least of the vessels was too heavy for a racing craft. It is no longer possible for the "skipper" to animate his men by what would now be the dangerous practice of "walking among them," but coxswains may be thankful that they are no longer liable to be chucked out of the boat should the captain disapprove of the course that was being steered. Indeed, as races are rowed at present, such action would seem to be unwise. Modern rowing has been as fortunate as cricket in escaping the betting evil, the nearest approach to which in old days was the "vowing" in the event of success, of "a snow-white heifer" or something equally tasty to whichever deity seemed adverse, thus giving the latter the advantage of "standing on velvet," which was no doubt just what he (or she) liked.

In one respect "wet-bobbing," as compared with its sister sport, has lost ground in the last fifty years. While the number of professional cricketers has enormously increased, the professional rower is almost extinct. The rivalry, once so keen, between the Tyne and the Thames is a thing of the past, and there are no successors to Chambers, Boyd, and a number of other good oarsmen and scullers. This is a distinct loss to rowing, since, in default of amateurs able and willing to undertake the duties of a coach, instruction by professionals (who, if not fairly good, would soon have to take to some other business) would at least do away with some of the worst faults of the suburban beginner. The reason for the

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disappearance of the professional oarsman is not far to seek. Of late years the funds of the numerous regattas, once held annually at the chief river towns, have not allowed of offering prizes for watermen's crews, and the inducements that once made the profession of rowing not unprofitable have therefore ceased to exist. From my recollection of the crews that in old days used to compete for these money prizes, which were sometimes of considerable value, I should say these men were as fitted to survive as their dry-bobbing brother pros. In the middle of the last century professional crews were to be met with at regattas a great distance from their training quarters. One of the best of these crews for a few years hailed from Manchester, which, when one considers the poor opportunities for rowing afforded by the river Irwell, was nothing short of miraculous. About equally remarkable was the appearance a few years ago of a crew—in this case amateurs—from Birmingham, which, I believe, practised on one of the local reservoirs. They rowed—as they say on the Severn—with beehive backs, and no style to brag about, but, as might be expected, with plenty of pluck and energy. The wonderful thing about them was that they rowed at all.

I have a special reason for recalling the presence of "watermen" at the Worcester Regatta of 1852 or 1853. In one of my long vacations I joined a four that entered for the two chief races then annually rowed at Worcester, one for some silver oars, and the other for a silver cup, which I remember even then to have been in a dilapidated state, and which I heard shortly afterwards, on the advent of financial difficulties, was melted down. Our crew was anything but a strong one. I was in the Ch. Ch. eight at the time, but a rower of no special eminence. Two

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others were at "the House," but the stroke was a middle-aged married man, a local schoolmaster, who pegged away without any pretensions to style. An Oxford crew, which included "Short, of New," who afterwards rowed in the Varsity—was also entered for both races. While we were ensconced in a mansion, our opponents put up at the Dog and Duck, a riverside public, which, notwithstanding my many visits to Worcester of late years, I have never seen or heard of since. We were beaten in our first race, owing, as we thought, to our boat, a tub hired from the "yard" at the back of the Grand Stand on the Pitchcroft. The interval between the first and second race was exceedingly short, but long enough for us to interview the members of one of the watermen's fours attending the regatta, and ask for the loan of their boat for our next journey. They acceded to our request in the most sportsmanlike way, with the result that we ran clean away from the crew that had beaten us an hour or so before.

It makes an old rowing man sick to walk by the river Thames (say, between Kingston and Hampton Court) during the boating season, and see scores of great hulking fellows rowing (?), evidently without having been instructed in the first rudiments of the art. Worse still are the scullers on sliding seats who have evidently escaped preliminary instruction in a tub. Many of these last (who will appear at some riverside regatta during the season) have every fault possible to a sculler. In addition, some of them are physically unfit to undergo any form of hard exercise, and their narrow chests, round backs, and meagre limbs would raise a laugh if it was not so pitiful. It should be remembered that as some people are incapacitated by nature for the functions even of a modern

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M.P., so there are young men whom no amount of training could convert into anything but a travesty of an athlete; and the friends of the latter should surely advise them to take their amusement a little less energetically.

For a good deal of the bad rowing to be seen on the Thames I think sliding seats—or their misuse by incompetent oarsmen—are chiefly answerable. *Nec meus hic sermo*. The opinion—stated to me a few years ago—of one of the greatest oarsmen of the last century—O. Meade King—was that rowing had deteriorated since the introduction of the sliding seats, while there had been little improvement in the time in which races were formerly rowed. Some improvement, of course, there has been, but not nearly as much as is generally imagined. In fact, in 1869—as “an old blue” recently stated—with fixed seats and outriggers, Oxford got over the course from Putney to Mortlake in 20 minutes 5 seconds, and in 1868 in 20 minutes 56 seconds. Supposing my old friend to have been, to some slight extent, prejudiced in favour of fixed seats, there is still no doubt that, allowing for the increased number of young men who take up rowing as a pastime, there is more vile rowing and sculling to-day than fifty years ago.

### THE P.R.

The sport of boxing differs from rowing in that its professors appear to have made no advance in skill or in popularity since the days immediately following the siege of Troy; while their methods seem almost identical with those of the ancients. Virgil describes Dares—what a name, given a Cockney bookmaker’s pronunciation, for a pugilist!—as tiptoeing—*constitit in digitos*—round his





"SKIPPER" KING.  
(Eton Eight, 1851—afterwards President O.U.B.C.)

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weightier opponent exactly as might be witnessed to-day. Entellus' gauntlets would no doubt cause a sensation in a modern ring, and his feat of supplementing the victory by killing the bull, which was the prize of the contest, with one blow of his mighty fist, would surely be welcomed as a new sensation at the National Sporting Club if any modern could be found capable of performing it.

I was at school at Highgate when the P.R. was at the height of its glory, and I well remember how we would fight—as if we were veritable embryo champions—for the temporary possession of the copy of *Bell's Life* which some boy always smuggled in when the issue of a big fight had just been determined. With what interest would we read how some one tapped his opponent's claret and was punished by the "raising of a mouse" over the left eye. In those days a noted member of the P.R. had won the Derby, and succeeded in getting into the House of Commons. There is nothing that I know of to prevent a modern boxer from winning the Derby, provided he wishes to do so, and has a good enough horse, but his entry into St. Stephen's is improbable, though there are politicians there who would be a disgrace to the P.R. even in these days of its decay, and plenty of occasions in that august assembly when the prowess of a Bendigo or a Sayers would be of service to the party of his choice.

George Borrow, an enthusiastic admirer of the P.R. in its palmy days, waxes eloquent over some of the old fighters. "There was—what! shall I name thee last? aye, why not? I believe that thou art the last of all that strong family still above the sod; where mayst thou long continue—true piece of English stuff, Tom of Bedford—sharp as winter, kind as spring. Hail to thee, Tom of

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Bedford, or by whatever name it may please thee to be called, spring or winter . . .”

Borrow attributes the coming decay of the P.R. to the Jews, who were accused by Cobbett of introducing bad faith among pugilists. If things were as bad as Borrow imagined there must surely have been a recovery later. Perhaps Borrow was inclined to exaggerate the preference of the children of Israel for “red gold” above glory. There can have been little decadence at the time of Sayers’ fight with Heenan, when, no doubt, the leading members of the P.R. fought out their battles in a manly and straightforward way. Nowadays, when thousands of pounds may be won by a successful boxer, it is strange to think how half a century ago men allowed their features to be pounded flat and into pulp for a few pounds “and the belt.” There was more glory and more broken noses than wealth to be got in those days, and one likes to think it was the glory that was chiefly appreciated. It was the fashion in my Oxford days for undergraduates “seeing life” to interview noted ex-pugilists at the public-houses to which they had retired on quitting the P.R. I remember several times being the guest of Ben Caunt at his place of business. He was a magnificent-looking man viewed from behind; a front view was less pleasing, as his features, which may once have been comely, had been battered and flattened in his many contests. There was a light-weight champion—I forget his name, but think he was some sort of a “chicken”—whom we used also occasionally to patronise, and who had the additional attraction of a rat pit.

Sayers was a popular idol till the day of his death, and who will count him unworthy of the honour? It is safe to say that such enthusiasm will never be evoked by a “bruiser” again. Thackeray, not a very likely man to be

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prejudiced in favour of the P.R., wrote in one of his *Roundabout Papers*: "That one-handed fight of Sayers is one of the most spirit-stirring stories ever told. . . . That little man with one hand powerless on his breast, facing yonder giant for hours, and felling him, too, every now and again." The most civilised nations can least of all afford to despise dogged resolution and pluck, of which they are sure one day to stand in need. There was courage and skill in the old days, and, no doubt, there is still plenty of the former, but, in modern fights, the latter quality is little in evidence, when (as I read in a latter-day authority on boxing) "round-arm hooks at the point of the jaw, only rendered possible by gloves" have been substituted for the methods by which Sayers and many another won their fame.

I once saw at Church Stretton, in the sixties, Joe Goss leading a band of Black Country sportsmen against about three hundred yokels, supporters of the late R. Jasper More, then the Radical Candidate for South Shropshire. A big battle was confidently expected, but it failed to come off, neither party liking to commence operations. After the nomination Mr. Goss was escorting the Tory candidates from the hustings to their hotel, and trying to earn his money by elbowing in the stomach everybody he could reach, when a big, middle-aged farmer, annoyed at not being allowed to approach and shake hands with the candidates, took Joe round the waist, and chucked him away among the crowd as if he were a child. The champion came up to the scratch again as if nothing had happened, and went on as before with his tiptoeing and elbowing; but my estimate of him had suffered considerably. There have since been plenty of less skilful and less honest fighters than Joe Goss, and I think after

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his day very few people but the combatants and the members of a sporting club or two have taken any interest in the encounters. *Sic transit.*

### SWIMMING.

Now that such a vast number of Englishmen consider themselves capable of swimming across the Channel, swimming has to be included among English sports. While Webb's great feat of many years ago is still a record, those who have recently attempted to rival it have, no doubt, been possessed of exceptional skill and courage. I used to fancy myself a fairly good swimmer, but my nearest approach to any exceptional performance was thinking myself capable of crossing the bay at Llandudno from one Orme's Head to the other. From the shore the feat does not look anything out of the way; it has, however, been but seldom accomplished. I was staying at Llandudno one summer, and a big farmer, a neighbour of mine in Salop, was also there. The marker at the billiard-rooms where we used to meet in the evenings was one of the few credited with the feat, and, on the matter cropping up, I said that I thought I could do it myself. My friend immediately called out, "I'll bet you a hundred pounds to a sovereign you don't do it." "Done!" I replied. The next day he came to me in a dreadful state of mind. I don't suppose he had ever made a bet before in his life. "Of course that was all nonsense," he said. "Oh dear, no!" I replied; "a hundred pounds is not to be picked up every day. I am going into training at once, and I'll let you know when I'm ready." He begged, he prayed, he almost wept; he said he should not like to be the cause of my

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death. I assured him I would take every precaution to prevent that catastrophe. When he left for home he commenced writing to me weekly, trying to get the bet off. I used to answer that I was getting on famously and improving daily. Then he wrote to my wife, imploring her to use her influence. I think his fear was that it would leak out that he had been betting, as he belonged to some strict sect of Dissenters. In a few days I discovered that the feat was a harder one than I had imagined, owing to the currents setting into the bay, and I gave up all idea of attempting it, but I amused myself by keeping S—— on tenterhooks. I never cared much about practical jokes, especially when I was the butt, and I am afraid S—— did not enjoy this one. He got awfully teased, when he appeared at markets and elsewhere, with inquiries about the temperature of the ocean, and the state of my health. Autumn arrived, and on the approach of winter he thought, good, easy man, full surely he was safe; but I reminded him that no date had been mentioned, and that I might be in better fettle in another year or two. The thought of the affair hanging over him for the rest of his life was too much for him, and he offered, if I would let him off, to give a dinner, to be attended by mutual friends, at the Crown, Bridgnorth, then one of the best of old country inns. I expressed the hope, when proposing his health at this entertainment, that it would be a lesson to him to avoid gambling in the future.

### BILLIARDS.

A sport that has had a rise instead of a fall during the last fifty years is billiards, which, from being considered a low, disreputable game, to be played, if anywhere, in a

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second-rate public-house between Captain Rook—who had been turned out of the army—and Mr. Pigeon, when that gentleman could be met with, has now eventuated into a sport that supports quite a number of professionals and professors. My father, who was not particularly strict in his ideas, was greatly annoyed at my showing a desire, when I came home from Eton (where we used to make our little breaks of ten and fifteen on a table in Windsor) for the holidays, to play billiards with a neighbour of ours who had a private table, then quite an exceptional luxury. I remember the woodwork of this particular table was reported to have been derived from the wreck of the *Royal George*, which must greatly have increased in size from its long stay under water, if any faith were to be placed in the numerous fragments thereof which were to be met with in country houses and elsewhere in my early days. Nowadays all good hotels in the principal towns, and in some that are anything but “principal,” have billiard-rooms where guests can pass an hour or two after dinner without fear of being “rooked,” while the matches played throughout the season at Thurston’s and other halls between rival professionals are attended by all classes, from peer to farmer, up in town for a day or two. Naturally the favour shown to the game has done much to elevate the status of its exponents—or was it their efficiency that removed the taboo?—and it is now a very different game from the one that was so looked down upon fifty years ago. Of old when a writer of fiction introduced a billiard player—which he only did to prove him a scamp of the first water—the great player (one of the captains aforesaid) would, with an exceptionally good opening, run out triumphantly with a break of fifteen or twenty; yet



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seldom did he find any one capable of competing with him on level terms. Now it is hard to place a limit on what may be done by four or five of the leading players. New rules are being constantly made to prevent them from going on for ever, which would be destructive of the "gate." The "spot stroke" has long since been barred, and the same fate has already overtaken the recently discovered "anchor stroke," of which every one quickly tired. It will be noted that while the professional rower has almost disappeared, and amateurs are still capable of holding their own at cricket, the gap between the professional billiard player and the amateur gets wider every day. The two men chiefly responsible for the improvement in the game were John Roberts, senior, who was for many years unapproachable, and his son. The latter, though he has long since reached an age when professors of any game requiring steadiness of hand, a keen eye, and exceptional nerve have generally retired in favour of more youthful exponents, has lost but little of his skill. I was a great admirer of the elder Roberts, and seldom missed an opportunity of seeing him play. Afterwards, when in London, I preferred seeing his son at the Egyptian Hall or elsewhere to any other entertainment, when I would see seated near me celebrities from the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

Many years ago when the elder Roberts was billiard champion, I happened to be in Birmingham, when a friend asked me if I should like to see a little bit of fun. On my assenting, he took me to Dale End, a street in which there are numerous public-houses, and entering one of these we saw seated in the bar-room an elderly man, dressed as a farmer, who was manipulating the end of a walking stick with a penknife. Going

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upstairs to the billiard-room we found a heated dispute going on between two players as to their skill or the want of it. "Why," said one contemptuously to the other, "I could find an old countryman to beat you with a walking stick." This was more than his opponent could stand, and a match was made for a sovereign, I think. At that moment who should walk in but the countryman with the walking stick, whom we had seen in the bar-room. This was no other than John Roberts, of whose identity only two or three of those present were aware. I forget what breaks were made, but it was quickly seen that the old countryman could score a good deal quicker with his walking stick than his opponent could with his cue.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE.

THE feeling which binds us to places is one that we share with the cats. Why we—or they—feel it, is a mystery, but it is certainly one of the last feelings to leave us, and age instead of weakening intensifies it. The humdrum little village where we first drew breath—such useful breath as it has been too!—the spot where once some commonplace ancestor was born or buried, the fields we played in as children—and perhaps not very happy children either—seem sacred to us while we live, and are engraved on our hearts when we die.

This attachment is independent of any charm which the place may possess, and often asserts itself stubbornly against what we feel to be our better judgment. We have been about the world, and may know that we should be unable to exist for another week in the place that our memory so hallows. Leaving it may indeed have been the one wise or fortunate action of our lives. But we feel the loss the more, the more we have gained by it, and, as other things are torn from us, this, which is but a sentiment and can therefore no more be taken from us than a ghost or a shadow, becomes dearer and more cherished than ever.

It was so many years since I had seen the place that the feeling which impelled me to take the journey must

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have been strong indeed. I had always—almost always—wished to keep away. A feeling of soreness, almost of shame, made all thoughts of the old place unwelcome. To have struck deep roots only to pull them up and transplant them was a relinquishment none the more pleasant that it was forced upon me. My sole reason, I told myself, for returning was my wish to see Nurse Saxelberry. It was only the other day I heard of her being still alive; I had fancied her dead many years ago.

Nurse Saxelberry was one of the old-fashioned faithful servants who were in my boyhood the rule rather than the exception. I do not think we children liked her much; she was too masterful. We were a large family, and she stayed on year after year till there was no longer any need of her services. It gives some insight into her character that I do not think any of us knew her Christian name. The other servants who were in turn attached to the nursery were Susan or Anne, as the case might be. Some even had nicknames; but he would have been a bold youngster who had endowed Nurse Saxelberry with a nickname. Her Christian name I afterwards found was Kate. She did not look it, and yet no name could have suited her better. *Tu quoque litoribus nostris . . . Caiæta.*"

To us youngsters she was naturally middle-aged if not actually an old woman; yet I am constrained to believe that there was a period in her life when she was not absolutely without some measure of personal attractions. We were travelling abroad—in the days before railways—in state, with carriages and posthorses, as was the only way except by "diligence." Our courier, an exceedingly handsome young Frenchman, used some-

## The Return of the Native

times to ride in advance—his horse, frequently a sorry one, decorated with bells which made music wherever he went—while at other times he sat with me in the rumble of the carriage, the interior of which was occupied by the nurses and children. I was picking up French quickly, chiefly no doubt because Michel did not know a word of English, and, apparently, did not want to. One day, however, when seated beside me, he asked the English for “*Quel jolis pieds.*” “What pretty feet,” I told him, and he repeated it over and over again—“*Wat putty fit*”—like a parrot. When he was quite perfect he called for the translation of “*Je ne comprends pas,*” and this also he repeated till he had got it, as he thought, quite pat. The next and final sentence was “*Il me l’a dit.*” This he seemed to find specially hard, and it was long before he was satisfied. As he laboured at “*He tould me, he tould me,*” I wondered what on earth he was up to. Arrived at the town at which we were to stop for the night, Michel descended with even more than his usual agility and opened the carriage door. The first person to alight was of course Nurse Saxelberry. I remember as if it were yesterday the protrusion of her elephantine foot, followed by his remark, in a tone between rapture and surprise—it was long before the days of the Chicago belles—“*Wat putty fit!*”

Nurse Saxelberry looked up surprised and indignant, yet not, I feel sure, without some little access of gratified vanity. The spirit, if not the words, of her ejaculation “*You great stupid*” was no doubt sufficiently clear, but Michel proceeded calmly with his lesson. “*I do not oonderstand,*” he said, and then proceeded to lay the blame of his impudence on my shoulders with, “*He tould me.*”

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Michel came to England once or twice afterwards to see his inamorata, and he was such a nice, handsome fellow that it is a wonder Nurse Saxelberry resisted him. The reason no doubt was—a strong reason in those days—that she did not like to leave my mother, for whom she had the strongest affection. What a different life would hers have been had she yielded. In that case I doubt whether she would have seen her ninety-sixth year, or been as happy as her calm single-blessedness has apparently made her.

From the little station it is a walk of three miles to the village. When I was last here the square church tower and an adjacent clump of trees would have been visible all the way. Now hop gardens on either side the road prevent one getting any view of the country. I hope the energy and pluck that went to the establishing of what was locally quite a new industry have been adequately rewarded; but this seems unlikely. One comes across so much beer nowadays that can only be sentimentally indebted to malt and hops, that the possibility of over-production in what were once considered its indispensable constituents can be easily imagined. About half a mile from the village the hop gardens come to an end, and the church tower becomes visible. I pass through crops of barley and oats ready—as we used to say—for the sickle, and I am pleased, if a little surprised, to see that if the sickle is no longer in use the almost equally old-fashioned “cradle” still survives. I came upon half a dozen mowers in line, swinging this useful implement as if it were in as little danger of being superseded as its ubiquitous namesake. The season has been a dry one, and I am surprised to see such good crops everywhere. The

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chalk subsoil makes the farmer welcome a wet season. I remember the local saying:

“When England weeps  
The island reaps.”

True, the district is no longer an island, but it once was, and local ideas are slow to change. The clump of trees now I am near it looks quite important. It was a matter of local belief that there is no other shelter between it and the North Pole, but I don't think the villagers in my time knew much about the latter locality.

Not a soul is to be seen in the village until round a corner comes the middle-aged parson travelling gently along on his tricycle. The sight of him suggests a visit to the church before calling on Nurse Saxelberry. The middle-aged parson, without raising his eyes from the road, which he is apparently searching for obstructive pebbles, directs me to a cottage opposite, where I find a respectable elderly woman who has charge of the keys. If I thought her elderly, I soon found she was yet too youthful to greatly assist my rather dim recollections. I am conscious of a slight access of pride when I see her increased respect at hearing my name and the memorials I wish to inspect. To be respected for what one has thrown away—one's leavings, so to speak—is rather flattering, and would be more so but for the suggested doubt as to the wisdom of the abandonment.

The parson, who, I am told, has not long held the living, has collected—almost as if he had foreseen my visit—the memorials of our family into a neat row, chronologically arranged at the west end of the church. I remember them scattered about higgledy-piggledy.

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Since 1695 my ancestors have been buried in the church-yard or in the vault just outside the wall of the church. *Si qua est ea gloria*—well, at all events, it is nothing to be ashamed of.

Standing with my guide in front of the church porch I look down the village street. It is a mere cluster of rather poor and for the most part thatched cottages, with increasing intervals between them as they get away from the shadow of the tower. There is a small inn, whose not very evident attractions may yet be locally irresistible. I remember only two houses in the village with any pretensions to gentility. One of these is the red brick house exactly opposite the church, and this, once a neat and trim residence, has a dilapidated and uncared-for look. I am not surprised to hear—my guide has quite conquered the taciturnity by which at first she was troubled—that it is untenanted. The “troops of merry children” who played there are dead, with the exception of a son, who is colonising some distant land. I can recall no family traits that suggested a probable or even possible abdication of a position—Triton among the minnows—that some even in these days are found not to despise. Yet, without wishing, like Ulysses,

“To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought,”

it is possible that the survivor felt cramped in his little kingdom, the revenues of which were no doubt sorely reduced by bad times. For my part I never cease wondering how so many still live contented with their monotonous lives. Often, perhaps, it is not so much content as sheer laziness, or not knowing how to get away from them. Plenty of people wish to be the greatest,



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if not the best, and there may be no greater curse than ambition without the power to rise.

The other "family mansion" appertaining to the village is the Court, which, with its extensive farm buildings, stands within the shelter of the clump of trees previously referred to. The Court is on the outskirts of the village. Looking down the drive—not kept as trimly as of old—I catch a glimpse of the well-remembered ornamental gables, an improvement, at any rate, on those of the modern jerry-builder, and see to my disgust that the old house has been whitewashed—a proceeding of which it appears to approve as little as does the boy in the soap-advertisement of the enforced cleansing. Was the operation, I wonder, intended to be symbolical of what so many landowners and farmers have had to undergo? A few yards from the entrance to the Court stands Nurse Saxelberry's cottage. This has also been whitewashed, but the effect is, for some reason, less injurious.

Nurse Saxelberry is, as I expected, standing by the cottage door, which commands a view of the village street and the square, defiant-looking church tower. Beyond is the blue sea with a few rushing "ocean tramps" and their long tails of black smoke. The old nurse can remember the days before steam, when, on the wind changing, a thousand ships that had been windbound for days would, all at once, make sail; a sight that will never be seen again. She was twelve years old when Waterloo was fought, and was in her infancy no doubt terrorised by "Boney." Her experience of foreign lands was of course quite exceptional. Only great, or comparatively great, people travelled, and these not oftener than they could help. How people arrived at or removed, in old days, from these remote villages, often miles from any road

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traversed by even a second-rate coach, is a marvel; but then so few wished or attempted to do either. Now young men and maidens "trip it" merrily all the year round, and perhaps are not any the better contented after all.

When I approach, and my old nurse knows certainly who is her visitor, she makes no attempt to speak. All her energies are bent on controlling herself, and she was always, outwardly at least, stern and collected. When I have led her into her cottage, and she is seated in her great arm-chair, she still keeps silence. I hold her hand; she puts down the other, with which she had been shading her eyes the better to regard me, and strokes mine. So we sit awhile; she is evidently much overcome. Once I hear her murmur "Master John," and then, "your mother." I make a few not very original remarks as to her comfort, her great age, and so forth, but she appears to be paying no attention. I am afraid of tiring her, and when I have sat there almost twenty minutes, she all the time holding my hand between hers, I think I had better be going.

As I rise to depart, Nurse Saxelberry says something that I do not at first catch—her voice is indistinct, or possibly I am a little hard of hearing—but which seems to amuse her immensely. Then I understand that she is asking me if I ever write any "lines" now. "I like lines," she is muttering with evident relish, and something of the air of a connoisseur. "Never miss reading lines," she goes on. "I remember all your lines." I feel sorry for this, as I am sure very few of them—at least of those that she is likely to have met with—are worth remembering. I regretted, I told her, that I had written a great many lines. Her wrinkled old face looks quite shocked. Why should I be sorry? She has evidently, with all her

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love for "lines" never heard of Mrs. Browning's poem, "The Great God Pan":

"And the reed that never can grow again  
Among the reeds in the river."

She soon recovers herself, however. "I remember," she goes on, "those lines about the Sargents."

Mr. Sargent was a plaguy Irish pedagogue who came to our village when I was a schoolboy and proclaimed—in a rich brogue—his readiness and ability to instruct the sons of the small landowners in Greek and Latin, with the purest Hibernian accent. "Madaia" was, I remember, carried away in a "charriot dhrawn by whinged drahgons"—but I despair of reproducing it. To this worthy my father insisted on sending me in the holidays, and I avenged myself by lampooning the pedagogue in the *St. Margaret's News*, a paper written by the juveniles of our family for home consumption. But Nurse Saxelberry is quoting the opening line:

"The Sargents came from Dublin Town."

I cannot help laughing—rather a bitter laugh, though. I remember the "lines" well enough, and how strongly my father, honest man, objected to my ridicule of the neighbours as uncharitable. If he had gone farther, and told me that the writing of "lines," even other than doggerel, is an uncertain factor of happiness, that to live contented in the state of life, etc.—every one had the Catechism by heart in those days, and some few tried to live up to it—was the wisest, as it was certainly the easiest plan, perhaps I should have attended to him, perhaps not. It was certainly my success in this and similar early productions that turned my thoughts towards authorship, out of which

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I have got perhaps about the same mixture as the majority.

Thus I think while Nurse Saxelberry declaims in a voice broken by fits of senile laughter. I wish she would stop. She looks up at me at last, and seeing there is something wrong she does stop. I wish her good-bye. She is wiping her spectacles now, either that she may take a last fond look at me—she well knows it is the last—or for another reason. There are tears in *my* eyes at any rate.

The last I saw of her she was standing at her cottage door shading her eyes with her hand, and looking after me down the little street. She was blessing me, I felt certain, but some blessings must surely come too late, and, like sunshine after a wet harvest, prove rather tantalising than beneficial. It is to be hoped that the exceptional flavour of Nurse Saxelberry's may, even yet, make them of some use to her "boy."

And now there's just time before catching my train to attend to another matter which may after all have had its share in bringing me back to "the Island." I knew very well I should never get away without revisiting the spot where I shot my first hare, though I have always regarded this as an inglorious achievement, and was far from experiencing the feelings by which the Duke of Wellington was presumably moved on his return, many years after the battle, to Waterloo. Of course my visit was primarily to Nurse Saxelberry, but it is well, when you get the opportunity, to kill two birds with one stone. The big field out of which the bailiff and I—how well I remember the former, with his good-natured face, and the heads and legs of the precious "birds" sticking out of the roomy pockets of his sleeved corduroy waistcoat—

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put up that first—and last—covey of partridges is so near the Court that I could hardly have avoided it had I wished to, and it seems, like the middle-aged parson, to have been expecting me. At any rate, it is down in clover again, which has probably been the case nearly a score of times since the visit by which I chiefly remember it. The rest of England changed out of recognition, stage-coaches succeeded by railroads, which are yielding in their turn to motor-cars—I see in to-day's paper a kindly suggestion that motor-cars should be provided with nets wherewith to catch the farmers and labourers instead of killing them outright—to give place in their turn to flying machines, yet there are still people growing clover as they did, no doubt, when things began to dry up after the flood. With all this talk of agricultural depression one almost expected to find this field out of cultivation, as has been the case for many years with others I use to plough, sow, and reap; but the old county has too much spirit left to allow things to come down to that. I wonder how many hundreds of pounds have been spent on this field since I tramped it so many years ago, and what return two or three generations of farmers have got for their outlay?

I skirt round it, and make for the gate at the bottom which lets you out on to the marshes. How well I remember those birds skimming over the gate, and my delight in following them. Then came the disturbance in the rushes and the truculent old farmer—as I thought him. Perhaps he didn't mean to be truculent—and if he did, he ceased being so long ago—but he spoilt my day for me. I think the memory of any one who snubbed us in our boyhood outlasts any other. The people who were always nice to us, and whose kindness was taken for

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granted, may fade away and be forgotten; but those others are always cropping up. They might surely have let us have a good time; if they never had one themselves, the more reason, one would imagine, for wishing us to have ours. After all, there were not too many bright days in the boyhood of most of us, and unless we are very lucky we get to be glad of them all before the finish. I think I may say that the boys I've snubbed have been very few, and wanted snubbing very badly. Perhaps the old farmer, ill-conditioned as he was—ill-conditioned is just the word him—did me more good than harm.

Well, though the old farmer did his best to spoil it for me, from that day onwards sport in one shape or another has never ceased to appeal to me. There are plenty of people to tell you that it is a misfortune for a young fellow of strictly limited income to have a liking for sport, as this may prevent his going into an office, dangling his legs from a high stool, and afterwards going in for money-grubbing. Then when he is fifty or sixty he may be wealthy enough to take up sport after the manner of the retired tradesman, than which nothing can be a more miserable travesty. I feel sure this advice would have been bad fifty years ago, nor do I believe it wholesome advice even for the present day.

I happened a few years ago to be one September in the neighbourhood of a town where two or three men who had succeeded in making money had come suddenly to the conclusion that it was time for them to have a little recreation. So they together rented the shooting on a big manor, provided themselves with guns and dogs, and straightway took up the rôle of sportsmen. One day I was induced to walk with them, and became an amused if terrified spectator of their methods. I soon found there

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was no safe place in the same field with them. A Yorkshireman, a good sportsman, had been inveigled into giving his assistance, and wishing to make himself useful he walked up by the hedge-side a little in advance of the line of guns, in order to turn the birds. Fortunately I had advised him that this would be a service of some danger, so when the birds rose near him he threw himself flat on the ground. Once or twice I thought he was done for, as the shot spattered into the hedge a foot or so above his prostrate body. No one, with the exception of the Yorkshireman, shot anything at all. The party gave up "shooting" early in the afternoon in order the sooner to commence the orgy, an appetite for which was, no doubt, the real incitement of the outing. After dinner, mayors, ex-mayors, and county councillors got up one after another, supporting themselves by the table, to hiccup out the most idiotic nonsense I had ever listened to. It was a sickening exhibition, but I was not sorry to see it once, and learn what crimes could be perpetrated in the sacred name of sport. Surely since these rollicking gentlemen had got so far without being entered to sport it would have been better to let it alone than run riot.

I can only say for myself that I have had many troubles, and a love of sport has generally enabled me to lay them aside if only for a few hours. Generally, not always. For the rich, no doubt, there may be other ways of escaping dull care, who may consider his seat *post equitem*, however uncomfortable, safer than the motor-car; but I am afraid that in the future a good many people of limited incomes will have to do without the alleviations that have done so much for me.

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