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STALKING REMINISCENCES

“Records they’re not—at least, in one sense, no ;
But in another, yes—
Records and annals of the long ago
And much rare happiness ;
They bring me back the Land of Heart’s Desire,
And when I’m seeing pictures in the fire,
Treasures are these no less.

“They are not chronicled in Rowland Ward ;
As heads they mayn’t be much ;
But each of them has some old tale to guard,
Some answering chord to touch ;
In every one of them is locked away
Some golden memory, some sunny day ;
And one has need of such.”

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STALKING
REMINISCENCES

1914—1920

BY ASHLEY LEGGATT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1921

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DEDICATED TO
MY FIDUS ACHATES
SUSAN

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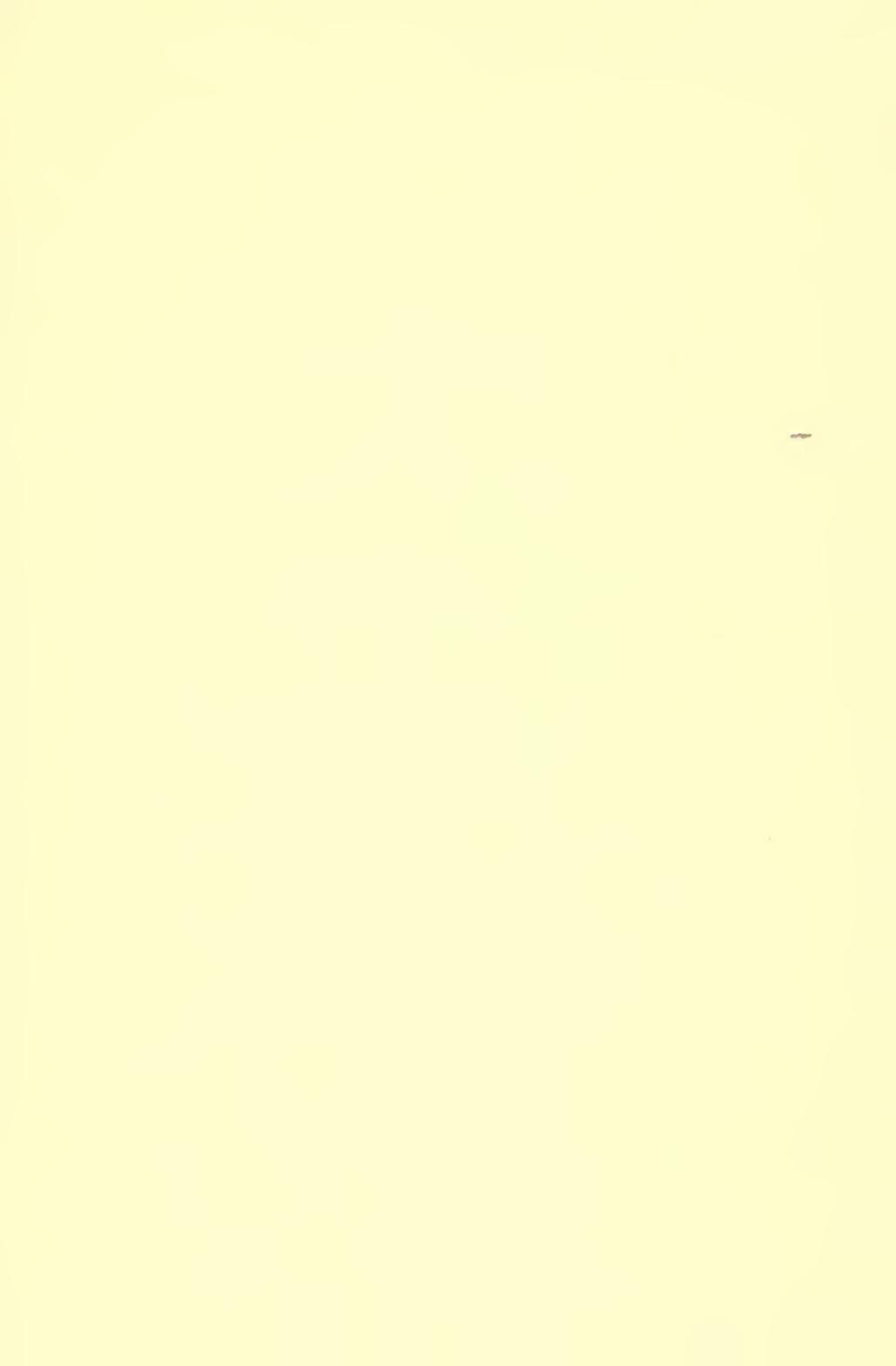
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BALBLAIR, 1914

STALKING REMINISCENCES

CHAPTER I

FARLEY, 1914

“FOUR years ago it was my fate, ‘*not*’ to captivate a widow,” but to have the right to kill five stags in Farley Forest, in addition to the grouse-shooting thereon—curious to relate, the former did not appeal to me one little bit, and I only took it because the grouse-shooting was unattainable without it. Little did I think I should so soon become the devotee I have become—but there, it is always the unexpected that happens, and had it not been for those five stags the world would have missed this forest idyll. It must have been the middle of September when my keeper Roy suggested to me that it was a pity to have five stags and not have a try for them; and as my Lady of Balblair agreed with him, I meekly acquiesced, and it was arranged to drive Farley Wood with four beaters. My old friend Merton Barker and I were posted in the various ambushes with which Farley abounds. I was accompanied by Susan of the many names and the wondrous kilts, and she has been beside

me in all these deeds of derring-do on enchanting Erchless and beloved Farley. If her kilts have been wonderful, her walking has been more so, and I am sure if she could be persuaded to take the rifle her shooting would be more wonderful still, as in practice at the target she placed her shots with unerring precision on the bull's-eye, and made a better score than either Roy or me. Roy is a first-class rifle-shot, and some days I can shoot straight—alas ! only some—some days I can miss with the best of them; but this first year I was in great form. However, this is a digression—the first of many, so like stalking, which some days seems all digressions—but let us return to our stags. Perhaps it would be better to say a few words first about ourselves and our lair. We are none of us young, but we are not very old, and not very plain, and we are quite prepared to tarry again and again, in sunshine or snow, in storm or shine, for the stags we love so well. We are rather inclined to be dressy, and Sally Susan of Soda says I am more cut out for a chef or a valet than a stalker—once more agreed; it is much less painful than arguing with her. We are both nearer sixty than fifty, so we are prouder of these wondrous years from a pedestrian than a stalking point of view—and that's enough about the hero and the heroine.

Dear old Merton Barker, the other rifle on this first auspicious occasion, is certainly one of



BALBLAIR HOUSE.

the cheeriest companions who ever missed a stag—but there, if I begin to sing his praises I shall be like the book; and so I will only say that *he* is like the brook and can go on for ever—wag a wagging, never flagging; here's to him, at the risk of bringing a blush to his pale face.

And our lair—ah! who shall sing the praises of beloved Balblair! Its great charm is its seclusion—only a mile from Beauly, it stands hidden and tucked away amongst beautiful trees about 100 feet above the river and just above the railway which runs between it and the river; the trains are not very frequent, and as they are completely hidden it is not such a nuisance as it sounds—in fact, the only nuisance is the sound.

The sound of a motor is never heard, which in the pre-war days was an enormous boon to one to whom the sound of a motor-horn was like a red rag to a bull.

Very beautiful are the trees in which Balblair nestles, first and foremost being the limes with their heavenly scent; beech, oak, birch, walnut, Spanish chestnut, Scotch fir, all flourish, and absolutely encircle the house, so that it is scarcely visible except for vistas cut by the former tenant, Major Paynter, for the sake of getting some view from the drawing-room window, which peeps are very enchanting, one looking west on to Farley and Erchless and the other north over Ben Wyvis, with the twists and turns of the River Beauly in

between, and Beauly pier and village at one of the bends of the river. Sitting at the drawing-room window and watching one of the wonderful Scotch sunsets, one can forget the war and wish one had led a better life. The house itself is ivy-covered, and the round end as one approaches it gives it the appearance of a tiny castle, and makes the drawing-room something rather out of the common with its round end. Verily and indeed is it a cosy retreat in these days of storm and stress, and hidden away in its fond embrace one can be of the world forgetting, and by the world forgot. And all the more lovable, perhaps, because it is a bit tumbled down and decayed, and yet utterly comfy, and the walls over 2 feet thick, so it is warm when the weather's wintry, and cool when the weather's kind; and the fireplaces are quite a dream, and more than compensate for the absence of bathrooms, electric light, telephone, and other modern horrors.

Mais revenons à nos cerfs—we have digressed too far. At the first drive the Lady Susan and I were posted in the ambush known as Gladstones. Merton Barker was about a quarter of a mile to our left and a bit above us, and in due course we heard his rifle ring out, and our excitement was intense when shortly afterwards some deer cantered past below us, mostly hinds, but one or two small stags in the rear, one of which was dropping behind, and finally stopped in a glade

about 100 yards below me. Evidently, I think, Merton Barker must have hit him, but we could find no trace of a wound, except the bullet with which I gave him the happy despatch, to my unbounded delight. And then another stag appearing, he, too, presented an easy shot and so I got a couple at my first attempt, and our joy was complete. What did it matter that the stags were small, about 12 stone each, and the heads poor? Roy was all for bleeding me, but I declined that little attention. We were a very merry party at lunch, as, indeed, we ought to have been—two stags at the very start. I had visions of half a dozen by the end of the day, but we got no more.

Only two other stalks are worthy of mention in this first year. Three or four days after driving Farley Wood I was out with dear old Davie Ross (who did all the stalking this year, Matheson, the head-keeper, having been called up), when we suddenly stumbled on some deer feeding in some bracken about 150 yards away and a good deal below us. Of course, they at once made off, and as one of them was a fair beast, though with a very poor head (beggars cannot be choosers), I fired from the shoulder standing, and broke one of his hind legs. This, of course, slackened his pace, and Davie, aged sixty-four, the ghillie Sandy Forbes, also no chicken, and I started in hot pursuit. It proved a long chase and a stern chase, and though

I soon distanced my companions, I could get no nearer than 200 to 300 yards. After about a mile or two of this there was nothing for it but to risk another shot, which I did, and to my great delight broke his other hind leg, so I was able to get up to him and put him out of his misery. His weight was 14 stone, and I was mightily pleased at having hit him twice when he was moving at a fair pace—the first time at 150 yards, and the second well over 200. The last stalk of this first year was the most successful from a trophy point of view—in fact, the only good head I got. We had killed a stag in the morning, not a very good beast, and Davie and I had lunched together with great content, and were returning home along the path between the two lochs east, when Davie remarked to me that it was the first year in thirty years that he had never seen deer between the two lochs. That second we rounded a corner, and there below us were a number of beasts. We were flat on our faces in half a second, out came the glasses, and there was the best stag we had seen, surrounded by a number of hinds and one or two small stags; they were about 350 yards off and a good deal below us, and our stag was lying down. They had not seen us, and we crawled about 80 yards to the edge of the little plateau from which we had seen them, and then Davie informed me he could get me no nearer. Full of the confidence of inexperience, I determined to risk the



FARLEY, 1914.

Weight, 14 stone.

To face page 7.

shot and waited for him to rise. He did not keep us waiting long, for in a few minutes he rose and stood broadside on, and I made no mistake, and he dropped dead. Davie was delighted, and said to me: "Bravo! you oughtn't to be here; you ought to be shooting Germans!" We paced the distance, and it was 250 yards, so I was on very good terms with myself, especially as it was my tenth stag and made up my number. He was a beautiful 10-pointer with very symmetrical horns, and his head adorns my drawing-room walls; his weight was 14 stone. And so ended a very good season for a beginner—hardly a miss to wail over.

"Oh, the sighing and the suing
When a stalker goes pursuing
And he misses! Food for fishes
Only fitted—heart of lead—
Stalker wishes he was dead."

Plenty of misses in the years to come; therefore for the moment we will rejoice, and close the chapter with a word or two about my stalker. Dear old Davie Ross was born and bred on Farley, and knows every glade and corrie; though sixty-four years of age, he can still walk and crawl and creep with the best of us, and can go all day on the hill (of the road, as his gude wife says, he is "no very fond," and seldom troubles it except for kirk). What he does not know about deer is hardly worth the trouble of learning, and the best

tribute I can pay to his prowess is the answer the wonderful stalker of Erchless, Thomas Fraser, gave to me when I asked him if he thought Davie was good—I mean as a stalker; his reputation as a gallant is well known. “None better,” was the reply. Here’s to him! And though he is now sixty-eight, long may he be spared to spy me a stag and let me do the stalking.



ON FARLEY, 1915.

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CHAPTER II

FARLEY, 1915

SHURE it was a great year, though I missed my first two stags, hurried shots in the wood which brought forth the remark from Davie: "You're no shooting so well this year." However, though there were plenty of misses, there were some good shots, and I got four very good heads.

We got three or four medium stags with poor heads in and around Farley Wood the end of August—one on the 23rd with my nephew, the renowned A. M. Walters (familiarily known as A. M., who with his brother P. M. were the terrors of the professionals at "Soccer" in the eighties and early nineties, and earned the proud sobriquet of "Those bloody Walters!" in the North), both of us firing and both of us claiming the stag; and another on the 27th, a lucky snap standing shot at a stag we suddenly came on warming himself at a woodman's fire. But the first stalk in the open was on the 4th of September, a wet day, but no mist. Susan was with me as usual, and we had found nothing in the morning, and lunched near the duck loch, Loch Balloch, and were wet

through. After lunch we made for the West Hill, and were half round it when Davie suddenly dropped, and out came the glass, and sure enough, about 200 yards ahead were two horns sticking out above a rock. We made a short detour, and crawled to about 100 yards, when we saw a shootable beast lying down behind a rock sheltering from the rain. Susan was a few yards behind us, and we beckoned her to crawl up beside us, and I suppose the noise of her Burberry through the wet heather reached our friend, for he jumped up and presented a nice easy shot. No mistake was made at him, but immediately on the shot another stag jumped up, which had been invisible, and stood for a second or two; and I ought to have got him too, but I was so taken by surprise and a little slow in ejecting the cartridge (my rifle is a Mannlicher Schonauer) that I missed him; he was just moving as I fired, and was off like a flash. However, we were quite pleased with our trophy, though it was a poor head and only weighed 13 stone 4 pounds; and in due course Sandy and the pony arrived (we were nearly on the top of the West Hill), and we were back at the car with our stag by 5.30, soaked to the skin, but with a grin on the face of the Tiger and the Tigress.

The 23rd of September was the next eventful day when I was out alone with Davie (Susan having gone into Inverness to see her sister Nortie off), and Jimmy Johnston as extra ghillie. We found



FARLEY, 22ND OF SEPTEMBER, 1915.

Weight, 15 stone.

some deer in the ravine between the West Hill and the North Hill, and after a long crawl we got to within 250 yards of them. They were mostly lying down, and we thought it better to wait till they got up, as then very likely they would feed up the ravine towards us, and it was terribly bare in between. However, we waited the best part of an hour in vain, so, as Davie said afterwards, "at long last we got very saucy," and risked another 100 yards, crawling as flat as flounders and very slowly to within 150 yards; and then, to our great relief, they began to get up and feed towards us. In due course the stag we were after, a very good 7-pointer, came into view (he had been lying down out of sight behind a knoll), and presented a nice broadside shot. I fired, and away he galloped with the herd, and I fired a big, big "D——!" after him; but Davie exclaimed, "Good shot!" and when they came into view again, to my great joy, the stag was not with them, and when we got down into the ravine there was our stag lying stone dead with the bullet through his heart. He had run about 50 yards, as they always seem to do when shot in the heart; and not having seen him kick when I fired, I thought I had missed him. He was a fine fat beast, and turned the beam at 15 stone, with long, stout horns, and his head faces me as I sit at my study table, and I hope inspires my prescriptions with magic powers to heal. Sandy and

the pony arrived in half an hour, and we were a very merry quartette all the five miles back to the car, which we reached by 6 o'clock.

The 29th of September was the date of the next rejoicing. Davie and I had seen a very good stag with a large number of hinds two days before on the east beat near Loch Nan Gun, which we in vain tried to get within shot of; but not very seriously, as Davie was of opinion they would make for the wood if we did not disturb them. So two days later we determined to drive the wood. At the second drive Susan and I were stationed in our customary ambush for the eastern beat under the larch-tree; the drive was nearly over, and I was beginning to think it was drawn blank, when about 150 yards to our right a herd of hinds came streaming down the hill—which was, of course, thickly wooded—then a small staggie or two, and finally my lord majestically bringing up the rear. They paused and hesitated at the bottom, not able to make up their minds whether to cross the flat in front of our ambush or to break to the left out into the open; and as I feared they might do the latter, I determined to chance it if the big fellow would stand clear of his retinue and offer anything of a shot, which he eventually did, though not a very easy one, and to my great joy he fell mortally wounded with a bullet above his shoulder; and when I got up to him the *coup de grâce* was necessary with another one in the neck.



FARLEY WOOD, 29TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1915.

Weight, 16 stone 4 pounds.

He was a fine stag, the heaviest I have got on Farley, 16 stone 4 pounds, and a 9-pointer with splendid thick, black, rough horns, though unfortunately not very long and no great spread—still, a very good beast, and the staggiest stag I ever have smelt, which is rather curious, as it was not very late in the season. His head adorns my hall, and gives me many a thrill as I go in and out; it is curious what a feast they are to a stalker, and how absolutely unnoticed they are by the rest of mankind.

The 4th of October was the next red-letter day. Some stags had been seen on the bare bit east which used to be part of Farley Wood (making it one of the largest woods in Scotland) before Lord Lovat had it cut down about ten years ago. It is a very favourite haunt of the stags in Farley Wood, when they are driven out of the wood by the flies, and affords excellent feeding. We soon spied some shootable beasts, one a very good 6-pointer, but it was desperately hard to get near them, as the ground is very bare, and we spent all the morning in vain trying to get within shot. After lunch we returned to the attack, and finally I got a long shot at the big fellow, well over 200 yards, and missed him all right. But they did not see us, and though they disappeared over the ridge, Davie said they would not go far; and sure enough, when we got to the ridge, there they were about a quarter of a mile below, huddled together and

rather suspicious, but inclined to begin feeding, so we gave them half an hour to settle down, and then managed to crawl and slither to about 250 yards from them, when up went their heads, and Davie advised me to chance it. So I fired, and the 6-pointer gave a huge kick, and off they galloped and disappeared immediately over another ridge, and I thought all was lost. But Davie seemed confident, and down we went top speed, and when we got to the ridge, there was our friend lying stone dead with the bullet through his heart, and we were not more than a quarter of a mile from Davie's house. Needless to say, it was the nearest to home I ever got a stag. He was a fine fat beast with long, stout horns, and his head is now the pride of my dining-room; his weight was 16 stone. A long, lucky shot, and the only stag I am ever likely to get so low down.

The 9th of October was our last stalking, and I had two stags to get to make up my number. There were evidently a good number of stags in the wood from the roaring, so the wood was driven, but in vain till the last drive before lunch, when I got a medium beast at the north drive. After lunch we went out and climbed to the top of the rocks and spied some stags lying down on the top of a ridge some way off—"an awfu' long way," Davie described it; but we promised him a long drink if he brought it off, and so, lamenting the distance, we started off. It proved a desperately



FARLEY, 11th OF OCTOBER, 1915.

Weight, 16 stone.

difficult stalk, as the stags were lying on the top of a long, flat, bare, damp bit of moor with scarcely a hillock, and we had to crawl very, very flat for 200 or 300 yards, and mostly through water. We got to about 200 yards from them, and then Davie pronounced it impossible to get any nearer; so we made ourselves as comfortable as we could in a pool of water, and waited for them to get up. We waited in vain for half an hour, and then whistling was suggested, and tried in vain; then clicking the heels of our shoes together as loudly as we could, also in vain; so finally we shouted at them, and at last they rose and stood on the horizon, of course end on. One step and they would be over the ridge and out of sight; it was an anxious moment, but after a few seconds the beast we had selected as the best turned broadside on, and I fired, and Davie said, "Good shot!" but he and the rest of them went off and were out of sight in one second, and I groaned and dashed forward to the ridge, Davie exhorting me not to hurry. And he was right, for 50 yards over the ridge my stag lay stone dead with the bullet in the right place, and he turned out to be a fine 7-pointer, weight 15 stone, whose head adorns the nursery of my fellow-stalker, who saw all the fun and crawled through most of the pools, so she fairly earned her trophy. And so ended my best year of the five on Farley—the fewest misses, and the longest shots, and the best heads.

CHAPTER III

ERCHLESS AND FARLEY, 1916

A YEAR of wild regrets and maddening misses, with only one bright spot to soften the blackness. The head-keeper, Ewen Matheson, had returned, having got his discharge from the army, after being all through the Dardanelles fiasco. Little did he think that a Farley fiasco was in store for him, but such, poor fellow, was his fate. A nicer fellow never lived—a fine braw Highlander, well over 6 feet, he was a magnificent specimen of mankind, and though close on fifty, he looked ten years younger till he was done with me—that aged him more than Gallipoli! It is curious, but somehow from the first I felt that I could not shoot with him—both of us were too keen and too excitable. I require a soothing atmosphere such as Pau and old Davie rather than the stimulating breezes of Biarritz and Ewen. In addition, there was the tragedy yet to be described which could only end in disaster, irrespective of temperament—*ex uno disce omnes*. There were very few deer in Farley Wood this August, as the wood was being ruthlessly cut down and quite

spoilt as a sanctuary for the deer—in fact, we hardly saw, much less got a stag, either in the wood or on Farley till well after the middle of September, and I was in despair—added to which, the one or two shots I did get I missed ingloriously, and Matheson had begun to mutter things about my shooting and the wonderful things he had heard about 1914 and 1915. So I began to think of pastures new and fresh Elysian fields, and naturally my fancy lightly turned to Erchless, on which my distracted gaze had often been riveted; and finding it unlet, I was lucky enough to secure the rights of killing seven stags and stalking under the guidance of Thomas Fraser. The 22nd of September was our first day out; Susan was of course with me, and our two ghillies were Jimmy Johnston and Willie Mackintosh. We could find nothing shootable before lunch, but after lunch Fraser came to me and said he had spied a single shootable beast lying down in a gully just at the entrance of the sanctuary and that a single shot would not disturb the sanctuary, and so we had better try for him. The stalk was very easy, as he was lying down halfway up the side of a deep ravine, and we had only to creep up behind the other side of the ravine till we were opposite him, when we were about 70 yards from him, as the ravine was very narrow. I got a comfortable rest, and determined, with Fraser's concurrence, not to wait for him to get up, as we

were so near, and he was lying broadside on and I had a good view of his body. So I fired, and up he sprang, and plunged headlong down to the bottom of the ravine, where we found him stone dead. His weight was only 13 stone 3 pounds and a very poor head, but oh the joy of the first stag after the agony of several misses on Farley. Willie Mackintosh and the pony were soon up, and we drank success to the new love, though we did not mean to be off with the old. And here I may mention how thoroughly I am in agreement with authorities on the subject, such as Lord Lovat, Cameron of Lochiel, and Augustus Grimble, about not waiting for a stag to get up, but to take him lying if he offers anything of a shot; plenty of time for your shot at a poor target is far more important in my humble opinion than a hurried shot at a good target. In stalking it is the hurry that misses as well as the pace that kills.

And perhaps this is also the place to say a few words about Thomas Fraser. I wish I had stalked all my life and in many forests, so that I might have vastly more experience for the sake of comparison; but I know an artist when I see one, whether he is a Rembrandt, or a Rodin, or a Rubinstein, or a Ranji, and if ever there was an artist in his profession or pursuit, Fraser is one. Once he spies a stag it has a very poor chance if his gentleman makes no mistake; with his infinite patience and slow, stealthy step, he gives you

confidence from the moment he takes you in hand, and he gets you so wonderfully close that one is indeed a poor performer if the quarry escapes. It is quite extraordinary how slowly he takes one uphill—in fact, one's progress is always very slow with him, as he uses his glass so very frequently—not his telescope so very often—that, of course, he keeps for the initial spy and for distances—but a monocular which he uses for every dip and hollow and round every turn, and which causes very little delay, as it needs no adjustment and each look is only a matter of a few seconds, to make sure all is clear. He is a youngish man, not much over forty, and of spare frame, so he can go for ever, and at a rare pace, too, if he wants to and it is necessary; but as a rule it is his slowness and his caution and his infinite patience and his thoroughness which impress you and make you feel that you are in the hands of a master. And if there is a stag on the ground and you don't get a fairly easy shot at him, the conditions must have been wonderfully adverse and the circumstances worthy of much thought and mental digestion.

After several heart-breaking days of misses on Farley, on one of which Matheson had got me up to about 150 yards from a solitary stag which was lying in a very difficult spot on one of the bare bits of Farley between the Lily Loch and the West Hill, and which got up after keeping us waiting

some time, and which I promptly missed, whereupon Matheson flung his cap on the ground and exclaimed to the ghillie, Sandy Forbes, "I don't know whether it is your luck or mine, Sandy, but I'm d——d if I can understand it!" and my feelings can be better imagined than described. Well, after several of these crises in one's career I was again on Erchless with Fraser (it was the 28th of September), and after a blank morning we spied two stags on the flats between Erchless Wood and Loch Fada. Both were good beasts—one a good 10-pointer and the other only had one horn; and though the former was in the more difficult position, Fraser naturally decided to go for him, and after a long and difficult stalk and some masterly manœuvring he got me to within 100 yards from the stag, and I missed a ridiculously easy shot broadside on. The beast was off like lightning, and luckily gave me no further chance, as Fraser whispered to me not to move and to remember our one-horned friend, who was feeding about a quarter of a mile off, and did not seem much disturbed by the shot. In due course we crept and crawled to about 200 yards from our friend, when he got us, and Fraser, seeing that it was hopeless, allowed me to fire at him as he was moving off, and to his surprise and my joy, I got him in the back and so disabled him that we were able to get up to him and finish him off. He was a fine fat stag weighing 16 stone, and his

one horn had 5 points; there was only a lump where the other should have been, so he had evidently been injured or wounded in previous years. As we were on our way home, Fraser asked me if I would let him test my rifle at the target next morning, as he could not understand my shooting. Of course I gladly acquiesced, as neither could I nor Matheson! When I met him next morning, in reply to my anxious query, "Oh yes, sir," said he, "no wonder you kept missing, your rifle is dropping over a foot at 100 yards!" And I in my foolish confidence in my success of the two previous years had never thought to test it at the target. I had no target then at Balblair and ammunition was a bit scarce owing to the war; but such idiocy is scarcely credible in the face of such slight obstacles, and it makes me shudder now to think of the agony my folly caused me. However, if it is a warning to any fellow-stalker, I did not suffer in vain.

September 30th.—We were a party of five, Own Doll and her husband, Herbert Parbury (familiarily known as Pilly), and dear old Merton Barker having arrived by the mail, so we didn't get up to Farley till nearly 1 o'clock, and we decided to drive Farley Wood. We lunched behind Matheson's house, and whilst partaking of my frugal bap it struck me that three rifles were one too many for the wood, so I called Matheson and asked him if he had seen any deer on the West Hill in the

morning. He said "Yes," and I suggested his taking one of us if there was time. "If we start at once," he replied; so I let the other two toss for it, and Herbert won, and off he went with Matheson and Sandy Forbes and the pony for one of the most remarkable afternoons in the annals of stalking—of which more anon. Farley Wood was not driven in vain, for at the second drive (the east beat) Susan and I were in the ambush under the larch when a very fine switch came trotting out about 100 yards to my left, and as he would not stand, I fired just before he was going to disappear behind a ridge, and to my indescribable delight rolled him over with a bullet behind the shoulder, and he was dead when we got up to him. Never shall I forget the delirium of rolling him over! After long agony a kill at last, and the spell of ill-luck and bad shooting was over. Curious it was my first day with Davie this season—he had charge of the drives—and we were always lucky together. Poor old Merton did not get a shot—we saw no other beasts except hinds—but needless to say he was delighted that the run of bad luck was broken. Our stag weighed 15 stone 10 pounds, and his head is in my hall *vis-à-vis* to the big 9-pointer killed in the same drive last year.

And now for Herbert and Matheson. They had found a good 10-pointer on the south side of the West Hill rather near the Erchless March, and

they had to go right round the West Hill and part of Erchless to get within shot. Finally, after a deal of crawling, they got to about 200 yards from the stag, and as it was getting dark, Herbert fired, and his rifle misfired! Tragedy No. 1. He managed to get the cartridge out, aimed again, and fired, and, good shot, the stag dropped, but got up immediately and made slowly off, evidently badly wounded. It was now growing rapidly dark, and Herbert and Matheson dashed after their quarry and got to within 60 or 70 yards of him, when Herbert thought to finish him off, as he could still just make him out in the dim twilight. Alas and alack! his rifle misfired four times, and the stag managed to escape in the darkness; and though they hunted till it was quite dark, and Matheson was out all the next forenoon (though it was the Sabbath), they never found him, though Matheson was certain he could not go far. Cruel luck for them both—poor Pilly with only a few days' leave from this horrible war, and Matheson having been away two years at Gallipoli and suffering acute agony from my misses. They deserved a better fate. Pilly did not get home till 9 o'clock, and bore his misfortune nobly. I should have been demented. Needless to say, the rifle was changed before the next stalk—it was a hired one. But perhaps it was not to blame; there was a lot of bad ammunition about that year.

Monday, the 2nd of October, Herbert and

Dollie, Susan and I went to Erchless, Merton Barker to Farley. The latter ought to have got a stag, but Matheson's ill-luck stuck to him, and Merton missed. So did Herbert in Glengowrie with Ross, a nephew of Davie's, as stalker. I was with Fraser, and was the lucky one. We all went together as far as the high ridge which divides the near part of Erchless from Glengowrie, the distant part. We parted shortly before reaching the top, as we had seen some stags lying down on a green slope about a mile to our left, not far from the top; however, for once Fraser was at fault, just to show he was mortal, and overlooked an old hind, who gave the alarm, and our friends gave us the slip, and a rather glum lunch was our portion instead of a goodish stag. After lunch we climbed to our topmost parts, and could find nothing our side, though, of course, we could see plenty of deer in Glengowrie, where Herbert and Dollie had gone; but about 4 o'clock Fraser found some deer just outside Erchless Wood, about three to four miles off, and he thought there was a decent stag amongst them, but could not tell at that distance. So we descended and found on closer inspection that there was one quite good beast amongst them, but difficult to get at, as his hinds were very scattered. However, after endless casts and recasts and creeps and crawls, and one or two encroachings over the march on to Struy, Fraser got me up to a little over 100 yards from

the stag; but by this time it was 6 o'clock and getting dark, and if it hadn't been for a lovely moon I could not have seen to shoot. As it was, it was difficult enough to see him, as he was a dark beast and would stand facing us, roaring away like a lion. However, at long last he turned, and I fired and got him; but he staggered towards the wood, which was only about 100 yards distant, so we dashed down to him and gave him the *coup de grâce* just in time, as if he had gained the wood we should probably have lost him in the dark. I shall never forget the scene lying waiting for the shot—"seldom the time and the place and the Loved One altogether"—but this was one of those rare occasions. The moonlight and the moor, and the wood in the background, and the deer scattered about, and his majesty roaring away, bidding defiance to foes seen and unseen—it was a wonderful picture in a still more wonderful setting at the end of a great stalk. Our stag was an 8-pointer weighing 15 stone 1 pound. On the 7th of October Herbert got a switch on Erchless weighing 12 stone, and I missed again on Farley.

The 9th of October was the silver lining to the cloud which darkened the stalking of 1916. In the first place, Merton Barker broke the run of Matheson's ill-luck and got a good stag on Farley above the Lily Loch—a very nice 6-pointer weighing 15 stone 3 pounds. Susan and I went to Erchless, and had a blank morning. After

lunch we spied a very good stag near the wood, and after a good stalk Fraser got me to about 120 yards from the stag, but, mistaking his exact position as I crawled up, my shot was rather hurried, and I missed him handsomely, and he and the herd went off top speed and disappeared round a hill to our right. Fraser thought they would make a detour and make for the sanctuary, so, leaving Susan and the ghillie, we ran as fast as we could the best part of a mile in the hopes of cutting them off; and sure enough, when we got to the ridge overlooking the valley we expected them to come up there was his majesty 200 yards below us, hesitating for a moment which way to proceed. Suddenly he looked up and saw us, and Fraser whispered to me to fire from his shoulder, as we dare not move. We were both so blown that it was impossible to do so for a few seconds, which seemed like minutes; however, I exhorted Fraser to make a great effort to hold his breath for two or three seconds to prevent his shoulder moving, and he managed to do so, and I fired, and evidently hit it, as it gave a great jump, and Fraser said, "Good shot!" But our troubles were not yet over, for off he went, and was soon out of shot. They went up the hill facing us, and Fraser watched them through the glasses, and Fraser said he thought I had hit him in the stomach. He soon began to drop behind, and finally left the herd and seemed as though he



ERCHLESS, 9TH OF OCTOBER, 1916.

Weight, 16 stone 6 pounds.

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was turning back to the wood; so we dashed away again so that he would not get our wind, and succeeded in getting beyond his line of retreat, and eventually got up to 50 or 60 yards from him, and the prize was ours. He turned out to be a magnificent beast, the best head got on Erchless for twenty years, and I christened him the "Emperor of Erchless." The following paragraph from the *Inverness Courier* describes him:

A FINE STAG

"In a season when heads are generally acknowledged to have been much under the average it is remarkable that Dr. Leggatt, the lessee of Erchless Forest, secured the best head shot there for twenty years after an exciting stalk. The horns were very thick, beautifully dark in colour, and symmetrical. The head narrowly escaped royal honours, there being eleven well-developed points, 3 on top each side with good cups. The stag scaled 16 stone 6 pounds."

It was nearly dark when we got him, so he had to be left out all night. He weighed 16 stone 6 pounds next morning, and we allowed 4 pounds for lying out all night, as I have proved that a stag loses from 4 to 5 pounds under those circumstances. I have weighed a stag at night, and then dragged him out into the open and left him all night, and then weighed him again next morning and found the loss of weight was 4 pounds. That was a wet night; it would probably lose another pound on a fine night.

Needless to say, there were great rejoicings in

the camp over the death of the "Emperor," and glad am I that I did not know how good a beast it was, or I should certainly have missed a second time; as it was the shot was difficult enough from a heaving shoulder and with a dropping rifle. However, all's well that ends well; here's a health to his fallen majesty and to his conqueror Caesar—I mean Fraser! and may we get another to equal it some day; it will be hard to beat.

The next day, the 10th, was very stormy, a tremendous wind and heavy showers, but we were early astir and up at Erchless soon after 9, to feast our eyes once more on the fine head of our trophy and to get him on the pony and down to Erchless in good time, so that Mackintosh and the pony could rejoin us soon after lunch in case we succeeded in getting a goodish beast we had spied about two miles from our fallen friend on the south-east part of Erchless high up above Loch Fada. We got to about a quarter of a mile from him, but could get no nearer, so decided to lunch, as he was lying down with two or three hinds sheltering from the gale. After about an hour he got up and fed away from the hinds, and in a perfect hurricane we managed to creep to the top of a ridge and peep over, and there he was 70 or 80 yards in front of us. He was facing us, and got us at once, so I fired, and hit him in the chest and knocked him head over heels; but he was up and off and over the ridge like lightning, and



FARLEY AND ERCHLESS, 1917.

A hot day in July.

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Fraser and I dashed after him in the pelting storm, and when we got to where he had disappeared we saw him about 150 yards below, very sick and standing with his legs wide apart and looking as though he was going to drop. However, when we got close up to him he again tried to stagger off; but a second bullet put an end to his troubles, and there we were with another journey for Mackintosh and the pony, soaked to the skin, but very happy. He was a good beast, 15 stone 5 pounds, a 9-pointer, not a very good head, an old stag going back.

The next day, the 11th, Merton Barker got a nice 7-pointer weighing 14 stone 8 pounds, after a great stalk on the middle heights of Erchless, called the Hare Mountain. He and Fraser had a great crawl of about 500 yards over very bare ground, which must have been desperately exciting, but equally fatiguing—however, just the crawl to suit “poor old” Merton.

On the 12th we drove Farley Wood, and I got a nice rough 8-pointer at the Northern drive, my second and last stag for the season on Farley. Fancy only three stags in the season on Farley! Terrible! Certainly, I ought to have had three or four more, but for vile shooting, and Merton ought to have had another, but that would only make about half my number, so if it hadn't been for Erchless it would have been a sad season indeed.

CHAPTER IV

ERCHLESS AND FARLEY, 1917

I WAS lucky enough to get the stalking on Erchless again this year, and a wonderful season it was, too, at the finish. It was ushered in rather dramatically, for we got our first stag on Farley as early as the 27th of July; it happened thus: Davie and I had been prowling round Farley Wood one evening, as we sometimes did, and had seen nothing. As we were coming down to the car, which was waiting for us near Matheson's house, Matheson, who was working in his turnips, came running towards us and asked us if we had seen the deer. We said no, we had seen nothing. He said some good stags had passed west just above his house ten minutes ago, and could not be more than a quarter of a mile away, so Davie and I hurried back up the brae towards Sandy Forbes's house, and when we got to the top of the ridge, there, standing facing us in the brushwood, was a fine stag. I seized the rifle from Davie and fired standing, and the stag disappeared over the ridge, and we found him a few yards below, stone dead, with the bullet through his neck. The rest of the



FARLEY WOOD, 27TH OF JULY, 1917.

Weight, 14 stone 8 pounds.

herd were disappearing into the wood 150 yards away, and offered a not very difficult chance of a second, but I resisted the temptation. Our prize was a very fine 11-pointer, weighing 14 stone 8 pounds; his horns were not clean, but they were quite hard underneath the velvet, and Macpherson of Inverness had no difficulty in removing the velvet, and a very fine trophy he makes in my drawing-room opposite the "Emperor." It was the first stag of the season, and duly chronicled in the *Inverness Courier* thus:

"Mr. John Macpherson, taxidermist, Church Street, has received for preservation a very fine head of 11 points sent in by Dr. Ashley Leggatt, Balblair House, Beaulieu. The stag weighed 14 stone 8 pounds and was in very forward condition. The horns had a span of 27 inches, the brows 9 inches, second points 11 inches and third 10 inches, the beam being $6\frac{1}{2}$ in circumference, length of horn 29 inches. This is the best head that has been got in Farley Forest for some considerable time."

Needless to say, we had a bottle that night to celebrate such an auspicious start; and though we got no more deer for weeks, it was followed at long last by a wonderful season.

Not another beast did we see in the wood or on Farley all August and the first half of September. How different to the old days! On the 15th of September we got a small stag on the heights of Erchless—hardly a shootable beast, but any port in a storm; and a small haunch is better than no venison. Then several blank days both on

Erchless and Farley, till on the 29th I told Fraser to try on Erchless, whilst I did the same on Farley. Needless to say, he succeeded, and got a good stag with a poor head, an 8-pointer, weighing 15 stone 13 pounds. This changed the luck, for on the 1st of October I got a small stag, a 9-pointer weighing 12 stone 7 pounds, on the east part of Erchless close to Loch Fada, after a stalk of innumerable detours and crawls. However, finally Fraser's patience triumphed, and he got me to a ridge overlooking a valley into which the deer had disappeared, and where he said we should get the shot as they ascended the opposite hill of the valley about 150 yards across. Sure enough, there they were, and, making no mistake, our toil was rewarded, and we went marching home wi' great content.

The 4th of October was and is likely to be the red-letter day of my stalking career. It was fine, but very cold, with a strong north-west wind and falling glass, and Fraser said snow was coming, and as there were a lot of deer on the ground, we had better go to Glengowrie; so we took two ponies, as it is a long tramp. When we got to the ridge which divides the near and distant part of Erchless, we spied some good beasts about a mile away on the top of the Hare Mountain, and after an easy stalk got to about 100 yards from where a good 8-pointer was lying; there we lay and shivered for half an hour till our



THE DAY. ERCHLESS, 11th OF OCTOBER, 1917.

Weight, 11 stone 3 pounds; span, 29 inches.

friend got cold too, I suppose, and rose, and bang went the rifle, and he fell dead. He weighed 14 stone 3 pounds and had a fine wide spread of 29 inches, and was soon on one of the ponies and despatched back with Willie Mackintosh; and we lunched at 1.30 in as sheltered a nook as we could find. After lunch Fraser came and said he and Donald Ross (the stalker who lives in Glengowrie) had spied a very fine stag about three miles away down on the flats of Glengowrie, but it was too far for the lady to go. Needless to say, the lady expostulated, and I backed her up, so Fraser gave way, and at 2.15 off he, Ross, Susan, and I started for Glengowrie, leaving Sandy and the other pony on the heights to keep a lookout. After a long and rapid descent we got down to the flats of Glengowrie, and found a great number of goodish stags about, but could not find the fine fellow we were after. This was at 3.30, and till 4.30 we lay and shivered whilst Fraser and Ross kept hivering and hesitating whether to risk intervening stags and creep on for our prize. At 4.30 Fraser could stand it no longer, and said there was quite a good beast roaring about a quarter of a mile in front of us, and we would chance it and go for him. So we crawled for about 200 yards and got to a small knoll, and peeped over, and there was our roaring friend; so I fired, and Fraser smiled, and I knew all was well, though he galloped off, and 70 or 80 yards

farther on he fell dead within 15 yards of the brook which is the boundary between Erchless and Corrichallie. He was a good 8-pointer, weighing 15 stone 12 pounds, with a very fine spread, and adorns the walls of Susan's bedroom, and reminds her when she is snug and warm in bed of how cold she was when he fell. By the time the gralloch was performed and we had emptied our flask with a wee dram all round in honour of our fallen foe it was a quarter to 5; and though there were deer all round us, as we were seven miles from the car and it was getting colder every minute, we decided to make for home. Scarcely had we started when a loud roar on our right, about a quarter of a mile away, made us all drop flat. Out came the glasses, and there was the mighty monarch we had come after coming down the hill driving his numerous retinue in front of him to lower ground in view of the storm which their instinct surely told them was coming. Leaving Susan and Donald Ross crouching where they were, Fraser and I crept on towards our quarry, as there were numerous knolls and hillocks which made our crawl fairly easy. We got to within 150 yards of the herd, and then, with a mighty roar, our friend came in sight and stood half facing us, offering a favourable chance. I fired, and he fell, and then half-rose and began tearing up the ground with his horns in his fury for a few seconds; and then all was over and the climax of the never-to-be-forgotten day was



THE DAY. ERCHLESS, 4TH OF OCTOBER, 1917.

Weight, 18 stone 5 pounds. After being out four nights in the snow.

reached. We rushed up to where he lay and a splendid animal he was—a long-horned 11-pointer with very stout, rough, black horns, evidently an old fighter, as one of his brow antlers was broken half off and his second antler on the other side was in a similar condition. Fraser said he was one of the biggest stags he had ever seen—how big we were never to know exactly, for, of course, it was too late to get our last two stags in that night, and a snow-storm came on that night which lasted for forty-eight hours and made it impossible for us to get them in for four days! He then weighed 18 stone 5 pounds, and Fraser was of opinion that he would have been well over 19 stone if we could have got him in that night; but, as I said before, that was impossible, as we were three miles from the pony and it was 5 o'clock when we got him, and the coming snow-storm made it nearly dark. So we had to leave them, and, saying good-night to Donald Ross, whose house was about two miles away, lower down in Glengowrie, we started on our long trudge, mightily pleased with ourselves and unmindful of the cold and the distance and the dark. When we reached the summit it was almost dark, but I just managed to descry Sandy and the pony also, just starting for home and nearly frozen. When he heard of our success he was overjoyed, and remembered no more the freezing and his long, dreary wait of nearly four hours. Needless to say, it was pitch black when

we reached Erchless Wood, and even Fraser could hardly find the opening and the path through it. He said that as a rule the Glengowrie party generally brought a lamp up with them when they started, and left it at the edge of the wood, but we had been foolish virgins, and had to grope our way home in the dark. It was 7.30 before we got to the car, and 8.30 before we were back at Balblair. They tried next day to get in the stags, but the ponies got bogged in the snow-drifts and they had to give it up. That was Friday. Saturday the snow was deeper, and it was Monday before they were safely in the larder—four days in the snow: cold storage with a vengeance; but the venison did not suffer in the least. It was indeed a wonderful day. I am never likely to have another like it, especially as regards atmospheric conditions. Never have I seen anything like the number of deer on the ground, and I suppose the coming storm made them easier to get at. I do not know whether snow always has this effect; thunder, of course, makes them restless, but more wary and difficult to stalk.

The next day, the 5th, there was 6 inches of snow everywhere and a foot on the tops, with drifts 2 or 3 feet deep in places, and snow-showers in between sunny intervals. There were deer in plenty on the high rocks just outside Farley Wood but nothing very good, and Stone and I had an exciting climb and stalk after a small stag

with a good little head of 6 points who was lying under the shelter of a big rock. We got to about 50 yards from him, but he would not rise, so after waiting about a quarter of an hour I fired, and over and over he rolled, down and down, but luckily came to rest on a heathery ledge and his horns were uninjured. He weighed 11 stone 4 pounds. We dragged him down to the bottom of the rocks, and as it was only about 200 yards from the wood, Sandy managed to get the pony to him through the snow.

The next day, Saturday the 6th, Susan and I were early up at Erchless, all agog to hear whether they had been able to get our beauties in from Glengowrie. Disappointment was our portion, for, as I said before, Fraser and Mackintosh had tried, but the ponies got bogged in snow-drifts and they had to turn back. To-day was bright and sunny, but still bitterly cold, and of course the entire country round, hills and valleys alike, were snow-clad, and on the tops the snow was very deep. It was a wonderful sight, and such a heavy fall so early in the season had not been known within memory. Fraser said it was quite impossible to try and get them in to-day, so there was nothing for it but to leave them till Monday, and hope for the best.

We saw plenty of deer directly we got out of the wood, and decided on a nice 8-pointer which was trying to find food through the snow with

three or four other stags about half a mile to our left, and in a very easy spot to get at. We did not want a long crawl through the snow. The stalk was easy and without incident, and the stag fell dead to the shot. He had quite a good head of 8 points with very symmetrical horns, and weighed 13 stone 8 pounds. Fraser asked me if I had ever shot a beast in the snow, and I said only my wee staggie yesterday. He told me to be very careful, as one was very likely to miss on account of the glare, and also because the snow made them seem to be much nearer than they really were; so, having plenty of time for the shot, I took extra pains, and all was well. We did not stalk after lunch, as the snow was too deep to get anything in that night unless it was very near the wood, and my shot had moved all the deer farther into the forest.

As we were sadly behind our number on Farley, I sent Roy up to see what he could do, and he succeeded late in the afternoon in getting a small stag on the West Hill, a 6-pointer, 11 stone 10 pounds, which, of course, they could not get in that evening, so we had three beasts lying out over the week-end. It sounds bad, but there was really no help for it, and everyone who tasted the venison agreed that it was none the worse for it. They got them in all right on the Monday, but it was no easy job on Erchless, and they had to bring the ponies right round the West Hill and all along

the march between Farley and Erchless to Donald Ross's house, and so up the flats of Glengowrie to where the deer were lying, ten miles each way.

Tuesday, the 9th, I had promised my friend Major John Otto a day on Erchless, and he got a 10-pointer with a very good head, weighing 13 stone 8 pounds, on Boa, which is the near part of Erchless. He tells me he ought to have got another, but he was shooting with a strange rifle; and I am very glad he didn't, as it would have left me with only one for my last day! Roy was despatched again to Farley, and got two, one a 6-pointer near the Duck Loch, weighing 14 stone 8 pounds, and the other on the West Hill, a 10-pointer with a very good head, which adorns the dining-room of Balblair; the horns were long and symmetrical and a good spread, but not very dark and too smooth—probably a wood stag.

Three more good days completed the wonderful finale of this remarkable season. Wednesday, the 10th, was my last day on Erchless, and I had 2 beasts to get to complete my number—should I do it? The start was not hopeful, as after our usual spy from the spying rock we decided to go for some fairly good beasts about half a mile to our left, just outside the wood. The stalk was easy, but the shot rather hurried, and I missed a sitter and swore appropriately. However, Fraser suggested the avoidance of undue depression, as there were plenty of deer about, and said we

would at once go for a good 10-pointer he had spied from the spying rock about two miles north, close to the path leading to Glengowrie; so we turned our footsteps northwards, and without any difficulty got to about 500 yards from where our stag was feeding. There we found there were two or three nobbers with him, evidently posted as sentinels; but he had fed rather far from his sentries, and so we decided to crawl in and chance one who was posted a good deal above the 10-pointer, as if he saw us Fraser thought he would be too far away to give the alarm. All went well, and we got quite close to our friend, about 70 yards, and I had everything in my favour—a comfortable position, plenty of time, and a good light; so my feelings can be better imagined than described when I fired and a clean miss was recorded! Not seeing where the shot came from, he stood for a second or two and gave me time to fire again, and this time he fell dead, and I signalled to Susan, who was lying 200 yards behind us, to come up and share the delight of examining our trophy. When we got up to him one horn was buried in the ground, and I said to Fraser, after looking at the visible horn, “Well, this one has six points, anyway”; and when we unearthed the other horn there were six points too, and my prize was a Royal! My first and only one so far. The third point of the three on top on each side was very short, only about an inch long, which accounted

for Fraser thinking it was only a 10-pointer; but still, the sixth point on each side was quite distinct, and it was an undoubted Royal, though not a very good head. The horns were long and thick, and the other points were well developed, but the spread was narrow, the cups were very poor with such small third points on top. His weight was 14 stone. We lunched beside him, and of course the flask was duly passed around. Scarcely had we settled for lunch when Fraser crept up to us and said some deer were making right for us from Farley. I leapt up and seized the rifle, and crept to the top of the wee hollow we were lunching in, and there were the deer trotting towards us about 200 yards away. They then turned rather to the right, and Fraser whistled to try and stop them, but they kept on; and as there was a goodish stag amongst them, I determined on a running shot, and fired and hit him rather far behind; he did not drop, but was evidently hard hit, and after going 200 or 300 yards he lay down, and we crawled up to him and gave him the happy despatch. So my number was complete before lunch, and so was my happiness. He was an 8-pointer, and weighed 14 stone 11 pounds. Lunch was taken without further interruptions, and we were back at the car by 3.30—ponies, stags, and empty flasks. A glorious wind up!

Having finished on Erchless, I could now devote

all my attention to Farley, where we were terribly behindhand—ten stags to get in four days. I could not go out on the 11th, so let Stone have a try, and he got a nice beast with a poor head on the rocks behind the wood, an 8-pointer weighing 14 stone 4 pounds.

On the 12th John Stone and I went to the West Hill. There were plenty of deer about, and we decided to go for a good stag that was lying down by himself close to the march on the south side of the West Hill. We got close up to him, 50 to 60 yards, and as he would not rise I fired and hit him rather far behind the shoulder, probably in the stomach, and he sprang up, and then stood looking very sick and as though he must fall. However, he did not, and I wanted to give him another shot, but Stone advised not, as it would disturb the ground, and he was certain he was done for. Bad advice, as events proved, for after a minute or two he began very slowly to totter off, and continually stopping as though about to fall. Gradually it dawned on us that he was not going to fall, and that he was getting stronger, so we jumped up and pursued; but his pace improved, and after a stern chase, till we were utterly blown, halfway round the West Hill we had to own ourselves beaten, and he disappeared out of sight over the march into Erchless. Sadly and sorrowfully we lunched close to Loch Fada in sight of several lots of deer lying down and feeding on the west

and south sides of the West Hill opposite; and lunch and a good long pipe after the long run having revived our failing strength, we decided to go for a very good switch that was close at hand and in an easy position to get at. It turned out not so easy as it looked, and I could not get nearer than 200 yards, and hit him in the fore leg, and he reared straight up on his hind legs, looking an enormous height; then he limped off, and we limped after him, mindful of our morning's loss, and I got him in the neck at 200 yards, and we remembered no more our travail for joy that a stag was slain. He weighed 14 stone 9 pounds. Having signalled for Sandy and the pony, and as it was still early, we decided to have another try on the western slope of the West Hill, and soon spied a nice 9-pointer with a good head, which was stalked without incident, and a downhill shot at about 150 yards resulted in No. 2 being in the larder that evening, weighing 14 stone 4 pounds. We were very tired when we got back to the car five miles distant after three stalks and a very long run half round the West Hill. We had to walk all the way as both the ponies had other burdens to bear.

Next day, the 13th (my lucky number, for I am a thirteenth child and was born at No. 13), I was out again with Davie, with whom I was always lucky till this year. Would Fortune smile on us again, or would she still frown? We had

not long to wait for an answer, for on our way to the West Hill, where we had spied plenty of deer, Davie suddenly pointed to the green flats below us and in front of us, and said there was a beast lying there. On looking through our glasses we saw it was a stag, and dead, and when we got up to it we found it was a Royal! It had fine rough, strong horns and had been dead three or four days, but we could find no trace of a bullet nor any sign of disease or injury upon a superficial examination. The head, of course, was all right, and it now hangs on the drawing-room wall at Balblair—without adorning it much, however, as the wallpaper is white and does not make a good background. Davie was of opinion that the stag must have been shot on Corriehallie, where the keeper had orders to kill as many stags as he could get for the sake of the advertisement, as the place is in the market. Anyway, he must have travelled some miles ere he dropped, and it was very obliging of him to drop on Farley, as he had a good head and it was a lucky find. Soon afterwards, just this side of the West Hill, we spied a shootable beast, and after a not very clever bit of work found we could get no nearer than 200 yards. However, thinking we were in luck, I fired and brought it off, and a nice 8-pointer lay beside us at lunch, weighing 14 stone 4 pounds. After lunch Fortune was again kind, as we spied a good stag on Corriehagh, a mile or two nearer home,

which saved us going on to the West Hill; but we had to make a longish detour, as the wind was north-west and we were due west of him. After many casts and recasts and a good deal of crawling, I got to about 300 yards of him, but there he stood, roaring defiance, surrounded by his hinds, and absolutely impossible to get nearer and very difficult to get out of it. However, 300 yards was a bit too far even for our luck, so I managed to wriggle back to Davie, whom I had left 50 yards behind me so as to save him a crawl over a very bare bit, and we determined to make yet another cast and creep in on him down a gully chancing the wind, as it would be a very near thing. This time I managed to get to about 200 yards, and as it was getting late chanced the shot, though he was in a bad position, only half broadside on, with his head away from me and still roaring; but his roaring days were numbered, as I got him in the back and he could only rise on his fore legs, both his hind legs being paralysed, and we soon put him out of his misery. His weight was 14 stone, and he had a very good head of 8 points with a wide spread and very symmetrical. It was 5.30 when we got him, and we spied him at 2, so the stalk had been long, ditto, ditto my song, and I expect old Davie was thankful when it was over. A good day for our last one in the open forest, and not altogether unworthy of our luck.

As we were five short of our number, I deter-

mined to drive the wood on the last day, Monday, the 15th, taking Roy up with me as a second rifle. We started with the drive above Stone's house, and as Roy and I were proceeding to our ambushes, I saw the head of a good beast about 300 yards ahead of us, lying in the open beyond my ambush, with its little wooden plank for a seat under the larch which commands this opening. I determined to make a detour through the wood and so get nearer, but at that moment he got up and began roaring back to a rival who was roaring in the part of the wood which was just going to be driven; he then walked off and disappeared into the wood where I was creeping along to get up to him, and we saw him no more. But in the meantime his rival appeared in the open and offered a longish shot; he had emerged opposite to where I had left Roy and Susan, and I wondered why Roy had not fired; he told me afterwards that he thought it would move in my direction, so he left it for me—very noble of him. Luckily, I got him all right, and he was a good 8-pointer weighing 14 stone 4 pounds.

I ought to have got at least two stags at the next drive, the east beat, but missed easy shots. Luckily, they were not very good beasts, so my grief was not as great as it otherwise would have been; and for an excuse I had just begun to feel my vein in my right leg, and was thinking I was in for an attack of phlebitis, which probably "took

my eye off the ball," and which turned out to be only too true, as my leg bothered me all the winter and was the price I had to pay for my pearls of great price. As Roy had not had a shot, I asked him and Stone at lunch-time if they would rather go and try in the open than continue driving. Of course they would, so off they went, and each got a stag on the West Hill just before dark—Roy a 9-pointer weighing 16 stone 5 pounds, and Stone an 8-pointer, 14 stone 11 pounds. And so we were only two short of our number when the curtain was rung down on the most remarkable ten days that I am ever likely to see in my stalking career. We ought to have had five stags easily on the last day but for the lapses of the laird.

CHAPTER V

ERCHLESS AND FARLEY, 1918

WEARY of the war and the Daylight Saving Bill in London, and my tenancy of dear Mulberry having come to an end on the 4th of July, my youngest-born treasure Tabasco and I trekked North that evening with Mary and Hilda, leaving my greater treasure, my cook, Nellie, behind me for her fortnight's holiday. Of course I had to have a prow around ere long, and on the 10th of July I went up to Davie's about 6 o'clock, and we started forth over the bare bit above his house and into the wood and searched diligently, but could not find the beasts he had seen in the morning. However, on coming out of the wood two hours later, there they were on a ridge about a quarter of a mile east of us—and some good stags too, twelve or fourteen of them. We had no difficulty in getting to about 200 yards, but could get no nearer, as they were scattered, some feeding towards us, some on the ridge, some disappearing over the ridge. Needless to say, the best were disappearing, so I chose the best that was in sight and fired, and a small beast fell, and the rest made off top

speed ! I suppose just as I pulled the trigger the small beast, who was invisible, stepped between me and the one I was aiming at and paid the penalty. My victim was only a wee staggie, but as, of course, the velvet was still on them, I was not sorry that his big brother with a good head had escaped as the head would have been worthless now, and the venison of the wee one was quite excellent in spite of its being so early in the season.

The flies drove these stags out of Farley Wood a day or two after, and no more were seen for the rest of July and August. All the wood-cutting and the carting of the timber have absolutely ruined it as a sanctuary, and the glories of Farley have departed, never, alas ! to return.

Again I was lucky enough to get the stalking on Erchless, and as my first-born (whom the gods call Kruger, but *οἱ πολλοί* Nora) was with me the last half of August, I thought we would try our luck there. Anyway, I wanted her to see it, so on the 29th she, Susan, and I sallied forth and met Fraser at 10.30 at the usual place. When we got to the spying rock we found there were several lots of deer on the ground, so we went on to the high spying ground and found there was a small stag with two lots—one with a few hinds between us and the Hare Hill, and rather below us, and another also with some hinds on the top of the Hare Hill. We decided to go for the latter, as he was rather the better beast. The stalk was easy till just at

the end, when we found ourselves within 50 yards of the stag and one or two hinds ! Fraser whispered to me that I should have to be very quick with the shot after I had pushed the rifle through the heather over the stone behind which we were lying as flat as flounders, as the moment my head followed my rifle the stag would have me—which of course he did; but I was pretty nippy and had him first, and just got him in the chest as he was standing facing me. He fell dead; and was a nice wee beast of 10 stone 5 pounds. The horns still had the velvet on, but it was quite loose and came off as they were dragging him down hill, and Fraser darkened the horns, such as they were, with mud, and proved himself quite the taxidermist. Kruger was very pleased at the success of the stalk arranged in her honour, and, needless to say, Sally and I were ditto; it was all over by lunch-time, so we were able to sit up and take a little nourishment without any harassment as to what the afternoon would bring forth.

September the 7th was our next effort, and a very mighty effort it turned out to be. We met Fraser as usual at 10.30, and proceeded to the spying rock, but could see nothing but hinds, so climbed on up to the spying cairn on top, and there we spied a big herd of deer with one good stag and two or three smaller ones on the Hare Hill; but they were very scattered and impossible to get near, and there was nothing for it but a long

wait, which we proceeded to do as patiently as possible, with the aid of lunch and a couple of pipes. At 2.30 Fraser said the position was no better, rather worse, as the herd had broken up into two lots, with an interval of about a quarter of a mile between them, our stag being in the front lot, as they were feeding south, the wind being due south. So we decided to make a long detour almost down into Glengowrie and try and get round and come up between the two lots. We managed this all right with the help of a long crawl over the last 200 or 300 yards, leaving Susan and Jimmy Johnston when we began the crawl behind a small ridge; and then, after all our efforts, found our further progress was stopped by two or three straggling hinds from the front lot, and our stag and the rest of his lot rapidly feeding over the ridge and disappearing under the spying cairn whence we had toiled—so we were much worse off than before we started, and time was creeping on. Once more we cast back and made a detour round the top of the Hare Hill, picking up Susan and Jimmy *en route*, and so got to the ridge over which they had fed, and found them about a mile farther on feeding and lying down at the foot of a steep bit of rock almost on the Farley March. By this time it was 5 o'clock, so we decided to move them farther into Farley and leave them for to-morrow. And then shortly afterwards it occurred to me that we might get

round behind them and chance their getting our wind, as they were lying at the foot of a rock high enough to take our wind over and past them; so I suggested it to Fraser, and he said there was a chance, and we resolved to try it—desperate situations require desperate remedies. Susan, however, had had enough of it; she must have covered ten miles and still had four to go, so she and Jimmy returned to the car and to tea at Mrs. MacMillan's, and I said I would be down in half an hour—but *l'homme propose et le cerf dispose*. We got round behind them all right, and were just doing the last crawl to the edge of the rock below which they were when an old hind who had climbed nearly to the top of the rock got us and gave the alarm, so that when I got into position they were all at attention, and our stag was facing me about 150 yards away and 50 feet below. They were evidently just off, so I fired, and, alas! missed, and away they went, but not very fast and not very far, as they had not seen us, and they evidently did not expect us to be where we were, almost down-wind on them. However, they went about a mile, and then began to feed again, and Fraser asked me if I would have one more try, though it was now 6.30. I assented, and away we went in pursuit, almost exactly whence we had come, and without much difficulty got to about 150 yards from our stag, who had now only a few hinds and one small stag with him.

They were on a small plateau, and I could only see the body of our evasive friend, as his legs were below the surface of the plateau; but it was getting late, and he was broadside on, and the hinds were suspicious, so I fired, and evidently hit him, as he gave a great kick and seemed about to fall, when he slowly began to move off after the rest, and away they went for a bit, uncertain, and not very fast, loth to desert their lord, who was travelling very slowly. However, we could never quite get near him; he kept moving on round the big basin at the foot of the Hare Hill, deserted now by all except the small fellow, who kept butting him on with his horns; if we had had more time and light, of course, we would have given him time and lain concealed, but it was getting dark and it was a race against time. Finally even the little fellow deserted him, but he struggled on, and now turned up between the Hare Hill and the sanctuary and escaped into the darkness at 8 o'clock. Sickening to lose him after a seven-hours stalk, and more sickening to know that he would die in agony in a few hours. However, it was so dark it would have been impossible to see to shoot, and so, sadly and sorrowfully, we had to turn our footsteps homewards, especially as we had separated, Fraser having left me the last few minutes to dash on alone and see if he could get near enough to finish him. I waited about a quarter of an hour for him, and then

thought I had better make a bee-line for home before it was quite dark. I could just see Erchless Wood about three miles distant, so, dead beat and all as I was, I made for it at great speed, not wanting at all to spend the night in the forest, having neither food nor flask with me. Fast and all as I went, Fraser must have gone faster, as after going about a couple of miles I found him beside me, greatly to my relief. He said he had left the stag still staggering on just fast enough to beat him, and making for the top of Cairn Slofti, the steep hill facing Erchless Wood; so we were a very sad pair as we stumbled on to Erchless Wood, where he found the opening all right, which I should probably have missed and spent hours wandering about its recesses and ravines, and getting to the car goodness knows when. As it was, it was 9 o'clock before we reached it, and Susan had long since finished her tea and was beginning to think of sending out a search-party. I snatched a hasty cup or two, and divine nectar it seemed after my eight hours' interval from the last nourishment; and then as a final debacle the car refused to start, and it was 10 o'clock before we could get it going, and a quarter to 11 before we reached Balblair, as we had no motor lamps, and had to borrow a pair of carriage lamps and travel very warily, as it is a bad road at any time and a teaser in the dark with indifferent lights. And thus ended what I may call "the Switch's

Dance," for the gallant fellow who had beaten us for the nonce, and who had led us a merry dance, was a big switch; but his horns had a good spread, and he was well worth the chase.

On the 11th of September we were out again, and found our switch right on the top of Cairn Slofti. We were lunching about two miles off, a little below and west of the high spying cairn, and Fraser spied what he at first thought was a dead hind, as he could see no horns. However, after repeated inspections during luncheon, he and Ross, who had joined us, came to the conclusion that what they thought was an ear was the nose of a beast sticking up, in which case the horns would be buried in the ground; so we determined to make a long detour so as not to disturb the ground, and climbed to the top of Cairn Slofti, and there, sure enough was our switch, with his nose in the air and his horns buried in the ground. He was enormously swollen from acute peritonitis, my bullet having hit him rather far back, and of course his venison was useless; but his horns were long with a fair spread, 26 inches, so I determined to keep his head as a memento of a long stalk, easily the record of my stalking career. Sandy removed it and carried it down to the car, a good four miles, on his back. Fraser thought he would have weighed about 15 stone; he certainly was a goodish stag, and a game one to travel as far as he did with such a wound. He was only about

half a mile from where we lost him in the dark on Saturday; another hour of daylight and we should have got him easily.

On the 20th of September I got a small 6-pointer weighing 11 stone 2 pounds on Boa, not far from the little loch beside the path to Glengowrie. The stalk was easy, ditto the shot, but not immediately fatal, and the stag stood without moving or dropping for a long time. After waiting several minutes, Fraser and I determined to make a short detour so as to get quite close up to him, as we were 150 yards from him where we were; and after extraordinary precautions, which seemed to me unnecessary, we got quite near him and I did the necessary; but it must have been quite half an hour between the two shots, and the stag never moved all that time: he just stood looking very sick and very shaky, but he never dropped. My first bullet had hit him rather far back and high up near the spine, and I conclude he was suffering from concussion of the spine, which made him quite rigid and prevented him from falling and also from moving. Fraser was extraordinarily cautious over the second stalk; he seemed to think it was much more difficult than the first, and evidently did not want a repetition of our last week's experience. I think we might have saved ourselves all the trouble we took, and crept straight up and finished him off, but of course we did not know that he would stand

so long, if, indeed, he was able to move, which I very much doubt.

On the 26th of September "Billy" Wilson Smith got a very fine 9-pointer at the bottom of the Hare Hill; he weighed 15 stone 6 pounds, and had a really good head with a 28-inch span. Susan and I went to Glengowrie, and I wounded a fine stag in the shoulder, but he escaped west. On the 28th we were both successful. Billy Smith got a very fine stag in Glengowrie, weighing 16 stone 12 pounds; he was a 10-pointer and had quite a good head. Unfortunately, he had to be left out two nights, as we had only one pony and it was with me; a second pony was not to be had for love or money this year, and as it was Saturday the beast could not be got in till the Monday. I may mention that the allowance in weight for being left out a night is 7 pounds in Erchless Forest and 6 pounds in Farley. I think both of these weights are too much; my experiment last year proved that it was 4 or 5 pounds—that is for one night; I expect there is a loss of 1 or 2 pounds each subsequent night. Butchers tell me that meat loses weight each day it is kept, the loss being much greater at first and gradually diminishing, but always steadily diminishing. And of course the loss of weight when left out for a night is much more when the heart and liver are included in the weight, as they are on Erchless and Farley, as both organs contain and retain a lot of blood in

and around them, the drying up of which causes a considerable loss of weight, certainly several pounds. And this probably accounts for the discrepancy in the views of the authorities on the subject; the loss of weight would be very little if the liver and heart were not included—but why the former should not be, as it is most excellent eating (the best part of the stag in my humble opinion), I am at a loss to understand; and if it is left in, the loss of weight for one night would be 4 to 5 pounds at any rate. And now to return to the 28th. Susan and I were with Fraser on the home beat, and had toiled in vain in the morning. After lunch we spied quite a good stag on the Farley March above Loch Fada; we had to go nearly down to the loch to get round him and his hinds, but once that was accomplished the rest was easy, as the ground there is a succession of deepish corries, and the beasts were not scattered, but were all together in one of these corries. We crept to the ridge of the one where we expected to find them, and on looking over found the hinds were feeding out of the next but one, about 150 yards off; in a few seconds they were followed by the stag, and he gave me an easy shot, and I broke his back and had to give him another bullet when I got up to him. He had a poor head of 7 points, but was in prime condition and weighed 15 stone 8 pounds; and as it was my first good stag of the season, we were both

highly delighted, and Billy having been successful, too, in Glengowrie, it was a very merry Saturday evening in the Balblair banqueting-hall.

The 1st of October was the black day of my stalking career, for I missed three stags, and so drained the cup of misery to the *ultima gutta*. Billy Smith, however, redeemed the situation by getting another fine stag in Glengowrie, a 10-pointer weighing 16 stone 4 pounds; and as he got a beauty, a 10-pointer weighing 16 stone 6 pounds on Farley the day before, he has the proud record of four stags in five shots, averaging 16 stone each—good work. My three misses are a sorrowful tale; the first occurred before lunch about half a mile east of the spying rock on the broken ground near the west end of Loch Fada. The shot ought to have been an easy one, as we got up to about 100 yards from our stag; but just as I was getting into position one of the hinds got us and gave the alarm, and the shot was very hurried at the stag facing me. Anyway, a handsome miss was recorded, and Fraser said nothing, but looked volumes. We then made for some deer we had spied near the top of the Hare Hill, but they were in an impossible position, so we lunched and hoped the position would improve. However, it did not, and though we managed to creep and crawl for about 200 yards from our stag, he never stood for a shot, as he was very busy with his hinds, and a nobber which was inclined to feed towards us,

and finally got us, gave the alarm, and off they went, and disappeared down the Hare Hill on the home beat side. Fraser and I dashed after them, and soon got them again, about a quarter of a mile below us; so we embarked on a most apoplectic downhill crawl of about 200 yards, and finally I had to take the shot at about 250 yards. I took a full sight and missed comfortably, and then found the 300-yard sight had somehow in the crawl been raised, and so, of course, with the full sight I had taken, I was well over him. We got no further chance at them, as they joined up with another big herd of deer and made off towards the sanctuary. The latter was not a miss to weep over, but worse was to follow; for as we were wending our homeward way and I was trying to forget my imbecility, Fraser spied a small stag by himself just outside the wood about a quarter of a mile from the spying rock, and as he was in a very favourable position, got me up to 50 or 60 yards from him, and then, with everything in my favour, I missed him clean—under him, I think. Fraser said I must not have another shot at a stag till he had tried my rifle at the target, which he did next day, and found that it was shooting low, and as I was aiming low at these near shots it accounted somewhat for my sins; but the last miss was absolutely a sitter, and I did indeed feel sick at heart and as though the sun would never shine again.

But it did shine all right the next day but one, the 3rd of October, and the 4th, and the 5th, so seemingly I had profited by my mistakes—another illustration of the comforting adage, “The man who makes no mistakes makes nothing.” For on the 3rd I brought off the double event—the only time this season—not two very good beasts, but one of them had quite a good head, and the other provided an exciting stalk in very difficult country. In the morning we were after some beasts on this side of the Hare Hill, and suddenly came on a solitary stag, who was lying down roaring at the beasts we were after; he was about 300 yards away, and utterly unconscious of any danger from us, so intent was he on roaring defiance at a big switch which was advancing on him from the lot we were after. As the switch got nearer to him, our friend did not seem to fancy his chance, so he got up and began moving towards us, very slowly, and often stopping to roar. It was very interesting watching him through the glasses for such a long time and at such close quarters. He was a very good 8-pointer with especially strong tops, which made him look better than he really was. Steadily he came on to us, and at about 100 yards he offered an excellent chance, so I let him have it, and down he came, and all was sunshine once more and lunch was quite a pleasant meal. We were a large party for lunch, as we had been joined by

Ross, who had told us there was a good single stag about, which proved to be our victim. And Willie Mackintosh had heard the shot, so he arrived on the scene with the pony; so with Fraser, Sandy, and Susan, we were six in number—quite the stalking beano. Our stag only weighed 13 stone 8 pounds, but his horns were quite good, and I determined to follow Billy Smith's example and keep the horns and part of the skull, and they now encircle the Madonna above the drawing-room mantelpiece at Balblair. After lunch Fraser spied a stag on the ridge south of the burn and spying rock, not far from his house, on what appeared to be very difficult ground; so saying good-bye to Ross and telling Mackintosh to follow with the pony and our stag, Fraser, Susan, Sandy, and I, started for No. 2, and after a very difficult stalk and a great deal of crawling, Fraser and I managed to get to about 150 yards from him. We did not make a very clever job of it, as when he got up he presented an awkward shot, and I only wounded him; and though pretty sick, he managed to gain the ridge and disappear. I told Fraser to run on and try and get a shot at him before he reached the wood, which was not more than half a mile distant. So away went Fraser at top speed, and found our friend very sick about 100 yards over the ridge, and he with great care proceeded to place a bullet in one of the haunches, which settled matters and also the venison; and I lumbered

on to the scene and administered the *coup de grâce*, and a somewhat inglorious victory was ours. He was a 9-pointer with a poor head and only weighed 13 stone 4 pounds, but I am glad we got him, as the stalk was difficult, ditto the shot, and the country was new and very handy for a kill, only about ten minutes from Fraser's house.

On the 4th of October Susan and I were out on Farley, and stumbled on to two stags on our way to the West Hill, both of which I missed. One was a hurried shot at a stag lying in a sheltered corrie just west of the Black Loch; we came on him suddenly round a corner, and before I could get comfortably into position he got us and jumped up and was off, and I got a running shot, which I missed. The other was a little farther west, and was a one-horned stag that was lying down at the foot of a steep rock overlooking the greens at the foot of the West Hill. He would not get up, and did not offer a very good shot lying, but still I think I ought to have got him, as he stood and gave me time for an easy second shot; but I was over him, I think, as he took very little notice of either shot and disappeared quite leisurely round the rock at the foot of which he was lying, and when next we sighted him he was half a mile away, making for the North Hill. After lunch we made for the North Hill, but all the deer that were on it went over the march on to Erchless, so at a quarter to 4 I advised

Susan to make for home with Jimmy Johnston, whilst Stone and I crossed to the West Hill for a final effort. We had not left them five minutes, and had only just got across the ravine on to the West Hill, when we saw some beasts about a quarter of a mile to our right almost on the Erchless March. There was a very heavy shower on at the time, and we could not see whether there was a stag with them, so we crept, not too cautiously, towards where they had disappeared over a ridge into a small hollow, and suddenly came on three or four hinds and a very fine stag 50 or 60 yards ahead of us. Needless to say, they were off like lightning, but thinking I might cut them off round a small rise in the ground behind which they had disappeared, I seized the rifle from John, and ran about 100 yards as hard as I could to where I thought they would reappear; and there, sure enough, was the stag, standing for a second or two to see what was up; there was no time for anything but to raise my rifle and fire from the shoulder standing. The stag gave a kick and disappeared, and though I thought I had hit him, we were not very sanguine about getting him; however, we hurried up (he was about 100 yards away when I fired), and found him lying stone dead about 50 yards from where I had hit him, almost on the Erchless March. I had got him bang in the right place, in the heart, so the shot, though a lucky one, was a good one. He





FARLEY, 4TH OF OCTOBER, 1918.

Weight, 17 stone 2 pounds.

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turned out to be a magnificent beast, the heaviest stag I have got on Farley in five years, and weighed 17 stone 2 pounds. He was an 8-pointer with a 28-inch spread and strong, rough horns, though not very dark in colour. He was a young stag, and had signs of two more on top on the right horn, so he would very likely have been a Royal next year. All this happened within a quarter of an hour of leaving Susan and Jimmy, and I almost thought they would hear the shot and turn back; however, they did not, and after performing the gralloch we made for the ridge which commands a view of the greens where Sandy and the pony had been left, and after a deal of signalling succeeded in attracting Sandy's attention, thanks to Susan, who on joining Sandy had a good look through her glasses back at the West Hill, and picked us up frantically signalling. So in an hour's time Sandy was back with us, and by 5.30 we had our stag on the pony's back, and with some difficulty and great care got him safely into the larder soon after 7, where he turned the beam at 240 pounds, and I took a cup of tea in Stone's house with great content, and was back at Balblair just before 8. It was very curious getting this stag so soon after they had left us. I kept saying to Susan I was always unlucky with Jimmy Johnston, and of course now I feel more than ever so, and always shall till we break our run of bad luck. Billy Smith and Merton are both lucky with

him; and of course John Stone is frightfully lucky.

The next day, Saturday the 5th, Susan and I were with Fraser on the home beat at Erchless, and "poor old Merton" had the long, long road to Glengowrie for his first day. He got a shot, but missed, and came home somewhat down-hearted, but nothing like the absolute misery it causes to me. After parting with Merton, Fraser, Susan, and I, made for Cairn Slofti, where the former had spied several lots of deer; they were all of them unapproachable, so we had an early lunch and waited to see what would happen. We had a pretty long wait of two hours, but it was quite interesting, as we could see one lot of stags and hear one or two other lots roaring at each other. Finally, Fraser made up his mind which to go for; it was a difficult job, as there were so many about and they were mostly split up and hidden from our view and each other's view, as Cairn Slofti is so steep and full of little corries and clefts and steep cliffs. And after a deal of climbing and crawling we found ourselves on a ridge commanding a plateau on which our stag was roaring away at another stag hidden away on a ledge below the plateau. I had a very uncomfortable shot, as Fraser was mostly in the way and I could not get a good rest; however, I got him all right, and though he disappeared, we did not think he could go far, and we soon found



ERCHLESS, 5TH OF OCTOBER, 1918.

Weight, 13 stone 13 pounds.

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him round the corner of some steep rocks, looking very sick. He managed to get up, and disappeared into a steep gully a bit higher up. I exhorted Fraser to climp up and finish him off, as I was a bit blown, which he proceeded to do, and, getting comfortably into position, proceeded to miss him clean from 30 or 40 yards! Much amused, he exhorted me to come up and finish the job, so I scrambled up, and did the necessary; and very pleased were we with our prize, as he was a very good 10-pointer, the best head we have got this year. He only weighed 13 stone 13 pounds, which was somewhat lucky, as we killed him pretty high up on Cairn Slofti in a very inaccessible, steep part, and when we eventually got Mackintosh and the pony the stag had to be dragged down 200 or 300 yards, as it was too steep for the pony to get up. We sent Susan home with Mackintosh and the pony and our stag thereon, with his horns looking very fine, and Fraser and I had another dart for a very good 10-pointer which we had spied half-way up the Hare Hill. We had a wild chase to cut him off, as he was careering madly after some hinds in our direction; but just as we thought we had got it absolutely right, we found he had altered his mind and let the renegade hinds go and returned at top speed to the hinds he had left on the Hare Hill—so our five-furlong sprint was in vain. But I have never seen a stag chase hinds so far or at such a pace—quite a mile at full tilt,

and then back again equally fast. It was very disappointing, as we got beautifully in position for the hinds he had tried so hard to stop, and our feelings I had better not attempt to describe when we discovered that my lord was not there, but had turned it up, and was half-way back to the faithful fairies of his flock. We were pretty late when we got back to the car, and found Merton already back from Glengowrie, comforting himself with a big cigar for the miss that is such misery.

However, on the following Tuesday, the 8th of October, he wiped all that out all right, and we had the day of the season. He was with Fraser on the home beat and got two nice stags—one at the foot of Hare Hill, a 7-pointer weighing 14 stone, and the other just outside the wood, a 9-pointer with quite a good head, weighing 14 stone 3 pounds, so he was blissfully happy when we met at 7 o'clock. Susan and I had gone to Glengowrie with Sandy, and commenced our adventures on the way up to meet Ross at the high spying rock by trying to stalk a single goodish beast near the Farley March; but we made a mess of it, and Ross joined us and took us east. And first we lay and waited for a couple of hours for a good stag with a poor head which was lying down with some hinds about 250 yards from us, but absolutely impossible to get nearer. We lunched to pass the time, and eventually something hap-

pened to move them (they probably got us, as we were getting rather careless in our movements) and they disappeared over the ridge on which they had been lying, and we saw them no more. We then spied a single stag lying below us in the bottom of Glengowrie about a mile west of Ross's house; we could not get nearer than 200 yards, and he would not get up, so I took him lying and missed him, and off he went up the valley on to Corriehallie. We then went for some stags that were roaring at each other farther up in Glengowrie, and guided by the roaring, I found myself within 50 yards of a good beast, which I knocked over, and he lay as though dead for several seconds, and then, to our great surprise and mortification, struggled to his feet and limped off, giving me a stern-on shot as he disappeared over the ridge, which I missed, and so we lost him, as when we next saw him he was half a mile away, very lame certainly, but going at a fair pace up the hill towards the Hare Mountain. By this time it was 4.30, and we were far from home; but there was a big herd of deer with some good stags in it about half a mile west, which had taken no notice of us, and Ross asked me if I would have one more try at them. I was pretty tired, but desperate keen to get a stag, as I knew Merton was sure to get one, and it would be our last day on Erchless, as I had only one to make up my number, so I bared my big right arm and drew

my snigger seen, and told Ross to lead on; and we had a rather difficult crawl and creep, and finally got to about 200 yards, and found we could get no farther. But the best stag in the herd happened to offer a tempting shot, so I fired and brought it off this time, and a very fine 11-pointer was brought to his knees, and I was able to get quite close up and finish him off. He was a grand stag, with splendid rough, stout horns, and a 31-inch span; he weighed 15 stone 12 pounds next day, as, of course, we could not get him in that night, not having the pony with us. Ross was very pleased, and congratulated me on the shot, and our success revived Susan and me wonderfully, which was just as well, as it was a long, long way to the car, and I made it longer by having two shots on the way home, both of which we thought hit the mark all right, so we had to search a bit for the beasts, but could find neither; so I hope we were wrong, and that I had missed, as they were longish shots, and it was pretty dark and nothing to weep over in the missing. It was 6 o'clock when we got to the top, and I saw Susan was pretty baked, and I was rather wondering how we were going to get her home; however, she stuck to it with her wonderful grit, and at her own pace, and Sandy and I did not have to carry her, and we were down soon after 7; and there was much rejoicing at the treble event, despite the fact that it made my number two over.



ERICLESS, 8TH OF OCTOBER, 1918.
Weight, 15 stone 12 pounds. span, 31 inches.

Fraser said he would take one, and I was only too glad to take the extra one. And so the curtain was once more rung down on Erchless, and our hearts were very sair to think it was all over for another year; it is such a treat to stalk with Fraser, and the possibilities of Glengowrie are always so alluring that it makes the season one long thrill; and though some of the days are unco hard, and a bit too tremendous, it is utterly wretched when it is all over, and good-bye has to be said to Fraser and Willie Mackintosh. However, there must be the sadness of farewell to all the good things of this world, else, perchance, they would not be so good. We finished on Erchless two days before our time, which suited Fraser, as he had the very tough job of getting thirty stags off Erchless this season. So far he has got four in addition to our twelve, which makes sixteen, and leaves him fourteen to get in a week—hard work, I should think, but he will go very near it.

The rest of the season on Farley was chiefly remarkable for the excellent shooting of “poor old Merton,” who got five stags, and two of them very fine ones. On the 9th he got a splendid 7-pointer weighing 17 stone 2 pounds, which equalled the record weight on Farley. He got this on the flats near the Duck Loch, and after lunch he got another on the West Hill, a 6-pointer weighing 13 stone 6 pounds. On the 10th I got an 8-pointer late in the afternoon on the West Hill;

he had good horns with a 28-inch span. We were very lucky to get him, as we stumbled on him at 5.30 on our way home, having given up all hope after a terrible day of disappointments and two rather bad misses. We were coming round the far side of the West Hill, and I was behind John, but saw the beast first; he was a good deal below us and about 200 yards away, so, seizing the rifle from John, I crept and crawled to the end of the ridge in front of us, and, peeping over, found him still there, standing broadside on, about 150 yards away; and, getting hastily into position, got him through the heart.

On the 11th Merton got an 8-pointer, 13 stone 6 pounds, on the West Hill, and wounded another in the afternoon, but lost him. On the 12th we drove the wood, and I was the lucky one and got the only shot of the day, when they were driving the east beat; it was a long shot at a wounded stag (probably wounded by Merton two days before when stalking with Roy), well over 200 yards, and I was doubtful whether I had hit him, but I thought it better to go and have a look after the drive, and after careful inspection and a rather clever bit of tracking by Jimmy Johnston for 150 yards or so, we came on our stag stone dead. I had hit him rather far back and high up under the spine. He was only a moderate beast, an 8-pointer weighing 13 stone 8 pounds, but it was satisfactory to get a wounded stag,

and it was my best shot of the season to end up with.

Merton, too, had a glorious wind up, as he got two stags on the West Hill on the 15th. He was lucky to get them, as they stumbled on them in "the way they have in the army," and there was very little stalking about it; but still, one must have a bit of good luck sometimes, and, anyway, Merton made no mistake or the luck would have been useless; and his reward was one very fine stag weighing 16 stone 1 pound, with a very fine wide head, 8-pointer and 30-inch span, and stout, rough, black horns. Needless to say, it was quickly despatched to Macpherson to be set up; but as it could not be got in that day, and we were going south the next, I have not yet seen it, which I am dying to when it adorns the walls of Hampton Court Palace. His other stag was quite a good beast for so late in the season, and weighed 14 stone 9 pounds; he was a 9-pointer with only a moderate head.

And now "The play is finished," as they say in Pagliacci—and a glorious five years it has been, in spite of the war with its cruel blows and eternal strain. However, that is now all over, and only the scars remain. And we are top dog, owing to that unfortunate habit of the British of always winning one battle in a war, and that the last one! And so it has not been all in vain, and by next season, probably, the deer-forests will be

fetching their normal prices, and enchanting
Erchless

“ Will be no more for me;
I shall have to be contented
With the stumblings on Farlee ” ;

and the years that are to come will never probably
be a patch on the glorious ones that are gone;
and though

“ Eheu fugaces Postume, Postume, ”

the years that are gone are not lost to me, lost
to me.

CHAPTER VI

FARLEY, 1919

THE season of 1919 will long be remembered as one of the worst on record—may it not be also remembered as the last on record! You never can tell in these days of upheaval; but surely the Deer Forest Commission which has been appointed to sit again will not come to the conclusion that the great majority of deer forests can ever be anything but deer forests, whatever one or two of the most accessible and low-lying might be turned into. That 1919 was such a poor season was the more curious because it only applies to the heads. The beasts were in many forests as good as ever and many heavy stags were got, but the heads were universally acknowledged to be the poorest on record, and with the bodies so good it is very difficult to account for, especially as very few of the good stags were killed off during the war. I think the extreme drought in May, June, and July had most to do with it. In the Beaulieu neighbourhood it was the driest within living memory; Strathglass was like Sahara, and

the deer must have had a very lean time of it at the critical period of horn-growing.

On Farley it was a heart-breaking year, as not only were the stags very poor, but also the hinds were very backward, and so the stags were quite remarkably late in coming after them; no roaring was heard on Farley till the 7th of October, a fortnight later than usual, and no stag was even seen till the 27th of September, except for the chance visitors the beginning of that month which furnished us with our first stalk—I should rather say stumble! I was at breakfast on the 5th of September when a message was brought to me from Stone that four stags had been seen on the West Hill the previous evening—two of them clean, two still in the velvet, and all quite shootable beasts. Would we come up as soon as possible? Of course we would; and the Faithful One and I were soon in the car and up on Farley in a few minutes, where we got the welcome news that our visitors were still at home. We at once made tracks for the spying rock where we made a careful spy of the West Hill, but our friends were nowhere to be seen; however, Stone was quite sure they had not left the ground, so we pushed on till we came to the ravine, but still no signs of any stags, so we clambered up the ravine and on round the West Hill, and were beginning to feel an awful qualm that they had given us the slip, when all of a sudden John was flat on his face,

and we were ditto, and he whispered to me that he had seen the horns of a beast 50 yards in front of us! Another of these tragic stumbles instead of a magic stalk. We made a masterly retreat of 50 yards as flat as the proverbial serpent, and then ventured on a peep. We found he was alone, and was cosily tucked up behind a rock quite unsuspecting of any danger. Luckily the wind was fairly strong and right ahead of us. Stone and I thought it better to try and get more above him, which we could easily do by crawling back a bit and then creeping up a little hollow; so leaving Susan and Jimmy where we were, we had no difficulty in crawling into position above him and about 50 yards from him. He did not offer at all a nice shot, as he was lying down with his head curled round on to his body apparently asleep, so only his neck was visible to me. I noticed he had a good spread and that he was still in the velvet, so he was very backward. I got a good rest and took very careful aim and got him right in the neck, but he sprang up and ran a few yards, and then rolled over just below us evidently *in extremis*. We ran down to him and found him on his back still kicking, so I seized him by the horns, and we turned him over and John stuck his knife into his throat to bleed him. Then suddenly John cried, "Look out!" (I had let go of his horns and was standing admiring him), and with the knife sticking in his throat he

struggled to his feet and made a plunge half at me and half past me, and just missed me as I stepped hurriedly back; and he actually staggered and stumbled 30 or 40 yards down the hill before he rolled over and turned up his toes for the second time of asking. And all this with a bullet through the neck and a knife in his throat! A wonderful instance of a stag's vitality. He was a fine young stag, but not in very good condition, and only weighed 12 stone 12 pounds. He had a fine spread of $32\frac{1}{4}$ inches, the widest I have got; and though the velvet was still on, it was quite loose and peeled off quite easily. It certainly was a bit of luck getting him, as I don't think he was one of the lot we were after. The latter must have moved on to Erchless, as we never saw them again. Evidently our trophy was a young roving stag who preferred solitude to company—or was he a sick stag in search of health? Of course, if we could have been sure of his staying on our ground for another year or two we would not have taken him, as he was a young stag coming on—a 6-pointer, I should mention—but with us it is here to-day and gone to-morrow, and if we had not taken him someone else probably would have ere very long. And so to lunch beside our prize—and prize he is in these days of desolation and destruction in dear Farley Wood, with never, oh! never a stag to gladden our hearts as in the days when Farley was a forest, and the wood was

as good as a sanctuary; and even in the good old days he would have been something rather out of the common with his fine spread, and when Sandy arrived with the pony he exclaimed, "Never did I think to be taking home the like of yon beast this day"—and so say all of us.

And we took nothing else home till the 30th, though we were very nearly doing so on the 27th, if it hadn't been for a blizzard which descended on us and sent us home with saddened hearts and an empty saddle instead. It happened thus: after a blank morning in the wood we spied two single stags on the heights at the west end of Corriehalloch—one was a small beast, the other quite a good one; they were in a very difficult position commanding the entire basin of the big corrie, so we had to retrace our footsteps nearly back to the wood and get in on them from the Lily Loch. There was a very cold north-west wind blowing, and after much toiling and a good deal of crawling we managed to get to about 100 yards from them; but only the small fellow was in sight, the big one was lying down behind a rock and only his horns were visible. There was nothing for it but to wait till the little fellow moved or the big one got up; and then the snow began, and we were caught in the worst blizzard we have been in. We stuck it for nearly half an hour, during which time my hat blew off and

disappeared over the edge of the rock, but it did not signify, as the snow was so thick you could not see 5 yards away, and then my hands got so cold I should not have been able to pull the trigger had we waited any longer; so I determined to crawl in on them, and hope for a shot at the big fellow, who was still lying down in spite of the storm. All the time the small one, of course, was in sight, and I was sorely tempted to be contented with him, but Stone was very keen on the better beast, and so we proceeded to crawl on, and wriggled ourselves round some rather awkward places, and I suppose got too saucy, for they either heard us or got our wind, and up went the head of the small brute and off they went without giving us the shadow of a chance; and so we sorrowfully turned our frozen toes homewards, with heavy hearts and almost frost-bitten fingers and hope almost dead of ever getting another stag. However, the glad day dawned at long last, the 30th of September. Stone told me there was a shootable beast with some hinds and a small stag or two on the flats above the Lily Loch. They were in full view of the ordinary path up from the west end of the wood, so we had to go up by a road we had never been up before, straight up to the enclosed bit at the back of Jimmy Johnston's house, and then creep along under the bank into the wood, and so across the corner of the wood and the valley beyond between the wood and

the steep rocks opposite; and climbing to the top of the rocks we had no difficulty in getting in above them on the flats, and crawling to about 150 yards from them. They were then rather suspicious, and I got rather a hurried shot at what we thought was the best stag; but the light was bad and he was standing with a dark background of a heathery knoll behind him, and a handsome miss was recorded and the agony of despair was once more mine. They dashed off over the ridge and down the deep descent into the valley west of the Lily Loch, and in the direction of Corriehalloch. One crumb of comfort remained—we found that I had missed one of the smaller stags, the best beast having been out of sight when I fired; and Stone thought they would settle in Corriehalloch, and that we should get another chance at them later on; so we decided to lunch, though we did not feel much inclined for it, as we were not only downhearted at the miss, but a bit blown as well, having had quite a dash after them when they disappeared over the ridge. After lunch Stone came and made me happier by saying they had settled low down in Corriehalloch, about one and a half miles away. So we lost no time in getting down to the small valley which Stone had seen them enter, and cautiously crawled to where we ought to have been able to see them, but they were not there. Suddenly they came in sight out of the next hollow, and seemed as though they would pass underneath

us; but after a good deal of indecision they suddenly turned and began to make for Farley Wood, occasionally stopping to feed and never going very fast. There was nothing for it but to try and cut them off, so Stone and I went off at our best pace over a very rough bit of country, but luckily all downhill: it must have been a good mile, and I should think we made good time; anyway, we did not break any bones, nor twist our ankles, nor even take a toss, and finally scrambled down the burn just in time to get a hurried shot at our friend on a small plateau on the opposite side of the path to the spying rock for the West Hill and close to it. I was so blown, and it was such a hurried affair, that I really do not know how I managed to get into position and find a rest; however, we managed it somehow and I got him rather far back, but he was down all right and could only partly rise, so I had evidently injured his spine, and when we got up to him he required another shot, and he fell actually on the path within 100 yards of the spying rock and, of course, within quarter of a mile of the deer fence behind Andrew Forbes's house—very handy for getting home.

Well, it was a great stalk and a great run in at the finish, and could only be done by knowing every inch of the ground; and it was a great feather in John's cap. We killed him at quarter to 4, and we had been after him since 10.30, so it was my

next longest stalk to the dance the big switch led us last year, and might almost be called my "Fox Trot." Of course, Susan had been left a mile away right on the top, but she rolled along in very quick time, and said she had had a glorious view of the whole affair through her glasses, and had got frightfully excited over our race to cut him off, as she could see what a near thing it would be. Our prize was only a very moderate beast with a very poor head, an 8-pointer weighing 13 stone, but still he was a beast with horns, and he was the best of the bunch; and we had had a thrilling day, and success had crowned our efforts at long, long last, and so we were a merry crew for our short homeward tramp. It is a sad heart that never rejoices.

And the very next day Billy Smith's rotten luck turned, and he got quite a decent beast on the West Hill—a 10-pointer with rough, strong horns, fairly long, but a very narrow spread; his weight was 14 stone 8 pounds. Billy told me it was a very awkward shot as the stag was at the top of the steep part of the ravine, and it was so steep where he was that he could not get a foothold, and kept slipping down; and finally Stone had to hold him up with his hands under his feet! However, they brought it off all right, and the stag rolled down to the bottom of the ravine—over 100 feet—but luckily without injuring his horns. I was so glad of Billy's success after such a heart-

breaking week as last was—never the sign of a stag except the two which I lost in the blizzard. And I must say I was very disappointed, as with the severe weather and so much stalking going on up the glen in the neighbouring forests, I made sure there would be deer on the ground; but the hinds would never leave Erchless, and where there are no hinds there will be no stags till right at the end of the season, so I hope there will be no hind shooting on Farley this winter, as there was none on Erchless, and then perhaps we may have a chance next season.

The next day, the 2nd, was my turn again. Billy Smith and I had been having alternate days of anguish and disappointment, as he had been unable to go south on account of the railway strike, and it looked like being another blank day of “agony, rage, and despair; oh, where have they gone to, oh, where?” for we could find nothing in the morning in spite of a most diligent search all over and around the west and north hills, so we lunched at the top of the ravine close on the march, and were sadly and sorrowfully retracing our footsteps when surely, unless my old eyes deceived me, there were some beasts away a mile or two in front of us on the flats below the Duck Loch. Our glasses soon showed us they were a small lot of about a dozen hinds and two or three stags—poor beasts, but still better than nothing—so Susan and I were wonderfully cheered and John

was a little less murderous. We were able to go straight for them, as the ground was very broken and they were a goodish distance away. When we got to about half a mile from them we had to go canny, as they had fed out of sight. However, we soon found them lying down in a small corrie immediately below the Duck Loch, and were able to creep and crawl up to about 100 yards from them; however, only the horns of the best beast were visible, so there was nothing for it but to wait, which we had to do for an hour, luckily sheltered from the wind and mostly in sunshine, though the latter had departed before our friend got up. Finally at half-past 5 he proceeded to do so, and I proceeded to miss handsomely midst the muffled maledictions of John and the groans of the rest of the party, and away they went up the hill; and just as my enemy was disappearing over the top, or rather just as he gained the top, I drew a bead in desperation and, thud, got him bang almost in the right place, but a little far back; anyway, over he went and we knew that our darkness was past and our long wait had not been in vain. John's astonishment was somewhat great when I rolled him over going full tilt at 200 yards after such an imbecile miss, and he exclaimed, "How do you do it?" And, of course, it was a lucky shot, but these professionals, who so seldom miss an easy shot, can never understand one sometimes bringing off a gallery one (or a

glorious fluke if you prefer to call it so). No matter; we were all hilarious as we dashed (I should rather call it "puffing") up the hill and found our stag only just over the summit unable to rise, and we quickly put him out of his misery, and the flask was produced in frolicsome Farley fashion. He was but a poor beast, but, oh, the joy of anything with horns after days spent in hours of fruitless search! He was a 7-pointer, with nothing of a head, and only weighed 12 stone 6 pounds, and we had to leave him out all night as it was so late and the pony was goodness knows where. But nothing mattered; success was ours, and even our old legs rolled home with lightness and our souls with great content.

Billy Smith got another small stag the next day in Farley Wood—a 7-pointer, 12 stone 4 pounds, in good condition but nothing of a head again. He tells me he could probably have got another, as they galloped past quite close to him, but he laudably resisted as there was nothing very good, and John did not want to disturb the wood more than necessary.

The lady of the forest tells me all this is very dull, and that I am getting garrulous in my old age, so I must take a pull and bring this chapter to a speedier termination than I had intended—very annoying just as I was getting into my stride. The railway strike being over at long last, the Parburys were enabled to get north on the 8th,

and Herbert had a better week than most of us as he got four stags—a 7-pointer on the West Hill on the 9th, weighing 14 stone 4 pounds, with a poor head but a fair spread of 29 inches; a 7-pointer also on the West Hill on the 14th, weighing 15 stone 2 pounds (the heaviest stag of the season!), and two wee staggies in the wood on the 15th, one of which weighed 13 stone—so he was fairly lucky, but, oh, the sighing and the sueing over such rotten heads and poor bodies!

I had one delirious day, and only one, needless to say the 13th, in this heartbreaking season. The weather was wild and wintry, with a piercing wind from the north-west and a snow blizzard every few minutes; but, nothing daunted and with an extra woolley or two, we sallied forth, and from the spying rock we found some deer on the North Hill opposite the ravine; we had no difficulty in getting near them as they were in a very favourable position, and found that the stag had quite a decent head, and there were about nine or ten hinds with him. We crawled on till we got to about 150 yards from them, and then they began to get suspicious, and finally I had to take the shot with a not very comfortable rest and the stag standing three-quarters on, and the light very bad as a blizzard was just beginning. Consequently I was not surprised when he dashed off seemingly unhurt; but John thought it sounded like a hit, though the stag did not kick or lift to the shot.

However, I noticed that when they disappeared into a little hollow about 400 yards away the stag was dropping a bit behind, and when they emerged and went over the ridge out of sight the stag did not follow for some time, and so I began to think John was right. We dashed after them, and sure enough on getting to the ridge there was our friend lying down about 30 or 40 yards away in a very queer state, but not done for, as the sequel shows. I fired again from the shoulder, and up he jumped and disappeared into the blizzard over the North Hill; after him once more we dashed again, and after a short sharp burst up hill we descried him very far through on the far side of the North Hill, and I was able to creep in and do the necessary. Guided by the shots, Susan soon appeared through the blizzard, and we were all highly delighted, as he had quite a good head—a 9-pointer with 29-inch spread and stout, rough, black horns; he only weighed 13 stone 4 pounds, but it was a comfort to get a decent head at long last, and our toil had been long, ditto, ditto, our sprint, and thank goodness they were both of them over, and we were able to shelter from the blizzard and struggle with our lunch, as well as our frozen fingers would permit. I have had the head set up as a roarer, and unfortunately it is one of Macpherson's failures—the horns are far too upright and not nearly laid back enough, and the head is not stretched out enough. As far as I have been able to make out

(and the pictures show the same thing), the head and the body are almost in a straight line when a stag is roaring, and the horns lie almost down on his back; however, there it is. It must be very difficult to set up a good roarer, and one must take the rough with the smooth, or rather the realistic with the ridiculous.

We had to get back to the south side of the North Hill for lunch so as to find shelter from the icy blast, leaving John to go for Sandy and the pony; he did not have to go very far before he could signal him, and they soon had our friend on his way to the larder, and John joined us and said there were some beasts feeding to the west of the Duck Loch on the rough ground between the latter and Erchless, about one mile from where we were. Luckily the day had improved a bit, though it was still bitterly cold, and we were soon up and away and got to 300 or 400 yards from where we knew they were lying in the shelter of a small corrie, when suddenly, a few hundred yards to our right, we saw a solitary hind being pursued by an amorous stag. They were coming along at quite a good pace, the hind about 100 yards in front of her would-be lord and master, and so intent were they on matters matrimonial that they had not seen us, so we were flat as flounders in a second, and on they came, and their path brought them about 200 yards in front of us, where the stag foolishly paused for a moment,

and I let him have it. Thud went the bullet, and up he reared and danced round for a second or two and then fell over, and his life's romance was at an end. Needless to say the beasts we were originally after were disturbed by the shot, and we never saw them again; but our prize was quite worth having—a nice 7-pointer with rough black horns and a fair spread, and his weight was 14 stone 8 pounds. Of course, he had to be left out all night, as Sandy was away home with our morning's bag; but he was none the worse for that, and we were all as pleased as Punch at once more bringing off No. 2 after so many failures.

As it was only 3 o'clock, we thought we would have a look into Glengowrie and see if we could equal our record of the immortal 4th of October, 1917, and, sure enough, we might have if I had been more clever, as when we had climbed to the tops overlooking Glengowrie we saw some deer coming in from Erchless, and amongst them quite a good stag. They were coming in at a good pace, and we had to creep and crawl as fast as we could 200 or 300 yards so as to try and cut them off. They came on to about 150 yards from us, and then they seemed a bit undecided whether to come on or to return to Erchless, and I had rather a hurried shot with a very indifferent rest. However, I hit him all right, as he reared up and seemed very groggy for a moment or two; but, alas! he

soon recovered and made off with the rest over the tops and across the intervening flats on to Erchless, and our chance of equalling our record was gone. I had evidently hit him on the foreleg, but after the first shock he did not seem to mind much, and though he limped a good deal, I don't think the leg was broken, and let us hope he will soon recover and be none the worse for my bungling. We ended up on the march just above Donald Ross's house, so we had a good long tramp back to the car, and we were all pretty tired when we got there after our great day of sunshine and snow, of exultation and exasperation.

And now no more of 1919 except to add that it ended as it began, with vanity and vexation of spirit and plenty of snow to cool our ardour. We had only got eleven of our number by the 15th, so Mr. Garrioch gave us an extra day, and we were lucky enough to get two on the 16th. John got one early in the morning at the corner of the wood by Sandy's house, a good 6-pointer weighing 15 stone 2 pounds, which would probably have been over 17 stone three weeks earlier, as he was much "run," and I got a small 7-pointer on the West Hill, which I missed at 100 yards owing, I think, to the dazzle of the snow, and rolled over at 200 yards just as he was going over the ridge out of sight; he weighed 12 stone 12 pounds, and had a very symmetrical wee head, but, of course, in a good year he would have been

counted as trash and we would not have looked at him. Let us pray that the gods will send us a glorious C minor finale for 1920—after that there may be no stalking, the times are so upside down.

CHAPTER VII

BENULA AND FARLEY 1920

ALAS that stalking should be the diminutioner of other joys ! But so it is. Time was when Lord's and Wimbledon and Sandwich made the heart palpitate and enthralled the mind. Now they only serve as stepping-stones to the day when "It's northward-ho for Farley and the thrills that are to come." This year *the day* was the 15th of July, and the 16th saw me in dear Balblair once more, where the peace passes all understanding and the irritable can be at rest, and where the Daylight Saving Bill need vex one's soul no more. The clocks were at once put back, and we basked once more in the sunshine of Greenwich time.

The first fortnight was mostly passed in fishing, and evening prowlings on Farley for roe, both with indifferent success. I ought to have got one buck, as I managed to crawl to about 80 yards from him, but he was lying down and the bullet was about 1 inch too low and, needless to say, he did not give me a second chance; and another evening I got a shot from the shoulder at about 100 yards and wounded a buck in the foreleg, but

he got away and we never found him, though we searched long and diligently. On the 31st Susan and her luggage came north, and said I to myself, said I, "Now the luck will change"; and sure enough on the 2nd of August, Thow, the new second keeper on Farley, arrived panting and dishevelled at Balblair about 7 p.m., saying there was a good stag feeding on the bare bit above John's house. I rushed out to find Parker and get the car, but the former was nowhere to be found till quarter to 8, so it was 8.15 before we were up at Farley. John was still waiting for me, though it was beginning to get dark, and we scrambled very cautiously up the burn about quarter of a mile east of his house, but could see no sign of the stag. Then, suddenly, about quarter to 9 the beast jumped up out of some ferns about 100 yards behind us! and off he went top speed in the direction of the saw-mill. It was too dark to risk a shot under such conditions, so sadly and sorrowfully I smothered down some swear words and we mutually condoled with each other on the bad luck of being half an hour too late. We must have passed him quite close, and had the light been a little better we must have seen him before we got up to him. However, "all's well that ends well," and the very next evening, accompanied by our lucky *jeune fille* of the hills, we were up there by half-past 6; and repeating our scramble up the burn I suddenly saw our friend

feeding amongst the débris of the fallen trees about 100 yards to our left. He got us almost directly, but I had just time to snatch the rifle from John and fire from the shoulder standing, and brought him to his knees, from which he could never rise again as I had broken both his forelegs. A lucky shot and a bad one, but still it was a very hurried affair and the light was very bad, and he made a very bad target all amongst the brushwood and the tree-stumps. He was quite a shootable beast, 13 stone 8 pounds, and almost clean of the velvet—a 7-pointer with beautiful rough horns, but no great spread and not very long; still, he was quite a prize and our delight was immense, and John and I at once agreed that it was the luck of the lairdess that had done it. My “ould” friend Gould May had arrived that afternoon from Ireland (where he had had wonderful fishing on the Erne, 20 salmon in the fortnight), and of course he said that it was he that had brought the luck. Anyway they did it between them, and we did a bottle and a bit between ourselves that evening. Shure it was a good start for the old trio that have cracked so many bottles and so many jokes together !

A. M. Walters arrived a day or two afterwards, and nothing happened to disturb the harmony of the quartette for the next fortnight. The buck continued to be evasive, and my guests continued to be abusive about the fishing, which was quite

hopeless, in striking contrast to last year, when it was the best ever known—viz., 431 sea-trout, weighing 603 pounds, and 9 grilse and 2 salmon. However, the grouse were fairly good, which kept us from open enmity, and on the 19th my roe efforts were rewarded, and I got a nice young buck in Farley Wood in the centre beat. He was only a two-year-old and his horns, of course, were not great, but still it was quite a pretty little head, and the shot was creditable (it was over 100 yards), and I got him bang in the heart.

And that was the beginning of the fun, for the next day I heard from Fraser that Glencannich forest was unlet, and he thought I might get some early stalking on it, so I wrote and made an offer for a few stags; but I was too late, as it had just been let, and the agents offered me Benula, which was 7 miles still farther up the glen and 30 miles from Balblair—too far, but too tempting not to have a shot at and in, and so we fixed it up at three stags just for the sake of having a look at the forest. The first attempt on the 24th was a failure, as the mist never cleared and the stags, of course, were on the high tops; it was clear up to about 2,000 feet, but very thick above that, and after lunch the mist came down still lower. We went up the steep zigzag from the new lodge with Finlayson, the head stalker, and made for the top of Scurr-na-Lapich, 3,700 feet. It was a tremendous climb, and there being no view and

no chance of a beast made it all the more arduous. When we got up about 3,000 feet we turned west along the Braulen march, and had our lunch on a very uncomfortable and draughty ledge of rock with the mist blotting out everything; and as it seemed to be getting worse instead of better we reluctantly gave it up and climbed down again, and returned to where we had left the car at the old lodge: so our first effort at Benula was all toil and no thrill, except the thrill of wondering whether one was going to survive the ascent!

Friday, the 27th, we tried again and left Balblair at 8.30 a.m., picking up Stone on the way, as he had said he would very much like to come. We got to Benula just before 10.30, and found Finlayson awaiting us with three ponies, so we were able to ride up, which was a great help, as the ascent was very long, though not quite so steep as on the north side. The morning was misty, but Finlayson thought it would clear about midday. We took one and a half hours to make the ascent, and then the ponies were sent back to wait for us at the end of Loch Longard, two miles west of the lodge. We were on the ridge which ended in Carn Eige, 3,877 feet, the highest mountain north of the Grampians. The mist was trying to lift and we soon spied a large number of stags in the corrie below us, but owing to the mist we had not been able to see them soon enough, and they had got a touch of our wind and made off

up the opposite side of the corrie. We lunched in glorious sunshine on a grassy slope about half a mile from the summit of Carn Eige, and then proceeded along the ridge, and soon found another large lot of stags in the corrie on our right, about 1,000 feet below the summit. There was still a good deal of mist about, mostly below us now, and Finlayson thought we could get over the summit and round to the pass beyond it, up which the stags were sure to pass if he left the boy who was with us to move them. But, alas! the best laid plans "gang aft agley," for in getting to the pass we went right over the top instead of going a bit round and beyond it—cut it too fine, in fact, to save our old legs—and the deer must have got our wind in spite of being 1,000 feet below us, for they were already on the move when the boy began to show himself, and passed out of the corrie between us and the boy over the ridge we had crossed half an hour before! Cruel luck! and I thought I was going to have the time of my life, and at all events the chance of a right and left! There were several goodish beasts in the herd, but very few of them clean, and none of them as good as the fine fellow I got three days later; so though it seemed all dust and ashes, it was all for the best in a very beautiful world of glorious sunshine and mountain tops and mossy corries. Naturally Finlayson and I were much cast down at the slings and arrows of outrageous

fortune; but he suggested we should have a try round Benula mountain, as though it was farther to the ponies it was a more gradual descent and better walking, and there was the chance of a stag, so, of course, I was all for it. We had not gone very far before we spied a stag feeding below and in front of us with a few hinds; he was only a small beast, but offered us a fair stalk, and after all the stalk is the thing, especially so early in the season, and so we determined to pocket our pride and go for him. We had no difficulty in getting in above him, as he was a great deal below us; but then commenced a very long slither down a very steep grassy slope, which proved very trying to the seat of my knickers, and must have worked sad havoc with Susan's undies! However, we slithered down all right to about 300 feet above him, and then found we could get no farther on account of the hinds, and he was lying down and only his horns were visible; so there was nothing for it but to wait, which we did with great content for half an hour, as the sun was shining most gloriously and we had a lovely, mossy couch to lie on. All the mist had cleared away and the view was superb, and if the stag had been a good one it would have been as near heaven as it is possible for a mortal to be in this twentieth century of din and discord. After half an hour our friend got up and showed me his back, but his legs were out of sight, and I was rather sur-

prised when Finlayson said, "Take him now." However, I did so and missed—just over him, Finlayson said. They all bunched together, but luckily the stag stood quite clear, and in a second or two I fired again and got him bang through the heart, and Finlayson exclaimed, "Splendid shot!" So my day was happy. He was only a wee staggie of 12 stone, and nothing of a head and not quite clean of the velvet, but still he was something after our two disappointments and, anyway, venison in the larder and very good venison, too. Finlayson and Stone then proceeded to drag him down to the path, a mere matter of about 1,500 feet, as seemingly in this forest the ponies never leave the paths. However, they were down almost as soon as we were, and then Finlayson discovered he had left my rifle where the stag had been killed! So there was nothing for it but for him to toil up again and fetch it, so he was not likely to forget my first stag on Benula. The ponies were three miles down the path, so Susan, Stone, and I went on so as to send one of them back for the stag, and as it was getting late and we were five miles from the lodge there was not much time to spare. Susan and I were very tired by the time we met the ponies, and very glad of the lift for the last two miles, and still more glad for the tea when we reached the lodge at quarter to 8. It was a lovely evening and altogether a never-to-be-forgotten day, as the views

were magnificent after the mist had completely cleared off (which it did about 4 p.m.), and the stalk had been successful and entertaining, one of its most diverting features being the utter disregard Finlayson took of three or four hinds which were lying down or feeding 200 or 300 yards farther up the mossy slope we had slithered down, and seemingly we were in full view though, of course, a good deal above them. We had a lovely moonlight night for our drive home, and reached Balblair at 10 p.m., where Watty (A. M. W.) and the servants had long given us up for lost.

But glorious and all as was the 27th, it was as nothing compared to our final effort on the 30th. We left Balblair at 8.30 in a thick mist, and picked up Sandy three miles up the glen. He at once remarked he had been afraid we should not come, but that he thought it would clear up about midday and be very hot, and so it turned out; but all the way up it was very grey, and the mist was quite low down when we reached Benula at 10.30. Boa, the second stalker, was in charge to-day, and we had only two ponies as Finlayson wanted one on the north beat. The wind was east, so we had a long ride along the shore of Loch Longard and two miles farther west, where we left the ponies and had a very stiff climb to reach our ground. However, we were up by 12.30 and had got above the mist and found the tops quite clear, with brilliant sunshine and

very hot as Sandy had predicted. We at once spied a good number of stags lying down about half a mile in front of us and a good deal above us to the left of a burn, which we hoped would give us cover to creep farther up. However, our advance was made very difficult by the fact that there were a good many hinds lying on the right side of the burn opposite the stags, and in spite of every care they got us when we had crawled and climbed about half the distance up the burn, and a most fascinating stalk was brought to a sad end. We lunched beside the burn in glorious sunshine, and after a short rest girded our loins for the rest of the ascent. By the time we had reached the summit Susan was cooked and said she could go no farther, so Boa advised her resting with Sandy, where she was for an hour, and then they could both descend to the ponies which would have arrived by then, and which they would be able to see on the path about 2,000 feet beneath them—only a grassy descent, but very steep—and they managed it quite comfortably when the time came. Boa and I then pushed on to examine the corries on either side of the ridge we were on. We found nothing in the next one on the left, but a little farther on in the corrie on our right we spied two fairly good stags lying down alone. They were a little below us, and we had no difficulty in crawling and sliding down till we were about 100 yards from them.

We did not have to wait long, as they got up almost at once, and the best presented an easy shot and I knocked him over all right; he lay on his back for quite a minute with his legs in the air, and we made sure he was all right, and then, suddenly, he struggled up and stood with his hind-quarters drooping as though I had hit him far back and his spine was injured. I thought it better to give him another shot, which Boa thought hit him but I thought missed. Anyway, he moved off and was out of sight in a second, as he was on a small plateau with a very steep descent just behind him. Boa and I dashed to where he had disappeared, and in a few seconds we caught sight of his horns a good bit below us and about 200 yards away. Boa exclaimed, “ He’s not done yet ! ” and so it proved, for when we got down to where we had last seen the horns no trace of him could be found. We hunted backwards and forwards, and as we were near the top and it was very steep we could see a great deal of the corrie. At last, as we were being drawn farther and farther away from the ponies, and lower and lower, involving another terrific climb to regain the ridge and descend on the other side to the ponies, I said we must give it up; Boa said he would descend a bit as the stag might be lying dead in one of the numerous little hollows which we could not see, and that he would rejoin me on the ridge ten minutes after I got there. So I turned to retrace

my steps, but had not got 10 yards from Boa when I heard a hiss from him, and looking round saw him beckoning me. I was beside him in a second, and there, about 1,000 feet below us, was our stag, sick unto death but just able to totter along. We tried to get down to him but he kept on, and Boa suggested that we should leave him as he was drawing us so far away from the ponies, and he would get him in the morning as he could not go far, and he would have no difficulty in finding him, and anyway it would be too late to get the ponies round to get him in the same evening; in addition there was a good chance of getting another stag on the other side of the ridge on our way down to the ponies, so I readily assented, and back we climbed to the ridge. I may mention that Boa got him next day all right; he was lying down almost in the same place where we had left him, and he was surrounded by hinds, who I suppose had come to tend him, as there were none near him when we left him (reminding one of Landseer's picture of "The Dying Stag," a copy of which, presented by the artist "to the Master of Lovat," is in Balblair). He was not dead, and Boa had no difficulty in getting to about 130 yards from him, and could have shot him through the neck, but thought he would get in a little nearer; and in so doing the hinds got him and went off, and this made the stag get up and stagger into rather a steep place, where

Boa shot him, and he rolled down a goodish bit and unfortunately broke one of his horns; which was a pity, as he had rather a good head, a 7-pointer with strong rough horns, clean of the velvet, not very long but a fair spread; his weight was 14 stone 7 pounds, so he was well worth the trouble he gave us. My bullet had struck him in the belly well backward, which accounts for the droop in his hind-quarters when he struggled to his feet.

On regaining the ridge we began a gradual descent on the other side to where Susan and Sandy and the ponies were to meet us. The ground was very rocky, and we had not gone far before we spied two very good stags lying down in front of us and rather below us. The ground was so broken and there were so many large boulders about that it was quite easy to crawl in and wait for them to get up and decide which of the two to go for; the one I could see best had the best head. Boa thought the other was rather the heavier stag; of course, I chose the former and wriggled into position, and covered him with my rifle. Almost immediately he sprang up and stood facing me—probably a hind or two which we had not seen had got us. Boa said, "Can you take him now?" and the same second my rifle rang out, and the stag turned and walked away as though nothing had happened and was behind a rock in two or three steps. I groaned and

exclaimed that I had missed him, and that I rather fancied myself at a facing shot! Boa said, "Are you sure you missed him?" And I said I was afraid I was, as he neither kicked nor lifted to the shot, and simply walked out of sight seemingly quite unconcerned. Well, we hastened forward to where he had disappeared, and there we saw a large herd of deer streaming away down the corrie, and perhaps making for a pass which Boa said we might reach in time for another shot. We got our glasses out, and could not find our two stags in the herd. Then suddenly I saw the two a good bit behind the rest of the herd, and Boa agreed that they were probably our friends, so we were just making off full tilt for the pass, and had only gone a few yards, when we came on a great pool of blood, and Boa exclaimed, "Why, you must have got him"; and there, a few yards farther on, was our friend as dead as a door-nail with the bullet right through his heart. He looked a magnificent stag as he lay on the ground, and weighed 16 stone 1 pound when we got him in; he would probably have weighed nearly 18 stone by the middle of September. He had quite a good head of 9 points, with a good spread and fairly long—three on top on the right; only two on the left—good brow and bay antlers, but no tray, and almost clean of the velvet; altogether a wonderful prize for so early in the season. We had got him almost on the top of the ridge, and it must have been a very

arduous job dragging him down to the pony path quite 2,000 feet below. Anyway I know I was jolly tired when I got down, and I had only the rifle and two sticks to carry. Needless to say, Susan and Sandy were frightfully excited to hear what a thrilling time we had had since we had left them, though it was bad luck on my two mascots to have missed the fun. It was 6 o'clock when I got down, and quarter to 7 before the pony with our prize joined us, as Boa and the stag were about half a mile farther up the path, he having pulled it down straight, of course, whilst I had tottered down in a slanting direction; and we were six miles from the lodge, and only one pony between us for riding, so we were indeed worn out when we reached the lodge at 9 o'clock, though very blissful at our double event. Tea and an egg revived us wonderfully—we had eaten scarcely any lunch as we knew we had that enormous climb directly afterwards, so it was from 8.30 a.m. till 9 p.m. on half a bap and a wee bit of cake. But what is food and drink compared to the elixir of excitement and the glamour of the High Tops, and two stags of 16 stone 1 pound and 14 stone 7 pounds to complete one's blissfulness! But after bliss the blister. The drive home was a terrible affair; it was 9.30 before we were ready to start, and of course it was quite dark and very misty, and our acetylene lamps were worse than useless, as they turned the mist into a dense fog

and we could not see 5 yards ahead of us, and so, of course, we had to crawl the first thirteen miles down Glencannich, as the road is very narrow and terribly tortuous and fairly steep, and the first four miles is all along Loch Mullardoch with a sheer drop into the loch of 40 or 50 feet—most unpleasant. However, we took two hours over it and got down at long last, and I should think Parker was thankful when he safely landed us on the main Strathglass Road. I know all that was left of the laird and lairdess was very thankful! It was past midnight when we got to Balblair, and our wonderful day of sixteen hours was over. Sally and I have had many thrilling adventures together, but I think this 30th of August, which was the 31st and her birthday before it was over, will long be remembered by us as the Great Adventure, not so much from a stalking point of view as the wonderful day on Erchless before the snow-storm, October, 1917, but rather from the variety of its thrills, the arduousness of the ascent, the wonderful sunshine on the tops above the clouds, the disappointment of the first stalk, the uncertainty of the wounded stag, the grand climax of such a good stag so early in the season, and the anticlimax of getting back to the lodge and the drive home: all this makes it a day never to be forgotten and pretty hard to beat. Whatever Farley may bring forth, Benula has indeed produced an intermezzo more wonderful than Mascagni's.

Poor dear Farley—it did not bring forth much, and we had a "Pathétique" finale instead of the glorious "C minor" which I had hoped for. We never saw a shootable beast during September, though I might have got two small stags (about 11 stone each) on two separate occasions, both of which I missed ingloriously—one near the Duck Loch when we were grouching the beginning of the month, and the other on the West Hill at the end of the month. However, at long last on the 4th of October, a very wet day, we found some stags near the Duck Loch, and after a long wait and a very wet lunch standing up, I got a shot from behind a rock at a fair beast which was moving off, and brought him to his knees with a very lucky shot that broke both his forelegs—a 7-pointer with a very poor head, weighing 13 stone 10 pounds, in good condition, and quite a prize in these days of modern music and daylight saving.

And the next day, also very wet, we got a small stag on the top of the North Hill; and the mist was so thick we got utterly lost, and made an awful muddle of dragging the beast down, as, of course, we could not get the pony to the top, and dragged it straight in the wrong direction right away from where the pony was waiting, so that Sandy had a much longer journey to make than he should have had; and he was only a poor wee staggie of 11 stone 11 pounds, so our satisfaction was not as complete as our soaking.

And on the 6th Farley provided its one thrill of the season, and a real good thrill it was, and ought to have been even better had I been cleverer. Merton Barker went to the West Hill with John and got a decent stag (alas ! his only one this season) of 14 stone 4 pounds, and a fair head of 7 points. Susan and I were with Thow in the wood and saw quite a good beast on the big moss above the saw-mill; he was in quite a favourable position, till the felling of some trees about half a mile from him frightened him and moved him farther west. He then turned north, and though I tried to cut him off he was too quick and got round us, and then got our wind and disappeared into the east beat. We saw the quite fresh tracks of other stags but could not find the beasts themselves, and by 1.30 we were quite exhausted, and very glad of our lunch which we took on the top of the rocks facing the wood on its north side. I told Thow to have a good spy when he had finished his lunch, as you get a great view from these rocks looking west and north over most of the forest. Susan and I had just finished our smoke after lunch, and I was just thinking of making a move, when Thow crawled round the rock behind which we had been lunching and said there were three stags coming in as fast as they could from Erchless, and seemingly coming up the pass just beneath us so as to gain the shelter of Farley Wood. He had watched them for

several minutes, but dared not move until they had disappeared from sight in one of the hollows between us and the Black Loch. I seized the rifle and crawled across the small plateau we were on and was in position in a few seconds, and almost immediately they emerged from the hollow into which they had disappeared, and as they were very blown they stood for two or three seconds undecided whether to come on or turn back. However, they decided for the wood, and came on at a very slow trot, which soon subsided into a walk as they had evidently had a long gallop and were frightfully blown. This gave me plenty of time to make up my mind which to take, as they all had goodish heads and seemed about the same weight. Finally I decided on the last, as it seemed rather the best head, and Thow evidently thought the same, as he whispered, "Take the last." It was an easy shot, as, though they were moving, they were only about 50 or 60 yards away, and I got him all right. Unfortunately he did not drop at once, but went on for a few yards and then rolled over and I saw he was safe; but those few seconds prevented my getting a right and left, as the other two were almost out of sight and over the pass, and my second shot was a very hurried affair and I was just behind No. 2, and so the chance of a lifetime was gone. Had I been very nippy I believe I might have got all three; I certainly ought to have got two, but

for those few seconds' fatal indecision. However, I had the consolation of knowing I had got the one with the best head, though Thow thought the leader was rather the heavier stag. Anyway our prize was a beauty, I think perhaps the best head I have ever got on Farley—a beautiful 7-pointer with very stout, rough, long horns, and a perfect shape though the spread was not equal to the length; their stoutness and their darkness were their great features. He did not turn out to be as heavy as we thought, as we guessed him over 15 stone and he only turned the beam at 14 stone 2 pounds; still he was the one bright spot of a tragic year, and our hearts were very blithe and gay as we made for the wood, after the gralloch and the customary libations, to see if by chance we could pick up our two friends who had escaped us. However, it was not to be, as though we came on their tracks we failed to find them after a diligent search of two hours, and we never saw them again that day or subsequently; and I should think that probably after a night's rest they returned whence they came, which might have been Erchless, as Thow maintained, or even Struy or Strathconon—they had evidently galloped a long way. That was our only joy-day in this sad year of wistful longings and wild regrets. Often during the last few weeks did Finlayson's words that day on Benula come back to me. He was pointing me out a corrie which he said was a

certainty for a good stag or two, "When this was a forest, but now," and his looks said the rest; and often I found myself muttering, "When this was a forest," as day after day we toiled over and around the West Hill and the North Hill, and Glengowrie and all the big broken flats between, and never the sight of a decent beast to cheer the faint heart of the laird and the stout heart of his lady. However, so it is, and it is no use sighing over "the days that were and never will be more"; and as the secret of happiness lies in limiting our aspirations, let us be content with what the gods give us and not hanker after the halcyon days that are for ever gone, I fear—"Farley, with all thy sheep I love thee still," and would rather kill seven stags thereon than fourteen elsewhere.

And seven stags were all we did get this season. I got another on the West Hill on the 11th, after an inglorious miss at a small beast in the morning on the North Hill; he was a moderate beast of 14 stone with a very poor head, but he was something to go home with, a joy not often ours this season, and as we got him on the east side at the foot of the West Hill, we were quite close to Sandy and the pony, and we all rolled home together for the only time this year on Farley! I never got another stag, though two extra days were kindly given us; but after I had said good-bye to John on the last day he had a bit of luck, as he got a very good 6-pointer in the wood when it was nearly dark.

He weighed 13 stone 11 pounds, but was very much run and would have weighed at least 2 stone heavier a month earlier; his horns were beautifully dark and $30\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, so his skull was worth keeping, and it now adorns my study walls *vis-à-vis* to the glorious 7-pointer, and together they make a bonny pair to console me for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

And now my tale is told, and I must reminisce no longer. I could go on like this for ever, like Buttercup and Captain Corcoran, but it is best to stop before one becomes tiresome; one is apt to forget that, however interesting to oneself, one's own doings and undoings are much less interesting to others, and may be even grotesque or, worse still, boring. And so let me wish all my readers, if any, the best of luck when next they wrestle with their heart's desire, be it in the forest, field, or river—and, as one of my stalker's said to me after an awful miss when we were having a wee droppie, "Here's to the death of the next stag."

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