

MILORD'S GAME BIRD.

HOW PHEASANTS ARE LOOKED AFTER ON ENGLISH ESTATES.

The Men who keep the Supply from Running out—Mildred and His Friends on Gunning-Poachers and Game Keepers—Popular Sport in England.

From any point of consideration the English pheasant is the most splendid bird that reaches the English market.

Somebody, perhaps an Irishman, has called it "the sacred Ibis of Great Britain." It is certainly all but worshipped. The idolatry is an expensive one: for it surely costs England, Ireland and Scotland more than a million pounds sterling, to rear, to shoot and to finally eat such pheasants as annually come to the gun.

If the vast areas of valuable enclosed land comprised in gentlemen's seats and parks demesnes of the nobility, which are almost solely devoted to runs and coverts for pheasants, should be taken into account, and anything like a fair rental for these be added to the actual current sums expended, the outlay upon this one bird alone would annually reach millions upon millions of dollars, and be found to exceed all other forms of outlay by British sportsmen combined.

Indeed the pheasant is an interesting bird in all its relations to life upon the great English estates—in its extraordinary personal beauty; as the immemorial worry of keepers and prey of poachers; in its occupying greater attention from titled sportsmen than do all other game birds of Britain; and, above all from its superb and matchless place among the delicacies of the table. Every one has heard how Sidney Smith, and he was no mean epicure, asserted that he knew of no purely earthly joy equal to roast pheasant with rich gravy, chipped potatoes and bread sauce. For an American's understanding, it may truly be said that the pheasant is our turkey, partridge and quail in one ample and delicious frame.

The limitations of shooting in Great Britain undoubtedly add much, from the sportsman's standpoint, to the deep British interest at all times in these splendid birds. It is almost inconceivable to an American how universally the "sportman" craze prevails in England, Ireland and Scotland, and how every acre of land and rod of shore, outside of and distinct from all other uses to which it may be put, is sportsman's property, yielding extraordinary returns in rentals for the "shooting" and "fishing" rights alone. On a former occasion I demonstrated that the exercise of these rights and privileges annually cost British sportsmen the enormous sum of £6,000,000 or \$30,000,000 in American money.

Necessarily great pains are annually taken to keep up the pheasant supplies. There are some professional breeders. Their establishments are distinctively known as game farms. From these, pheasants, eggs, chicks and adults are often supplied by the hundreds and thousands to the more aristocratic estates; although a nobleman or gentleman greatly loses in caste among aristocratic sportsmen if he is known to lack the ability of keeping his own preserves bountifully supplied through his own gamekeeper.

The Prince of Wales is by no means first among the breeders, and yet on his estate at Sandringham and the adjoining property of Castle Risingham which he has leased for sporting purposes, as many as from 7,000 to 8,000 pheasants are annually provided by his royal highness for his sportsmen friends. In two or three of the dukeries, and on other large estates as well, immense pains and expense are given to insure abundant supplies of the birds of Colchis. The killing of from 2,000 to 4,000 birds at one "batue" has often been recorded, and it is well known that 9,500 were shot during one season at Elvedon, in Norfolk, which has an area of 17,000 acres. There are other game farms as they are called in other parts of England, and there is at least one such huge pheasantry in Scotland, on the Marquis of Ailsa's estate in Argyshire.

On all estates of average size the head gamekeeper will be allowed a half dozen keepers to assist him in breeding and caring for the game, and in protecting it from inroads of poachers. Often the number of under keepers will be increased by drawing, at certain seasons, upon the under foresters; so that where from 2,000 to 4,000 pheasants may be required for the autumnal guns of milord's sportsmen guests, with the wives and children of the helpers who may live in cottages within the demesne walls, a score of persons will be employed in the breeding and caring for pheasants upon one estate alone.

Usually these birds which have escaped both the poacher's nets and the sportsmen's guns are allowed to run wild during the winter: care principally being taken to keep their runs and coverts clear of too great obstructions by snow, to have their haunts occasionally provided with dry straw or water, and to keep their drinking wells or leas and troughs open and clear of refuse, and that they are well fed with oats and corn. On some estates during October and November a certain number are caught, taken to the aviary or pheasantry, their wings regularly clipped every two or three weeks, and they are then kept and fed during the winter to provide the required egg supply during the spring months, the scarcity of eggs being one of the most serious drawbacks in pheasant breeding.

Usually, however, the old birds are not "taken up" until the last of February. Then they are systematically "starved" by non-feeding for about a week, when large "figure 4" traps are set near their haunts. Then trails of oats are scattered between. The pheasants readily follow these to the traps which are sprung by strings in the hands of the keepers, any desired number being thus easily secured.

These birds are taken to the aviaries which the keepers, among whom I have many good friends, insist on calling "areas." These are simply large wooded spaces in the demesne grounds, sometimes fenced by high hedges, sometimes twelve feet high. The wings of the birds are constantly clipped and they would escape; but breeders find the labor required less costly than a wire netting covering for such necessarily large tracts.

These aviaries are provided with mock coverts of bark and bough, with nesting places and watering troughs, while some are secured against vermin by curved iron bases to the enclosing netting charged with electricity which causes death to all rodents attempting an entrance.

The pheasants begin laying by April, and they lay very much like the ordinary hen. Each can be counted on to furnish from 20 to 30 eggs. These are daily carefully gathered, not only from the nests in the aviaries, but from those of the unimprisoned birds. The latter is not a difficult task for the keepers; for it is a singular fact that notwithstanding the pheasants' wild nature they nest most freely in shrub clumps along the edges of walk and drives. The keepers tell me they love the sound and sense of companionship, though themselves wonderfully secretive and shy.

And here the element of poaching is ridiculously observable. From April to June pheasant eggs are worth from £4 to £5 per hundred, or from twenty to twenty-five cents each. A regular scramble for them is begun, and this season provides one of the richest of the poacher's harvests. It is a well known fact that one half of the pheasants' eggs exposed for sale at the shopkeepers are stolen. Expert poachers know every haunt of the pheasants upon the demesnes as well as the keepers. They are often ahead of the latter at the nests of the unimprisoned birds. Not only this, but keepers themselves do not scruple to surreptitiously dispose of milord's supply, or help themselves from the nests on neighboring demesnes.

Last spring I rode to Stourbridge with Sir Otley. Our mission was to secure 50 dozen pheasants' eggs, which we accomplished.

"Probably one half of them," he said, "came from my grounds. The other half are doubtless from several adjoining properties. But," he added dryly, "the poaching keeps the breed well crossed!" But the pheasant hen is not a good mother. Foster mothers must be provided. Domestic "setting hens" are therefore bought up from the peasantry roundabout in scores at from eighteen pence to two shillings each.

Several men are now required for their care; and for three months the entire collection of coops is changed daily like a camp to new ground, and each a trifle nearer the coverts or forest. The food is gradually changed to oats and cracked raw corn; the moment the young birds show signs of skulking they are removed from the domestic hen mothers and coops to the aviaries and in July they are set at liberty within the grounds and forest of the demesne.

Professional poaching is far less dangerous pursuit than it is usually considered. During the shooting season all sorts of village hangers-on are pressed into service as "beaters" and to carry and fill the game bags. It is an easy thing during the excitement to hide a generous portion of the game at convenient points from which it is taken under cover of night. Clamor and fright also break up the rucks or coverts into detached files of pheasants which retreat as high as possible among the branches of larch and fir, when the poachers can easily take them from their roosts at night by hand. Other methods are smudging or smoking them into half insensibility and knocking them from their perches with clubs; corn kernels into which short barbed wires are inserted are greedily devoured and the birds run by hand; while an ingenious and successful device is to fit a gamecock with artificial spurs, and stealthily place him alongside a covert, when the pugnacious pheasant cock instantly responds to the gamecock's crowing challenge, when three or four brace of the valuable birds are easily taken.

Pheasant shooting usually begins the latter part of October and closes with the final Christmas "batue." Notwithstanding high walls, gentleness of keepers, and all possible preventives, many pheasants leave the demesnes, seeking the outer hedges and bog grasses, where they fall a prey to the snares of tenants and guns of the poachers. Therefore a few days before pheasant-shooting begins, all the outside help at the castle starts in a circle miles from the demesne and concentrating toward the same, shout and "beat" with a terrific hulla-bulloo, thus driving many back within the preserves. Then milord and his friends dressed as for snipe-shooting on the moors and provided each with two double-barreled, breech-loading, center-fire fowling-pieces of No. 12 bore, a man for reloading and another for carrying cartridges, begin the slaughter. The sportsmen are stationed in advance at the edges of the open places. The gamekeeper, who is a sort of master of ceremonies, brings his assistants or "beaters" into line behind. Then they move forward, perhaps ten yards apart, the keeper, who knows every bush, hedge, copse or tree, directing the "beaters" in every movement. In an instant the preserve is a perfect bedlam of yells and explosions. The men yell, "Hi-yi-i-i!" as they "beat" the bushes, calling, as the startled birds flash from copse to copse, "Cock to the right!" "Cock above!" "To the left, cock!" "Hi-yi-i-i!" "cock, cock!" "Right ahead, cock!" while the death-dealing guns answer with such rapidity that they often get too warm to be held in the sportsmen's hands. This goes on all day, with an hour for a lunch of stew and beer at two, when the "beaters" are furnished a liberal amount of bread, cheese and beer; and their assistants, who follow the hunters with carts and donkeys, by night have often gathered up from 500 to 1,000 slaughtered birds. These are shipped direct to London to dealers who provide hampers and tags, and pay for the birds from four to six shillings per brace.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

The Eccentric Emperor.

That eccentric young man, the kaiser, has been occupying his spare moments in designing a new crown for himself. It is a massive affair of solid gold, and studded with diamonds and pearls galore. Its precise utility is not quite clear to most well regulated minds. The kaiser will surely not don it on state or any other occasions, or wear it when he gives a dinner party or pays a friendly call. His Majesty's forthcoming visit to England recalls the gorgeous wedding at Windsor Castle during his former visit, when the fair daughter of Princess Christian married Prince Aribert of Anhalt. The emperor has kept the promise he then made to the

Princess Christian to make the young couple as comfortable as possible at Berlin. They are established in their Anhalt residence on the Temple of Ufer, occupying the first floor, facing the river on the one side and the streets of handsome granite buildings on the other. The emperor has recently ordered that the Anhalt residence shall be connected by telephone with the royal stables, and that any kind of carriage desired by the Prince or Princess shall be immediately provided. This imperial courtesy has a substantial cash value, for it not only saves the expense of keeping their own horses and carriages, but does something more—the imperial livery insures her the utmost consideration and the cheapest prices whenever the princess goes shopping, which is not rarely. The Prince of Anhalt's domestic establishment is very unpretentious in the matter of retinue. He has but one male servant, his butler. There are two draughts of his regiment on special service at the house. The living expenses of the young couple are paid by the reigning Duke of Anhalt, who is extremely fond of them.

Died with Little Nell.

During the period when "Master Humphrey's Clock," or, as it became afterward known, the "Old Curiosity Shop," was running in some current magazine, a young girl in precarious health became perfectly preoccupied with the story, and so absorbed did she grow in the development and character of Little Nell that she felt persuaded her own life would continue just so long as the little heroine's and that both would terminate together.

This she told her father one day, adding that she knew Little Nell must die in the course of the story. And then began piteous letters from the afflicted father to Charles Dickens, stating the case and his daughter's infatuation, and pleading as only a parent who watches his child standing on the threshold of death can plead, that the novel might preserve alive Little Nell. Dickens was deeply touched, but replied that he could not do it, that the child in the story must die, only he would keep her alive through still another number of the magazine, notwithstanding the story was already dragging, and that was all he could do.

Finally came the closing pages, of that sweet, sad tale of Little Nell's life, and even as she fell asleep, the young English girl, who had found her flickering life to that of others, turned her face to the wall and waked no more.

Webster's Opinion.

In the year 1840 the locomotive was a small, weak machine that was employed to drag a few coalchick cars at a speed of about ten miles an hour. Daniel Webster, in describing the American railroads, said: "They are made of two stringers of scantling, notched into ties that often get loose in the ground. Upon the stringers two straps of iron, the width and thickness of wagon tires, are nailed."

"These straps of iron frequently get detached at the ends, which turn up like snakes' heads and pierce the floors of the cars." Such an accident actually happened to a car between Elizabeth and New York.

"Then," said Webster, "the wheels slip on the iron straps, in winter especially, so much that no dependence can be placed upon the time of arrival, and many people think it is not certain that railroads will be a success."

An Absent Minded Poet.

Lord Tennyson is fond of port, notwithstanding the sentiment of "Locksley Hall." It is related that his friend Henry Irving went to dine with him. After dinner a bottle of port was brought in. The old servant, to Mr. Irving's amusement, set the bottle and one glass before his master, who helped himself and talked on. Mr. Irving, who also likes port, kept his counsel and devoted himself to the claret. He did not even reveal that he had been left out in the cold when the poet, having finished the bottle, quite unconscious that he had had no help, asked if he liked the wine. Mr. Irving was able consciously to say that he did, for the claret, as claret, was excellent. This incident can hardly happen again, inasmuch as Lord Tennyson, on medical advice, has, it is believed, dropped his after dinner port, and now muses on claret.



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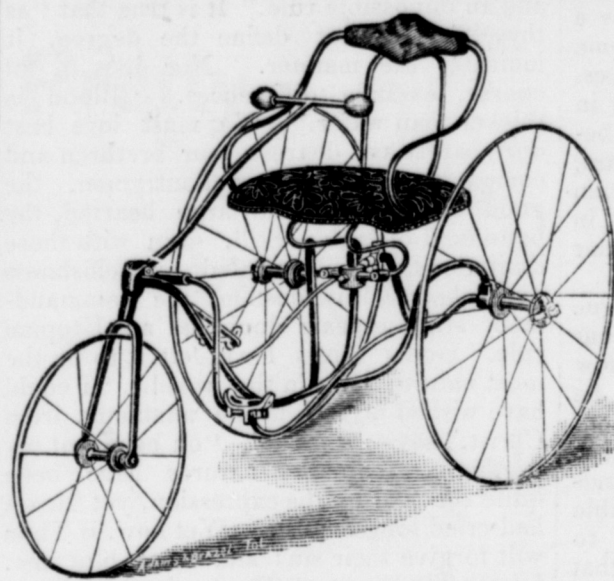
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