VARIOUS

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Содержание

WILD SPORTS AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE HIGHLANDS. 1 5
LETTERS AND IMPRESSIONS FROM PARIS. 2 26
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 32

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WILD SPORTS AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE HIGHLANDS. [1]

This year we have been a defaulter on the Moors. Not that our eye has become more dim, our aim less sure, or our understanding weaker than of yore; but we are no longer subject to the same keen and burning impulses which used periodically to beset us towards the beginning of our departed Augusts, inflaming our destructive organs, and driving us to the heather, as the stag is said to be driven by instinct to the shores of the sea. Somehow or other, we now take things much more coolly. We no longer haunt the shop of Dickson – that most excellent and unassuming of gunmakers – for weeks before the shooting-season, discussing the comparative excellences of cartridge and plain shot, or refitting our battered apparatus with the last ingenuities of Sykes. Our talk is not of pointers or of setters; neither do we think it incumbent upon us to perambulate Princes Street in a shooting-jacket, or with the dissonance of hobnailed shoes. We can even look upon the northern steamers, surcharged with all manner of ammunition, crammed from stem to stern with Cockney tourists and sportsmen, carriages and cars, hampers, havresacks, and hair trunks, steering their way from our noble frith towards the Highlands, without the slightest wish to become one of that gay and gallant crew. Incredible as it may appear, we actually wrote an article upon the twelfth of August last; nor was the calm, even tenor of our thoughts for a moment interrupted by the imaginary whirr of the gor-cock. For the life of us, we cannot recollect what sort of a day it was. To be sure, we were early up and at work – that is, as early as we ever are, somewhere about ten: we wrote on steadily until dinner-time, with no more intermission than was necessary for the discussion of a couple of glasses of Madeira. After a slight and salubrious meal, we again tackled to the foolscap, and by nine o'clock dismissed the printer's devil to his den with a quarter of a ream of manuscript. We then strolled up to our club, where, for the first time, we were reminded of the nature of the anniversary, by the savour of roasted grouse. So, with a kind of melancholy sigh for the impairment of our blunted energies, we sat down to supper, and leisurely explored the pungent pepper about the backbone of the bird of the mountain.

But empty streets, hot sun, and dust like that of the Sahara, are combined nuisances too formidable for the most tranquil or indolent nature. It is not good for any one to be the last man left in town. You become an object of suspicion to the porters – that is, the more superannuated portion of them, for the rest are all gone to carry bags upon the moors – who, seeing you continue from day to day sidling along the deserted streets, begin to entertain strange doubts as to the real probity of your character, or, at all events, as to your absolute sanity. If you are a lawyer, and remain in town throughout August and September, your own conscience will tell you at once that you are nothing short of an arrant sneak. Are there not ten other months in the year throughout which you may cobble condescendences, without emulating the endurance of Chibert, and confining yourself in an oven, to the manifest endangerment of your liver, for the few paltry guineas which may occasionally come tumbling in? Will any agent of sense consider you a better counsel, or a more estimable plodder, because you affect an exaggerated passion for *Morrison's Decisions*, and refuse to be divorced even for a week from your dalliance with Shaw and Dunlop? Is that unfortunate Lord Ordinary on the

[1] *Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands.* From the Journals of Charles St John, Esq. Murray. London: 1846.

Bills to be harassed day and night, deprived of his morning drive, and deranged in his digestive organs, on account of your unhallowed lust for fees? Is your unhappy clerk, whose wife and children have long since been dismissed to cheap bathing-quarters on the coast of Fife, where at this moment they are bobbing up and down among the tangled rocks, skirling as the waves come in, or hunting for diminutive crabs and cavies in the sea-worn pools – is that most oppressed and martyred of all mankind to be kept, by your relentless fiat, or rather wicked obstinacy, from participating in the same sanatory amusements with Bill, and Harry, and Phemie, and the rest of his curly-headed weans? Think you that the complaints of Mrs Screever will not be heard and registered against you in heaven, as, mateless and disconsolate, she cheapens haddocks in the market, or plucks sea-pinks along the cliffs of hoary Anstruther or of Crail? Shame upon you! Recollect, for the sake of others, if not for your own, that you call yourself a gentleman and a Christian. Shut up your house from top to bottom – fee the policeman to watch it – wafer a ticket on the window, directing all parcels to be sent to the grocer with whom you have deposited the key – give poor Girzy a holiday to visit her friends at Carnwath – and be off yourself, as fast as you can, wherever your impulses may lead you, either to the Highlands with rod and gun, or, if you are no sportsman, to Largs, or Ardrossan, or Dunoon, pleasant places all, where you may saunter along the shore undisturbed from morn until dewy eve, hire a boat at a shilling the hour, and purvey your own whitings; or haply, if you are in good luck, take a prominent part in the proceedings of a regatta, and make nautical speeches after dinner to the intense amusement of your audience.

But you say you are a physician. Well, then, cannot you leave your patients to die in peace? It is six months since you were called in to attend that old lady, who has a large jointure and a predisposition to jaundice. You have visited her regularly once a day – sometimes twice – prescribed for her a whole pharmacopeia of drugs – blistered her, bled her, leeched her – curtailed her of wholesome diet, forbidden cordial waters, and denounced the needful cinnamon. Dare you lay your hand on your heart and say that you think her better? Not you. Why not, then, give the poor old woman, who is not only harmless, but an excellent subscriber to several Tract societies, one chance more of a slightly protracted existence? Restore to her her natural food and adventitious comforts. Send her away to Cheltenham or Harrowgate, or some such other vale of Avoca, where, at all events, she may get fresh air, clean lodgings, and lots of mineral water. So shall you escape the pangs of an awakened conscience, and your deathbed be haunted by the thoughts of at least one homicide the less.

What we say to one we say to all. Stockbroker! you are a good fellow in the main, and you never meant to ruin your clients. It was not your fault that they went so largely into Glenmutchkins, and made such unfortunate attempts to *bear* the Biggleswade Junction. But why should you continue to tempt the poor devils at this flat season of the year, and with a glutted market, into any further purchases of scrip? You know very well, that until November, at the earliest, there is not the most distant prospect of a rise, and you have already pocketed, believe us, a remarkably handsome commission. Do not be in too great a hurry to kill the goose with the golden eggs. A rest for a month or so will make them all the keener for speculation afterwards, and nurse their appetite for premiums. We foresee a stirring winter, if you will but take things quietly in the interim. Assemble your brethren together – shut up the Exchange by common consent during the dog-days – convert your lists into wadding, and let Mammon have a momentary respite. – Writer to the Signet! is it fair to be penning letters, each of which costs your employer three and fourpence, when they are certain to remain unanswered? Do not do it. This is capital time for taking infeftments, and those instruments of sasine may well suffice to plump out the interior of a game-bag. No better witnesses in the world than a shepherd and an illicit distiller; and sweet will be your crowning caulker as you take instruments of earth and stone, peat and divot, and the like, in the hands of Angus and Donald, by the side of the spring, far up in the solitary mountain. Therefore, again we say, be off as speedily as you can to the moors, and leave the Deserted City to sun and dust, and the vigilance of a perspiring Town Council.

Example, they say, is better than precept – we might demur to the doctrine, but we are not in a disputatious humour. For we too are bound, though late, to the land of grouse – indeed we have already accomplished the greater part of our journey, and are writing this article in a pleasant burgh of the west, separated only by an arm of the sea, across which the bright-sailed yachts are skimming, from a long range of heathery hills, whereon we hope, if it pleases fortune, to do some execution on the morrow. Our three pointers, Orleans, Tours, and Bordeaux – so named after the speculation that enabled us to purchase them – are basking in the sun on the little green beneath our window; whilst Scrip, our terrier and constant companion, is perched upon the sill, barking with all his might at a peripatetic miscreant of a minstrel, who for the last half hour has been grinding Gentle Zitella to shreds in his barrel organ. We have tried in vain to move him with coppers dexterously shied so as to hit him if possible on the head, but the nuisance will not abate. We must follow the example of the Covenanters, and put an end to him at the expenditure of a silver shot. "There, our good fellow, is a shilling for you – have the kindness to move on a few doors further; there are some sick folks in this house. At the end of the row you will find a family remarkably addicted to music – the house with the green blinds – you understand us? Thank you!" And in a few moments we hear his infernal instrument, now not unpleasantly remote, doling out the popular air of the Glasgow Chappie, for the edification of the intolerable Gorbalier who poisoned our passage down the Clyde by constituting himself our Cicerone, and explaining the method by which one might discriminate the Railway boats from those of the Castle Company, by the peculiar ochreing of their funnels.

Did we intend to remain here much longer, we should be compelled in self-defence to clear the neighbourhood. This is not so impracticable as at first sight may appear. We have made acquaintance with a very pleasant fellow of a Bauldy – quite a genius in his way – who has a natural talent for the French horn. To him an old key-bugle would be an inestimable treasure, and we doubt not that with a few instructions he would become such a proficient as to serenade the suburb day and night. Nor would our conscience reproach us for having made one human creature supremely happy, even at the cost of the emigration of a few dozen others. But fortunately we have no need to recur to any such experiment. To-morrow we shall enact the part of Macgregor with our foot upon our native heather; and for one evening, wherever the locality, we could not find a more apt or pleasant companion than Mr Charles St John, whose sporting journals are at last published in the Home and Colonial Library.

We make this preliminary statement the more readily, because for divers reasons we had hardly expected to find the work so truly excellent of its kind; and had there been any shortcomings, assuredly we should have been foul of St John. In the first place, we entertained, and do still entertain, the opinion that very few English sportsmen are capable of writing a work which shall treat not only of the Wild Sports, but of the Natural History of the Highlands. They belong to a migratory class, and seldom exchange the comforts of their clubs for the inconveniences of northern rustication, at least before the month of June. Now and then, indeed, you may meet with some of them, whose passion for angling amounts to a mania, by the side of the Tweed or the Shin, long before the mavis has hatched her young. But these are usually elderly grey-coated men, whose whole faculties are bent upon hackles – the patriarchs of a far nobler school than that of Walton – magnificent throwers of the fly – salmonicides of the first water – yet in our humble estimation not very conversant with any other subject under heaven. Their sporting error – rather let us call it misfortune – is that they do not generalise. By the middle of September their occupation for the year is over. Shortly afterwards they assemble, like swallows about to leave our shores, on the banks of the Tweed, which river is permitted by the mercy of the British Parliament to remain open for a short time longer. There they angle on, kill their penultimate and ultimate fish; and finally, at the approach of winter, retreat to warmer quarters, and recapitulate the campaigns of the summer over port of the most generous vintage. These are clearly not the men to indite the Wild Sports and Natural History of the North.

The other section of English sportsmen come later and depart a little earlier. They are the renters of moors, crack sportsmen in every sense of the word, who resort to Ross-shire as regularly

as they afterwards emigrate to Melton. Now, as to their slaughtering powers, we entertain not the shadow of a doubt. Steady shots and deadly are they from their youth upwards – trained, it may be, upon level ground, but still unerring in their aim. If not so wiry-sinewed, and sound of wind as the Caledonian, their pluck is undeniable, and their perseverance praiseworthy in the extreme. Show them the birds, and they will bring them to bag – give them a fair chance at a red-deer, and the odds are that next minute he shall be rolling in blood upon the heather. But this, let it be observed, is after all a mere matter of tooling. To be a good shot is only one branch of the finished sportsman's accomplishment, and it enters not at all into the conformation of the naturalist. We would not give a brace of widgeons for the best description ever written of a week's sport in the Highlands, or indeed any where else, provided it contained nothing more than an account of the killed and wounded, some facetious anecdotes regarding the lives of the gillies, and a narrative of the manner in which the author encountered and overcame a hart. Even the adventures of a night in a still will hardly make the book go down. We want an eye accustomed to look to other things beyond the sight of a gun-barrel – we want to know more about the quarry than the mere fact that it was flushed, fired at, and killed. Death can come but once to the black-cock as to the warrior, but are their lives to be accounted as nothing? Ponto we allow to be a beautiful brute – a little too thin-skinned, perhaps, for the moors, and apt, in case of mist, to lapse into a state of ague – yet, notwithstanding, punctual at his points, and cheap at twenty guineas of the current money of the realm. Howbeit we care not for his biography. To us it is matter of the smallest moment from what breed he is descended, by whose gamekeeper he was broken, neither are we covetous as to statistics of the number of his brothers and sisters uterine. It is of course gratifying to know that our southern acquaintance approves of the sport he has met with in a particular district; and that on the twelfth, not only the bags but the ponies were exuberantly loaded with a superfluity of fud and feather. Such intelligence would have been listened to most benignly had it been accompanied by a box of game duly addressed to us at Ambrose's – as it is, we accept the fact without any spasm of extraordinary pleasure.

There are, we allow, some sporting tours from which we have derived both profit and gratification; but the locality of these is usually remote and unexplored. We like to hear of salmon-fishing in the Naamsen, and of forty and fifty pounders captured in its brimful rapids – of bear-skalls in Sweden, buffalo-hunting in the prairies, or the chase of the majestic lion in Caffreland or Morocco. Such narratives have the charm of novelty; and if, now and then, they border a little upon the marvellous or miraculous, we do our best to summon up faith sufficient to bolt them all. We by no means objected to Monsieur Violet's account of the *estampades* in California, or of the snapping turtles in the cane-brakes of the Red River. He was, at all events, graphic in his descriptions; and the zoology to which he introduced us, if not genuine, was of a gigantic and original kind. In fact, no sort of voyage or travel is readable unless it be strewn thickly with incident and adventure, and these of a startling character. Nobody cares now-a-days about meteorological observations, or dates, or distances, or names of places; we have been tired with these things from the days of Dampier downwards. Nor need any navigator hope to draw the public attention to his facts unless he possesses besides a deal of the talent of the novelist. If incident does not lie in his path, he must go out of his way to seek it – if even then it should not appear, there is an absolute necessity for inventing it. What a book of travels in Central Africa could we not write, if any one would be kind enough to furnish us with a mere outline of the route, and the authentic soundings of the Niger!

Scotland, however, is tolerably well known to the educated people of the sister country, and her productions have ceased to be a marvel. Grouse are common as howtowdies in the London market; and even red-deer venison, if asked for, may be had for a price. There is no great mystery in the staple commodity of our sports. Something, it is true, may still be said with effect regarding deer-stalking – a branch of the art venatory which few have the opportunity to study, and of those few a small fraction only can attain to a high degree. Grouse are to be found on every hill, black-game in almost every correi; few are the woods, at the present day, unhaunted by the roe; but the red-deer

– the stag of ten – he of the branches and the tines – is, in most parts of the country save in the great forests, a casual and a wandering visitor; and many a summer's day you may clamber over cairn and crag, inspect every scaur and glen, and sweep the horizon around with your telescope, without discovering the waving of an antler, or the impress of a transitory footprint. But this subject is soon exhausted. Scrope has done ample justice to it, and left but a small field untrodden to any literary successor. The *Penny Magazine*, if we mistake not, disposed several years ago of otter-hunting, and the chase of the fox as practised in the rocky regions; and finally, Colquhoun – he of the Moor and the Loch – with more practical knowledge and acute observation than any of his predecessors, reduced Highland sporting to a science, and became the Encyclopedist of the *feræ naturæ* of the hills. With these authorities already before us, it was not unnatural that we should have entertained doubts as to the capabilities of any new writer, not native nor to the custom born.

Neither did the puff preliminary, which heralded the appearance of this volume, prepossess us strongly in its favour. What mattered it to the sensible reader whether or no "the attention of the public has already been called to this journal by the *Quarterly Review* of December 1845?" The book was not published, had not an existence, until seven or eight months after that article – a reasonably indifferent one, by the way – was penned; and yet we are asked to take that sort of pre-Adamite notice as a verdict in its favour! Now, we object altogether to this species of side-winded commendation, this reviewing, or noticing, or extracting from manuscripts before publication, more especially in the pages of a great and influential Review. It is always injudicious, because it looks like the work of a coterie. In the present case it was doubly unwise, because this volume really required no adventitious aid whatever, and certainly no artifice, to recommend it to the public favour.

Whilst, however, we consider it our duty to say thus much, let it not be supposed that we are detracting from the merits of the extracts contained in that article of the *Quarterly*. On the contrary, they impressed us at the time with a high idea of the graphic power of the writer, and presented an agreeable contrast to the general prolixity of the paper. It is even possible that we are inclined to underrate the efforts of the critic on account of his having forestalled us by printing *The Muckle Hart of Benmore*– a chapter which we should otherwise have certainly enshrined within the columns of *Maga*. – At all events it is now full time that we should address ourselves more seriously to the contents of the volume.

Mr St John, we are delighted to observe, is not a sportsman belonging to either class which we have above attempted to describe. He is not the man whose exploits will be selected to swell the lists of slaughtered game in the pages of the provincial newspapers; for he has the eye and the heart of a naturalist, and, as he tells us himself, after a pleasant description of the wild animals which he has succeeded in domesticating – "though naturally all men are carnivorous, and, therefore, animals of prey, and inclined by nature to hunt and destroy other creatures, and, although I share in this our natural instinct to a great extent, I have far more pleasure in seeing these different animals enjoying themselves about me, and in observing their different habits, than I have in hunting down and destroying them."

Most devoutly do we wish that there were many more sportsmen of the same stamp! For ourselves, we confess to an organ of destructiveness not of the minimum degree. We never pass a pool, and hear the sullen plunge of the salmon, without a bitter imprecation upon our evil destiny if we chance to have forgotten our rod; and a covey rising around us, when unarmed, is a plea for suicide. But this feeling, as Mr St John very properly expresses it, is mere natural instinct – part of our original Adam, which it is utterly impossible to subdue. But give us rod or gun. Let us rise and strike some three or four fresh-run fish, at intervals of half-an-hour – let us play, land, and deposit them on the bank, in all the glory of their glittering scales, and it is a hundred to one if we shall be tempted to try another cast, although the cruives are open, the water in rarest trim, and several hours must elapse ere the advent of the cock-a-leekie. In like manner, we prefer a moor where the game is sparse and wild, to one from which the birds are rising at every twenty yards; nor care we

ever to slaughter more than may suffice for our own wants and those of our immediate friends. And why should we? There is something not only despicable, but, in our opinion, absolutely brutal, in the accounts which we sometimes read of wholesale massacres committed on the moors, in sheer wanton lust for blood. Fancy a great hulking Saxon, attended by some half-dozen gamekeepers, with a larger retinue of gillies, sallying forth at early morning upon ground where the grouse are lying as thick and tame as chickens in a poultry-yard – loosing four or five dogs at a time, each of which has found his bird or his covey before he has been freed two minutes from the couples – marching up in succession to each stationary quadruped – kicking up the unfortunate pouts, scarce half-grown, from the heather before his feet – banging right and left into the middle of them, and – for the butcher shoots well – bringing down one, and sometimes two, at each discharge. The red-whiskered keeper behind him, who narrowly escaped transportation, a few years ago, for a bloody and ferocious assault, hands him another gun, ready-loaded; and so on he goes, for hour after hour, depopulating God's creatures, of every species, without mercy, until his shoulder is blue with the recoil, and his brow black as Cain's, with the stain of the powder left, as he wipes away the sweat with his stiff and discoloured hand. At evening, the pyramid is counted, and lo, there are two hundred brace!

Is this sporting, or is it murder? Not the first certainly, unless the term can be appropriately applied to the hideous work of the shambles. Indeed, between knocking down stots or grouse in this wholesale manner, we can see very little distinction; except that, in the one case, there is more exertion of the muscles, and in the other a clearer atmosphere to nerve the operator to his task. Murder is a strong term, so we shall not venture to apply it; but cruelty is a word which we may use without compunction; and from that charge, at least, it is impossible for the glutton of the moors to go free.

Great humanity and utter absence of wantonness in the prosecution of his sport, is a most pleasing characteristic of Mr St John. He well understands the meaning of Wordsworth's noble maxim, —

> "Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels;"

and can act upon it without cant, without cruelty, and, above all, without hypocrisy. And truly, when we consider where he has been located for the last few years, in a district which offers a greater variety of game to the sportsman than any other in Great Britain, his moderation becomes matter of legitimate praise. Here is his own description of the locality wherein he has pitched his tent: —

"I have lived for several years in the northern counties of Scotland, and during the last four or five in the province of Moray, a part of the country peculiarly adapted for collecting facts in Natural History, and for becoming intimate with the habits of many of our British wild birds and quadrupeds. Having been in the habit of keeping an irregular kind of journal, and of making notes of any incidents which have fallen under my observation connected with the zoology of the country, I have now endeavoured, by dint of cutting and pruning those rough sketches, to put them into a shape calculated to amuse, and perhaps, in some slight degree, to instruct some of my fellow-lovers of Nature. From my earliest childhood I have been more addicted to the investigation of the habits and manners of every kind of living animal than to any more useful avocation, and have in consequence made myself tolerably well acquainted with the domestic economy of most of our British *feræ naturæ*, from the field-mouse and wheatear, which I stalked and trapped in the plains and downs of Wiltshire during my boyhood, to the red-deer and eagle, whose territory I have invaded in later years on the mountains of Scotland. My present abode in Morayshire is surrounded by as great a variety of beautiful scenery as can be found in any district in Britain; and no part of the country can produce a greater variety of objects of interest either to the naturalist or to the lover of the picturesque. The rapid and glorious Findhorn, the very perfection of a Highland river, here passes through one of the most fertile plains in Scotland, or indeed in the world; and though a few miles higher up it rages through the wildest

and most rugged rocks, and through the romantic and shaded glens of the forests of Darnaway and Altyre, the stream, as if exhausted, empties itself peaceably and quietly into the Bay of Findhorn – a salt-water loch of some four or five miles in length, entirely shut out by different points of land from the storms which are so frequent in the Moray Frith, of which it forms a kind of creek. At low-water this bay becomes an extent of wet sand, with the river Findhorn and one or two smaller streams winding through it, till they meet in the deeper part of the basin near the town of Findhorn, where there is always a considerable depth of water, and a harbour for shipping.

"From its sheltered situation and the quantity of food left on the sands at low-water, the Bay of Findhorn is always a great resort of wild-fowl of all kinds, from the swan to the teal, and also of innumerable waders of every species; while occasionally a seal ventures into the mouth of the river in pursuit of salmon. The bay is separated from the main water of the Frith by that most extraordinary and peculiar range of country called the Sandhills of Moray – a long, low range of hills formed of the purest sand, with scarcely any herbage, excepting here and there patches of bent or broom, which are inhabited by hares, rabbits, and foxes. At the extreme point of this range is a farm of forty or fifty acres of arable land, where the tenant endeavours to grow a scanty crop of grain and turnips, in spite of the rabbits and the drifting sands. From the inland side of the bay stretch the fertile plains of Moray, extending from the Findhorn to near Elgin in a continuous flat of the richest soil, and comprising districts of the very best partridge-shooting that can be found in Scotland, while the streams and swamps that intersect it afford a constant supply of wild-fowl. As we advance inland we are sheltered by the wide-extending woods of Altyre, abounding with roe and game; and beyond these woods again is a very extensive range of a most excellent grouse-shooting country, reaching for many miles over a succession of moderately-sized hills which reach as far as the Spey.

"On the west of the Findhorn is a country beautifully dotted with woods, principally of oak and birch, and intersected by a dark, winding burn, full of fine trout, and the constant haunt of the otter. Between this part of the country and the sea-coast is a continuation of the Sandhills, interspersed with lakes, swamps, and tracts of fir-wood and heather. On the whole, I do not know so varied or interesting a district in Great Britain, or one so well adapted to the amusement and instruction of a naturalist or sportsman. In the space of a morning's walk you may be either in the most fertile or the most barren spot of the country. In my own garden every kind of wall-fruit ripens to perfection, and yet at the distance of only two hours' walk you may either be in the midst of heather and grouse, or in the sandy deserts beyond the bay, where one wonders how even the rabbits can find their living.

"I hope that my readers will be indulgent enough to make allowances for the unfinished style of these sketches, and the copious use of the first person singular, which I have found it impossible to avoid whilst describing the adventures which I have met with in this wild country, either when toiling up the rocky heights of our most lofty mountains, or cruising in a boat along the shores, where rocks and caves give a chance of finding sea-fowl and otters; at one time wandering over the desert sand-hills of Moray, where, on windy days, the light particles of drifting sand, driven like snow along the surface of the ground, are perpetually changing the outline and appearance of the district; at another, among the swamps, in pursuit of wild-ducks, or attacking fish in the rivers, or the grouse on the heather.

"For a naturalist, whether he be a scientific dissector and preserver of birds, or simply a lover and observer of the habits and customs of the different *feræ naturæ*, large and small, this district is a very desirable location, as there are very few birds or quadrupeds to be found in any part of Great Britain who do not visit us during the course of the year, or, at any rate, are to be met with in a few hours' drive. The bays and rivers attract all the migratory water-fowl, while the hills, woods, and corn-lands afford shelter and food to all the native wild birds and beasts. The vicinity, too, of the coast to the wild western countries of Europe is the cause of our being often visited by birds which are not strictly natives, nor regular visitors, but are driven by continued east winds from the fastnesses of the Swedish and Norwegian forests and mountains.

"To the collector of stuffed birds this county affords a greater variety of specimens than any other district in the kingdom; whilst the excellence of the climate and the variety of scenery make it inferior to none as a residence for the unoccupied person or the sportsman.

"Having thus described that part of the globe which at present is my resting-place, I may as well add a few lines to enable my reader to become acquainted with myself, and that part of my belongings which will come into question in my descriptions of sporting, &c. To begin with myself, I am one of the unproductive class of the genus homo, who, having passed a few years amidst the active turmoil of cities, and in places where people do most delight to congregate, have at last settled down to live a busy kind of idle life. Communing much with the wild birds and beasts of our country, a hardy constitution and much leisure have enabled me to visit them in their own haunts, and to follow my sporting propensities without fear of the penalties which are apt to follow a careless exposure of one's-self to cold and heat, at all hours of night and day. Though by habit and repute a being strongly endowed with the organ of destructiveness, I take equal delight in collecting round me all living animals, and watching their habits and instincts; my abode is, in short, a miniature menagerie. My dogs learn to respect the persons of domesticated wild animals of all kinds, and my pointers live in amity with tame partridges and pheasants; my retrievers lounge about amidst my wild-fowl, and my terriers and beagles strike up friendship with the animals of different kinds, whose capture they have assisted in, and with whose relatives they are ready to wage war to the death. A common and well-kept truce exists with one and all. My boys, who are of the most bird-nesting age (eight and nine years old), instead of disturbing the numberless birds who breed in the garden and shrubberies, in full confidence of protection and immunity from all danger of gun or snare, strike up an acquaintance with every family of chaffinches or blackbirds who breed in the place, visiting every nest, and watching over the eggs and young with a most parental care."

Why, this is the very Eden of a sportsman! Flesh, fowl, and fish of every description in abundance, and such endless variety, that no month of the year can pass over without affording its quota of fair and legitimate recreation. But to a man of Mr St John's accomplishment and observant habits, the mere prey is a matter of far less moment than the insight which such a locality affords, into the habits and instincts of the creatures which either permanently inhabit or casually visit our shores. His journal is far more than a sportsman's book. It contains shrewd and minute observations on the whole of our northern fauna – the results of many a lonely but happy day spent in the woods, the glens, the sand-tracts, by river and on sea. His range is wider than that which has been taken either by White of Selborne, or by Waterton; and we are certain that he will hold it to be no mean compliment when we say, that in our unbiased opinion, he is not surpassed by either of them in fidelity, and in point of picturesqueness of description, is even the superior of both. The truth is, that Mr St John would have made a first-rate trapper. We should not have the slightest objections to lose ourselves in his company for several weeks in the prairies of North America; being satisfied that we should return with a better cargo of beaver-skins and peltry than ever fell to the lot of two adventurers in the service of the Company of Hudson's Bay.

It is totally impossible to follow our author through any thing like his range of subjects, extending from the hart to the seal and otter, from the eagle and wild swan to the ouzel. One or two specimens we shall give, in order that you, our dear and sporting reader, may judge whether these encomiums of ours are exaggerated or misplaced. We are, so say our enemies, but little given to laudation, and far too ready when occasion offers, and sometimes when it does not, to clutch hastily at the knout. You, who know us better, and whom indeed we have partially trained up in the wicked ways of criticism, must long ago have been aware, that if we err at all, it is upon the safer side. But be that as it may, you will not, we are sure, refuse to join with us in admiring the beauty of the following description; – it is of the heronry on the Findhorn – a river of peculiar beauty, even in this land of lake, of mountain, and of flood.

"I observe that the herons in the heronry on the Findhorn are now busily employed in sitting on their eggs – the heron being one of the first birds to commence breeding in this country. A more curious and interesting sight than the Findhorn heronry I do not know: from the top of the high rocks on the east side of the river you look down into every nest – the herons breeding on the opposite side of the river, which is here very narrow. The cliffs and rocks are studded with splendid pines and larch, and fringed with all the more lowly but not less beautiful underwood which abounds in this country. Conspicuous amongst these are the bird-cherry and mountain-ash, the holly, and the wild rose; while the golden blossoms of furze and broom enliven every crevice and corner in the rock. Opposite to you is a wood of larch and oak, on the latter of which trees are crowded a vast number of the nests of the heron. The foliage and small branches of the oaks that they breed on seem entirely destroyed, leaving nothing but the naked arms and branches of the trees on which the nests are placed. The same nests, slightly repaired, are used year after year. Looking down at them from the high banks of the Altyre side of the river, you can see directly into their nests, and can become acquainted with the whole of their domestic economy. You can plainly see the green eggs, and also the young herons, who fearlessly, and conscious of the security they are left in, are constantly passing backwards and forwards, and alighting on the topmost branches of the larch or oak trees; whilst the still younger birds sit bolt upright in the nest, snapping their beaks together with a curious sound. Occasionally a grave-looking heron is seen balancing himself by some incomprehensible feat of gymnastics on the very topmost twig of a larch-tree, where he swings about in an unsteady manner, quite unbecoming so sage-looking a bird. Occasionally a thievish jackdaw dashes out from the cliffs opposite the heronry, and flies straight into some unguarded nest, seizes one of the large green eggs, and flies back to his own side of the river, the rightful owner of the eggs pursuing the active little robber with loud cries and the most awkward attempts at catching him.

"The heron is a noble and picturesque-looking bird, as she sails quietly through the air with outstretched wings and slow flight; but nothing is more ridiculous and undignified than her appearance as she vainly chases the jackdaw or hooded crow who is carrying off her egg, and darting rapidly round the angles and corners of the rocks. Now and then every heron raises its head and looks on the alert as the peregrine falcon, with rapid and direct flight, passes their crowded dominion; but intent on his own nest, built on the rock some little way further on, the hawk takes no notice of his long-legged neighbours, who soon settle down again into their attitudes of rest. The kestrel-hawk frequents the same part of the river, and lives in amity with the wood-pigeons that breed in every cluster of ivy which clings to the rocks. Even that bold and fearless enemy of all the pigeon race, the sparrowhawk, frequently has her nest within a few yards of the wood-pigeon; and you see these birds (at all other seasons such deadly enemies) passing each other in their way to and fro from their respective nests in perfect peace and amity. It has seemed to me that the sparrowhawk and wood-pigeon during the breeding season frequently enter into a mutual compact against the crows and jackdaws, who are constantly on the look-out for the eggs of all other birds. The hawk appears to depend on the vigilance of the wood-pigeon to warn him of the approach of these marauders; and then the brave little warrior sallies out, and is not satisfied till he has driven the crow to a safe distance from the nests of himself and his more peaceable ally. At least in no other way can I account for these two birds so very frequently breeding not only in the same range of rock, but within two or three yards of each other."

Now for the wild swan. You will observe that it is now well on in October, and that the weather is peculiarly cold. There is snow already lying on the tops of the nearer hills – the further mountains have assumed a coat of white, which, with additions, will last them until the beginning of next summer; and those long black streaks which rise upwards, and appear to us at this distance so narrow, are, in reality, the great ravines in which two months ago we were cautiously stalking the deer. The bay is now crowded with every kind of aquatic fowl. Day after day strange visitants have been arriving from the north; and at nightfall, you may hear them quacking and screaming and gabbling for many miles along the shore. Every moonlight night the woodcock and snipe are dropping into the thickets,

panting and exhausted by their flight from rugged Norway, a voyage during which they can find no resting-place for the sole of their foot. In stormy weather the light-houses are beset with flocks of birds, who, their reckoning lost, are attracted by the blaze of the beacon, dash wildly towards it, as to some place of refuge, and perish from the violence of the shock. As yet, however, all is calm; and lo, in the moonlight, a great flight of birds stooping down towards the bay! – noiselessly at first, but presently, as they begin to sweep lower, trumpeting and calling to each other; and then, with a mighty rustling of their pinions, and a dash as of a vessel launched into the waters, the white wild-swans settle down into the centre of the glittering bay! To your tents, ye sportsmen! for ball and cartridge; and now circumvent them if you can.

"My old garde-chasse insisted on my starting early this morning, *nolens volens*, to certain lochs six or seven miles off, in order, as he termed it, to take our 'satisfaction' of the swans. I must say that it was a matter of very small satisfaction to me, the tramping off in a sleety, rainy morning, through a most forlorn and hopeless-looking country, for the chance, and that a bad one, of killing a wild swan or two. However, after a weary walk, we arrived at these desolate-looking lochs: they consist of three pieces of water, the largest about three miles in length and one in width; the other two, which communicate with the largest, are much smaller and narrower, indeed scarcely two gunshots in width; for miles around them, the country is flat, and intersected with a mixture of swamp and sandy hillocks. In one direction the sea is only half a mile from the lochs, and in calm winter weather the wild-fowl pass the daytime on the salt water, coming inland in the evenings to feed. As soon as we were within sight of the lochs we saw the swans on one of the smaller pieces of water, some standing high and dry on the grassy islands, trimming their feathers after their long journey, and others feeding on the grass and weeds at the bottom of the loch, which in some parts was shallow enough to allow of their pulling up the plants which they feed on as they swam about; while numbers of wild-ducks of different kinds, particularly widgeons, swarmed round them and often snatched the pieces of grass from the swans as soon as they had brought them to the surface, to the great annoyance of the noble birds, who endeavoured in vain to drive away these more active little depredators, who seemed determined to profit by their labours. Our next step was to drive the swans away from the loch they were on; it seemed a curious way of getting a shot, but as the old man seemed confident of the success of his plan, I very submissively acted according to his orders. As soon as we moved them, they all made straight for the sea. 'This won't do,' was my remark, 'Yes, it will, though; they'll no stop there long to-day with this great wind, but will all be back before the clock *chaps* two.' 'Faith, I should like to see any building that could contain a clock, and where we might take shelter,' was my inward cogitation. The old man, however, having delivered this prophecy, set to work making a small ambuscade by the edge of the loch which the birds had just left, and pointed it out to me as my place of refuge from one o'clock to the hour when the birds would arrive.

"In the mean time we moved about in order to keep ourselves warm, as a more wintry day never disgraced the month of October. In less than half an hour we heard the signal cries of the swans, and soon saw them in a long undulating line fly over the low sand-hills which divided the sea from the largest loch, where they alighted. My commander for the time being, then explained to me, that the water in this loch was every where too deep for the swans to reach the bottom even with their long necks, in order to pull up the weeds on which they fed, and that at their feeding-time, that is about two o'clock, they would, without doubt, fly over to the smaller lochs, and probably to the same one from which we had originally disturbed them. I was accordingly placed in my ambuscade, leaving the keeper at some distance, to help me as opportunity offered – a cold comfortless time of it we (*i. e.* my retriever and myself) had. About two o'clock, however, I heard the swans rise from the upper loch, and in a few moments they all passed high over my head, and after taking a short survey of our loch (luckily without seeing me), they alighted at the end of it furthest from the place where I was ensconced, and quite out of shot, and they seemed more inclined to move away from me than come towards me. It was very curious to watch these wild birds as they swam about, quite

unconscious of danger, and looking like so many domestic fowls. Now came the able generalship of my keeper, who seeing that they were inclined to feed at the other end of the loch, began to drive them towards me, at the same time taking great care not to alarm them enough to make them take flight. This he did by appearing at a long distance off, and moving about without approaching the birds, but as if he was pulling grass or engaged in some other piece of labour. When the birds first saw him, they all collected in a cluster, and giving a general low cry of alarm, appeared ready to take flight; this was the ticklish moment, but soon, outwitted by his manœuvres, they dispersed again, and busied themselves in feeding. I observed that frequently all their heads were under the water at once, excepting one – but invariably *one* bird kept his head and neck perfectly erect, and carefully watched on every side to prevent their being taken by surprise; when he wanted to feed, he touched any passer-by, who immediately relieved him in his guard, and he in his turn called on some other swan to take his place as sentinel.

"After watching some little time, and closely watching the birds in all their graceful movements, sometimes having a swan within half a shot of me, but never getting two or three together, I thought of some of my assistant's instruction which he had given me *en route* in the morning, and I imitated, as well as I could, the bark of a dog: immediately all the swans collected in a body, and looked round to see where the sound came from. I was not above forty yards from them, so, gently raising myself on my elbow, I pulled the trigger, aiming at a forest of necks. To my dismay, the gun did not go off, the wet or something else having spoilt the cap. The birds were slow in rising, so without pulling the other trigger, I put on another cap, and standing up, fired right and left at two of the largest swans as they rose from the loch. The cartridge told well on one, who fell dead into the water; the other flew off after the rest of the flock, but presently turned back, and after making two or three graceful sweeps over the body of his companion, fell headlong, perfectly dead, almost upon her body. The rest of the birds, after flying a short distance away, also returned, and flew for a minute or two in a confused flock over the two dead swans, uttering their bugle-like and harmonious cries; but finding that they were not joined by their companions, presently fell into their usual single rank, and went undulating off towards the sea, where I heard them for a long time trumpeting and calling.

"Handsome as he is, the wild swan is certainly not so graceful on the water as a tame one. He has not the same proud and elegant arch of the neck, nor does he put up his wings while swimming, like two snow-white sails. On the land a wild swan when winged makes such good way, that if he gets much start it requires good running, to overtake him."

Confound that Regatta! What on earth had we to do on board that yacht, racing against the Meteor, unconquered winger of the western seas? Two days ago we could have sworn that no possible temptation could divorce us from our unfinished article; and yet here we are with unsullied pen, under imminent danger of bartering our reputation and plighted faith to Ebony, for some undescribable nautical evolutions, a sack race, and the skeleton of a ball! After all, it must be confessed that we never spent two more pleasant days. Bright eyes, grouse-pie, and the joyousness of happy youth, were all combined together; and if, with a fair breeze and a sunny sky, there can be fun in a smack or a steamer, how is it possible with such company to be dull on board of the prettiest craft that ever cleaved her way, like a wild swan, up the windings of a Highland loch? But we must make up for lost time. As we live, there are Donald and Ian with the boat at the rocks! and we now remember with a shudder that we trysted them for this morning to convey us across to the Moors! Here is a pretty business! Let us see – the month is rapidly on the wane – we have hardly, in sporting phrase, broken the back of this the leading article. Shall we give up the moors, and celebrate this day as another Eve of St John? There is a light mist lying on the opposite hill, but in an hour or two it will be drawn up like a curtain by the sunbeams, and then every bush of heather will be sparkling with dewdrops, far brighter than a carcanet of diamonds. What a fine elasticity and freshness there is in the morning air! A hundred to one the grouse will sit like stones. Donald, my man, are there many birds on the hill? Plenty, did you say, and a fair sprinkling of black-cock? This breeze will carry us over in fifty

minutes – will it? That settles the question. Off with your caulker, and take down the dogs to the boat. We shall be with you in the snapping of a copper-cap.

This article, if finished at all, must be written with the keelavine pen on the backs of old letters – whereof, thank heaven! we have scores unanswered – by fits and snatches, as we repose from our labours on the greensward; so we shall even take up our gun, and trust for inspiration to the noble scenery around us. Is every thing in? Well, then, push off, and for a time let us get rid of care.

What sort of fishing have they had at the salmon-nets, Ian? Very bad, for they're sair fashed wi' the sealghs. In that case it may be advisable to drop a ball into our dexter barrel, in case one of these oleaginous depredators should show his head above water. We have not had a tussle with a phoca since, some ten years ago, we surprised one basking on the sands of the bay of Cromarty. No, Donald, we did not kill him. We and a dear friend, now in New Zealand, who was with us, were armed with no better weapon than our fishing-rods, and the sealgh, after standing two or three thumps with tolerable philosophy, fairly turned upon us, and exhibited such tusks that we were glad to let him make his way without further molestation to the water. The seal is indeed a greedy fellow, and ten times worse than his fresh-water cousin the otter, who, it seems, is considered by the poor people in the north country as rather a benefactor than otherwise. The latter is a dainty epicure – a *gourmand* who despises to take more than one steak from the sappy shoulder of the salmon; and he has usually the benevolence to leave the fish, little the worse for his company, on some scarp or ledge of rock, where it can be picked up and converted into savoury kipper. He is, moreover, a sly and timid creature, without the impudence of the seal, who will think nothing of swimming into the nets, and actually taking out the salmon before the eyes of the fishermen. Strong must be the twine that would hold an entangled seal. An aquatic Samson, he snaps the meshes like thread, and laughs at the discomfiture of the tacksman, who is dancing like a demoniac on the shore; and no wonder, for nets are expensive, and the rent in that one is wide enough to admit a bullock.

Mr St John – a capital sportsman, Donald – has had many an adventure with the seals; and I shall read you what he says about them, in a clever little book which he has published – What the deuce! We surely have not been ass enough to forget the volume! No – here it is at the bottom of our pocket, concealed and covered by the powder-flask: —

"Sometimes at high-water, and when the river is swollen, a seal comes in pursuit of salmon into the Findhorn, notwithstanding the smallness of the stream and its rapidity. I was one day, in November, looking for wild-ducks near the river, when I was called to by a man who was at work near the water, and who told me that some 'muckle beast' was playing most extraordinary tricks in the river. He could not tell me what beast it was, but only that it was something 'no that canny.' After waiting a short time, the riddle was solved by the appearance of a good-sized seal, into whose head I instantly sent a cartridge, having no balls with me. The seal immediately plunged and splashed about in the water at a most furious rate, and then began swimming round and round in a circle, upon which I gave him the other barrel, also loaded with one of Eley's cartridges, which quite settled the business, and he floated rapidly away down the stream. I sent my retriever after him, but the dog, being very young and not come to his full strength, was baffled by the weight of the animal and the strength of the current, and could not land him; indeed, he was very near getting drowned himself, in consequence of his attempts to bring in the seal, who was still struggling. I called the dog away, and the seal immediately sank. The next day I found him dead on the shore of the bay, with (as the man who skinned him expressed himself) 'twenty-three pellets of large hail in his craig.'

"Another day, in the month of July, when shooting rabbits on the sand-hills, a messenger came from the fishermen at the stake-nets, asking me to come in that direction, as the 'muckle sealgh' was swimming about, waiting for the fish to be caught in the nets, in order to commence his devastation.

"I accordingly went to them, and having taken my observations of the locality and the most feasible points of attack, I got the men to row me out to the end of the stake-net, where there was a kind of platform of netting, on which I stretched myself, with a bullet in one barrel and a cartridge in

the other. I then directed the men to row the boat away, as if they had left the nets. They had scarcely gone three hundred yards from the place when I saw the seal, who had been floating, apparently unconcerned, at some distance, swim quietly and fearlessly up to the net. I had made a kind of breastwork of old netting before me, which quite concealed me on the side from which he came. He approached the net, and began examining it leisurely and carefully to see if any fish were in it; sometimes he was under and sometimes above the water. I was much struck by his activity while underneath, where I could most plainly see him, particularly as he twice dived almost below my station, and the water was clear and smooth as glass.

"I could not get a good shot at him for some time; at last, however, he put up his head at about fifteen or twenty yards' distance from me; and while he was intent on watching the boat, which was hovering about waiting to see the result of my plan of attack, I fired at him, sending the ball through his brain. He instantly sank without a struggle, and a perfect torrent of blood came up, making the water red for some feet round the spot where he lay stretched out at the bottom. The men immediately rowed up, and taking me into the boat, we managed to bring him up with a boat-hook to the surface of the water, and then, as he was too heavy to lift into the boat (his weight being 378 lbs.) we put a rope round his flippers, and towed him ashore. A seal of this size is worth some money, as, independently of the value of his skin, the blubber (which lies under the skin, like that of a whale) produces a large quantity of excellent oil. This seal had been for several years the dread of the fishermen at the stake-nets, and the head man at the place was profuse in his thanks for the destruction of a beast upon whom he had expended a most amazing quantity of lead. He assured me that L.100 would not repay the damage the animal had done. Scarcely any two seals are exactly of the same colour or marked quite alike; and seals, frequenting a particular part of the coast, become easily known and distinguished from each other."

But what is Scrip youffing at from the bow? A seal? No, it is a shoal of porpoises. There they go with their great black fins above the water in pursuit of the herring, which ought to be very plenty on this coast. Yonder, where the gulls are screaming and diving, with here and there a solan goose and a cormorant in the midst of the flock, must be a patch of the smaller fry. The water is absolutely boiling as the quick-eyed creatures dart down upon their prey; and though, on an ordinary day, you will hardly see a single seagull in this part of the loch, for the shores are neither steep nor rocky, yet there they are in myriads, attracted to the spot by that unerring and inexplicable instinct which seems to guide all wild animals to their booty, and that from distances where neither sight nor scent could possibly avail them. This peculiarity has not escaped the observant eye of our author.

"How curiously quick is the instinct of birds in finding out their food. Where peas or other favourite grain is sown, wood pigeons and tame pigeons immediately congregate. It is not easy to ascertain from whence the former come, but the house pigeons have often been known to arrive in numbers on a new sown field the very morning after the grain is laid down, although no pigeon-house, from which they could come, exists within several miles of the place.

"Put down a handful or two of unthrashed oat-straw in almost any situation near the sea-coast, where there are wild-ducks, and they are sure to find it out the first or second night after it has been left there.

"There are many almost incredible stories of the acuteness of the raven's instinct in guiding it to the dead carcass of any large animal, or even in leading it to the neighbourhood on the near approach of death. I myself have known several instances of the raven finding out dead bodies of animals in a very short space of time. One instance struck me very much. I had wounded a stag on a Wednesday. The following Friday, I was crossing the hills at some distance from the place, but in the direction towards which the deer had gone. Two ravens passed me, flying in a steady straight course. Soon again two more flew by, and two others followed, all coming from different directions, but making direct for the same point. "Deed, sir,' said the Highlander with me, 'the corbies have just found the staig; he will be lying dead about the head of the muckle burn.' By tracing the course of the birds, we

found that the man's conjecture was correct, as the deer was lying within a mile of us, and the ravens were making for its carcass. The animal had evidently only died the day before, but the birds had already made their breakfast upon him, and were now on their way to their evening meal. Though occasionally we had seen a pair of ravens soaring high overhead in that district, we never saw more than that number; but now there were some six or seven pairs already collected, where from we knew not. When a whale, or other large fish, is driven ashore on the coast of any of the northern islands, the ravens collect in amazing numbers, almost immediately coming from all directions and from all distances, led by the unerring instinct which tells them that a feast is to be found in a particular spot."

We should not wonder if the ancient augurs, who, no doubt, were consummate scoundrels, had an inkling of this extraordinary fact. If so, it would have been obviously easy, at the simple expenditure of a few pounds of bullock's liver, to get up any kind of ornithological vaticination. A dead ram, dexterously hidden from the sight of the spectators behind the Aventine, would speedily have brought birds enough to have justified any amount of warlike expeditions to the Peloponesus; while a defunct goat to the left of the Esquiline, would collect sooties by scores, and forebode the death of Cæsar. We own that formerly we ourselves were not altogether exempt from superstitious notions touching the mission of magpies; but henceforward we shall cease to consider them, even when they appear by threes, as bound up in some mysterious manner with our destiny, and shall rather attribute their apparition to the unexpected deposit of an egg.

But here we are at the shore, and not a mile from the margin of the moor. Ian, our fine fellow, look after the dogs; and now tell us, Donald, as we walk along, whether there are many poachers in this neighbourhood besides yourself? Atweel no, forbye muckle Sandy, that whiles taks a shot at a time. – We thought so. In these quiet braes there can be little systematic poaching. Now and then, to be sure, a hare is killed on a moonlight night among the cabbages behind the shieling; or a blackcock, too conspicuous of a misty morning on a corn-stook, pays the penalty of his depredations with his life. But these little acts of delinquency are of no earthly moment; and hard must be the heart of the proprietor who, for such petty doings, would have recourse to the vengeance of the law. But were you ever in Lochaber, Donald? – Oo ay, and Badenoch too. – And are you aware that in those districts where the deer are plenty, there exist, at the present day, gangs of organised poachers – fellows who follow no other calling – true Sons of the Mist, who prey upon the red-deer of the mountain without troubling the herds of the Sassenach; and who, though perfectly well known by head-mark to keeper and constable, are still permitted with impunity to continue their depredations from year to year? – I never heard tell of it.

No more have we. Notwithstanding Mr St John's usual accuracy and great means of information, he has given, in the fifth chapter of his book, an account of the Highland poachers which we cannot admit to be correct. In every thinly-populated country, where there is abundance of game, poaching must take place to a considerable extent, and indeed it is impossible to prevent it. You never can convince the people, that the statutory sin is a moral one; or that, in taking for their own sustenance that which avowedly belongs to no one, they are acting in opposition to a just or a salutary law. The question of *whence* the game is taken, is a subtilty too nice for their comprehension. They see the stag running wild among the mountains, to-day on one laird's land, and away to-morrow to another's, bearing with him, as it were, his own transference of property; and they very naturally conclude that they have an abstract right to attempt his capture, if they can. The shepherd, who has thousands of acres under his sole superintendence, and whose dwelling is situated far away on the hills, at the head, perhaps, of some lonely stream, where no strange foot ever penetrates, is very often, it must be confessed, a bit of a poacher. Small blame to him. He has a gun – for the eagle, and the fox, and the raven, must be kept from the lambs; and if, when prowling about with his weapon, in search of vermin, he should chance to put up, as he is sure to do, a covey of grouse, and recollecting at the moment that there is nothing in the house beyond a peas-bannock and a diseased potato, should let fly, and bring down a gor-cock, who will venture to assert that, under such circumstances, he would

hesitate to do the same? For every grouse so slaughtered, the shepherd frees the country from a brace of vermin more dangerous than fifty human poachers; for every day in the year they breakfast, dine, and sup exclusively upon game.

Let the shepherd, then, take his pittance from the midst of your plenty unmolested, if he does no worse. Why should his hut be searched by some big brute of a Yorkshire keeper, for fud or feather, when you know that, in all essentials, the man is as honest as steel – nay, that even in this matter of game, he is attentive to your interests, watches the young broods, protects the nests, and will tell you, when you come up the glen, where the finest coveys are to be found? It is, however, quite another thing if you detect him beginning to drive a contraband trade. Home consumption may be winked at – foreign exportation is most decidedly an unpardonable offence. The moment you find that he has entered into a league with the poulterer or the coachman, give warning to the offending Melibœus, and let him seek a livelihood elsewhere. He is no longer safe. His instinct is depraved. He has ceased to be a creature of impulse, and has become the slave of a corrupted traffic. He is a noxious member of the Anti-game-law League.

This sort of poaching we believe to be common enough in Scotland, and there is also another kind more formidable, which, a few years ago, was rather extensively practised. Parties of four or five strong, able-bodied rascals, principally inmates of some of the smaller burghs in the north, used to make their way to another district of country, taking care, of course, that it was far enough from home to render any chance of identification almost a nullity, and would there begin to shoot, in absolute defiance of the keepers. Their method was not to diverge, but to traverse the country as nearly as possible in a straight line; so that very often they had left the lands of the most extensive proprietors even before the alarm was given. These men neither courted nor shunned a scuffle. They were confident in their strength of numbers, but never abused it; nor, so far as we recollect, have any fatal results attended this illegal practice. Be that as it may, the misdemeanour is a very serious one, and the perpetrators of it, if discovered, would be subjected to a severe punishment.

But Mr St John asserts the existence of a different class of poachers, whose exploits, if real, are a deep reproach to the vigilance of our respected friends the Sheriffs of Inverness, Ross, and Moray, as also to the Substitutes and their Fiscals. According to the accounts which have reached him, and which he seems implicitly to believe, there are, at this moment, gangs of caterans existing among the mountains, who follow no other occupation whatever than that of poaching. This they do not even affect to disguise. They make a good income by the sale of game, and by breaking dogs – they take the crown of the causeway in the country towns, where they are perfectly well known, and where the men give them "plenty of walking-room." On such occasions, they are accompanied with a couple of magnificent stag-hounds, and in this guise they venture undauntedly beneath the very nose of "ta Phuscal!" The Highland poacher, says Mr St John, "is a bold fearless fellow, shooting openly by daylight, taking his sport in the same manner as the laird, or the Sassenach who rents the ground." That is to say, this outlaw, who has a sheiling or a bothy on the laird's ground – for a man cannot live in the Highlands without a roof to shelter him – shoots as openly on these grounds as the laird himself, or the party who has rented them for the season! If this be the case, the breed of Highland proprietors – ay, and of Highland keepers – must have degenerated sadly during the last few years. The idea that any such character would be permitted by even the tamest Dumbiedykes to continue a permanent resident upon his lands, is perfectly preposterous. Game is not considered as a matter of such slight import in any part of the Highlands; neither is the arm of the law so weak, that it does not interfere with most rapid and salutary effect. No professed poacher, we aver, dare shoot openly upon the lands of the laird by whose tenure or sufferance he maintains a roof above his head; and it would be a libel upon those high-minded gentlemen to suppose, that they knowingly gave countenance to any such character, on the tacit understanding that their property should be spared while that of their neighbours was invaded. In less than a week after the information was given, the

ruffian would be without any covering to his head, save that which would be afforded him by the arches of the Inverness or Fort-William jail.

Long tracts of country there are, comparatively unvisited – for example, the district around Lochs Ericht and Lydoch, and the deserts towards the head of the Spey. Yet, even there, the poacher is a marked man. The necessity of finding a market for the produce of his spoil, lays him open immediately to observation. If he chooses to burrow with the badger, he may be said to have deserted his trade. He cannot by any possibility, let him do what he will, elude the vigilance of the keeper; and, if known, he is within the clutches of the law without the necessity of immediate apprehension.

The truth of the matter is, that the poachers have no longer to deal directly with the lairds. The number of moors which are rented to Englishmen is now very great; and it is principally from these that the depredators reap their harvest. Accordingly, no pains are spared to impress the Sassenach with an exaggerated idea of the lawlessness of the Gael, in every thing relating to the game-laws and the statutes of the excise. The right of the people to poach is asserted as a kind of indefeasible servitude which the law winks at, because it cannot control; and we fear that, in some cases, the keepers, who care nothing for the new-comers, indirectly lend themselves to the delusion. The Englishman, on arriving at the moor which he has rented, is informed that he must either compromise with the poachers, or submit to the loss of his game – a kind of treaty which, we believe, is pretty often made in the manner related by Mr St John.

"Some proprietors, or lessees of shooting-grounds, make a kind of half compromise with the poachers, by allowing them to kill grouse as long as they do not touch the deer; others, who are grouse-shooters, let them kill the deer to save their birds. I have known an instance where a prosecution was stopped by the aggrieved party being quietly made to understand, that if it was carried on, a score of lads from the hills would shoot over his ground for the rest of the season."

Utterly devoid of pluck must the said aggrieved party have been! Had he carried on the prosecution firmly, and given notice to the authorities of the audacious and impudent threat, with the names of the parties who conveyed it, not a trigger would have been drawn upon his ground, or a head of game destroyed. If the lessees of shooting-grounds are idiots enough to enter into any such compromise, they will of course find abundance of poachers to take advantage of it. Every shepherd on the property will take regularly to the hill; for by such an arrangement the market is virtually thrown open, and absolute impunity is promised. But we venture to say that there is not one instance on record where a Highland proprietor, of Scottish birth and breeding, has condescended to make any such terms – indeed, we should like to see the ruffian who would venture openly to propose them.

As to Mr St John's assertion, that "in Edinburgh there are numbers of men who work as porters, &c., during the winter, and poach in the Highlands during the autumn," we can assure him that he is labouring under a total delusion. A more respectable set of men in their way than the Edinburgh chairmen, is not to be found on the face of the civilised globe. Not a man of those excellent creatures, who periodically play at drafts at the corners of Hanover and Castle Street, ever went out in an illicit manner to the moors: nor shall we except from this vindication our old acquaintances at the Tron. Their worst vices are a strong predilection for snuff and whisky; otherwise they are nearly faultless, and they run beautifully in harness between the springy shafts of a sedan. If they ever set foot upon the heather, it is in the capacity of gillies, for which service they receive excellent wages, and capital hands they are for looking after the comforts of the dogs. Does Mr St John mean to insinuate that the twin stalwart tylers of the lodge Canongate Kilwinning – whose fine features are so similar that it is almost impossible to distinguish them – go out systematically in autumn to the Highlands for the purpose of poaching? Why, to our own knowledge, they are both most praiseworthy fathers of families, exemplary husbands, well to do in the world, and, were they to die to-morrow, there would not be a drop of black-cock's blood upon their souls. Like testimony could we bear in favour of a hundred others, whom you might trust with untold gold, not to speak of a wilderness of hares; but to any one who knows them, it is unnecessary to plead further in the cause of the caddies.

We fear, therefore, that in this particular of Highland poaching, Mr St John has been slightly humbugged; and we cannot help thinking, that in this work of mystification, his prime favourite and hero, Mr Ronald, has had no inconsiderable share. As to the feats of this handsome desperado, as related by himself, we accept them with a mental reservation. Notwithstanding the acknowledged fact that the Grants existed simultaneously with the sons of Anak, we doubt extremely whether any one individual of that clan, or of any other, could, more especially when in bed, and fatigued with a long day's exertion, overcome five sturdy assailants. If so, the fellow would make money by hiring a caravan, and exhibiting himself as a peripatetic Hercules: or, if such an exhibition should be deemed derogatory to a poaching outlaw, he might enter the pugilistic or wrestling ring, with the certainty of walking the course. The man who, without taking the trouble to rise out of bed, could put two big hulking Highlanders under him, breaking the ribs of one of them, and keeping them down with one knee, and who in that posture could successfully foil the attack of other three, is an ugly customer, and we venture to say that his match is not to be found within the four seas of Great Britain. The story of his tearing down the rafter, bestowing breakfast upon his opponents, and afterwards pitching the keeper deliberately into the burn, is so eminently apocryphal, that we cannot help wondering at Mr St John for honouring it with a place in his pages.

Did you ever see a badger, Scrip? That, we suspect, is the vestibule of one of them at which you are snuffing and scraping; but you have no chance of getting at him, for there he is lying deep beneath the rock; and, to say the truth, game as you are, we would rather keep you intact from the perils of his powerful jaw. He is, we agree with Mr St John, an ancient and respectable quadruped, by far too much maligned in this wicked age; and – were it for no other reason than the inimitable adaptation of his hair for shaving-brushes – we should sincerely regret his extinction in the British isles. We like the chivalry with which our author undertakes the defence of any libelled and persecuted animal, and in no instance is he more happy than in his oration in favour of the injured badger. Like Harry Bertram, he is not ashamed "of caring about a brock."

"Notwithstanding the persecutions and indignities that he is unjustly doomed to suffer, I maintain that he is far more respectable in his habits than we generally consider him to be. 'Dirty as a badger,' 'stinking as a badger,' are two sayings often repeated, but quite inapplicable to him. As far as we can learn of the domestic economy of this animal when in a state of nature, he is remarkable for his cleanliness – his extensive burrows are always kept perfectly clean, and free from all offensive smell; no filth is ever found about his abode; every thing likely to offend his olfactory nerves is carefully removed. I, once, in the north of Scotland, fell in with a perfect colony of badgers; they had taken up their abode in an unfrequented range of wooded rocks, and appeared to have been little interrupted in their possession of them. The footpaths to and from their numerous holes were beaten quite hard; and what is remarkable and worthy of note, they had different small pits dug at a certain distance from their abodes, which were evidently used as receptacles for all offensive filth; every other part of their colony was perfectly clean. A solitary badger's hole, which I once had dug out, during the winter season, presented a curious picture of his domestic and military arrangements – a hard and long job it was for two men to achieve, the passage here and there turned in a sharp angle round some projecting corners of rock, which he evidently makes use of when attacked, as points of defence, making a stand at any of these angles, where a dog could not scratch to enlarge the aperture, and fighting from behind his stone buttress. After tracing out a long winding passage, the workmen came to two branches in the hole, each leading to good-sized chambers: in one of these was stored a considerable quantity of dried grass, rolled up into balls as large as a man's fist, and evidently intended for food; in the other chamber there was a bed of soft dry grass and leaves – the sole inhabitant was a peculiarly large old dog-badger. Besides coarse grasses, their food consists of various roots; amongst others, I have frequently found about their hole the bulb of the common wild blue hyacinth. Fruit of all kinds and esculent vegetables form his repast, and I fear that he must plead guilty to devouring any small animal that may come in his way, alive or dead; though not being adapted for the chase, or even for

any very skilful strategy of war, I do not suppose that he can do much in catching an unwounded bird or beast. Eggs are his delight, and a partridge's nest with seventeen or eighteen eggs must afford him a fine meal, particularly if he can surprise and kill the hen-bird also; snails and worms which he finds above ground during his nocturnal rambles, are likewise included in his bill of fare. I was one summer evening walking home from fishing in Loch Ness, and having occasion to fasten up some part of my tackle, and also expecting to meet my keeper, I sat down on the shore of the loch. I remained some time, enjoying the lovely prospect: the perfectly clear and unruffled loch lay before me, reflecting the northern shore in its quiet water. The opposite banks consisted, in some parts, of bright greensward, sloping to the water's edge, and studded with some of the most beautiful birch-trees in Scotland; several of the trees spreading out like the oak, and with their ragged and ancient-looking bark resembling the cork-tree of Spain – others drooping and weeping over the edge of the water in the most lady-like and elegant manner. Parts of the loch were edged in by old lichen-covered rocks; while farther on a magnificent scaur of red stone rose perpendicularly from the water's edge to a very great height. So clearly was every object on the opposite shore reflected in the lake below, that it was difficult, nay impossible, to distinguish where the water ended and the land commenced – the shadow from the reality. The sun was already set, but its rays still illuminated the sky. It is said that from the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step; – and I was just then startled from my reverie by a kind of grunt close to me, and the apparition of a small waddling grey animal, who was busily employed in hunting about the grass and stones at the edge of the loch; presently another, and another, appeared in a little grassy glade which ran down to the water's edge, till at last I saw seven of them busily at work within a few yards of me, all coming from one direction. It at first struck me that they were some farmer's pigs taking a distant ramble, but I shortly saw that they were badgers, come from their fastnesses rather earlier than usual, tempted by the quiet evening, and by a heavy summer shower that was just over, and which had brought out an infinity of large black snails and worms, on which the badgers were feeding with good appetite. As I was dressed in grey and sitting on a grey rock, they did not see me, but waddled about, sometimes close to me; only now and then as they crossed my track they showed a slight uneasiness, smelling the ground, and grunting gently. Presently a very large one, which I took to be the mother of the rest, stood motionless for a moment listening with great attention, and then giving a loud grunt, which seemed perfectly understood by the others, she scuttled away, followed by the whole lot. I was soon joined by my attendant, whose approach they had heard long before my less acute ears gave me warning of his coming. In trapping other vermin in these woods, we constantly caught badgers – sometimes several were found in the traps; I always regretted this, as my keeper was most unwilling to spare their lives, and I fancy seldom did so. His arguments were tolerably cogent, I must confess. When I tried to persuade him that they were quite harmless, he answered me by asking – 'Then why, sir, have they got such teeth, if they don't live, like a dog or fox, on flesh? – and why do they get caught so often in traps baited with rabbits?' I could not but admit that they had most carnivorous-looking teeth, and well adapted to act on the offensive as well as defensive, or to crunch the bones of any young hare, rabbit, or pheasant that came in their way."

But now we have reached the moors, and for the next few hours we shall follow out the Wild Sports for ourselves. Ian, let loose the dogs.

Oh, pleasant – pleasant and cool are the waters of the mountain well! It is now past noonday, and we shall call a halt for a while. Donald, let us see what is in that bag. Twelve brace and a half of grouse, three blackcock, a leash of snipes, two ditto of golden plovers, three hares, and the mallard that we raised from the rushes. Quite enough, we think, for any rational sportsman's recreation, howbeit we have a few hours yet before us. Somewhere, we think, in the other bag, there should be a cold fowl, or some such kickshaw, with, if we mistake not, a vision of beef, and a certain pewter flask. – Thank you. Now, let us all down by the side of the spring, and to luncheon with what appetite we may.

Are there any deer on these hills, Ian? But seldom. Occasionally a straggler may come over from one of the upper forests, but there are too many sheep about; and the deer, though they will herd sometimes with black cattle, have a rooted antipathy to the others. No sight is finer than that of a stag surrounded by his hinds; but it is late in the year that the spectacle becomes most imposing, and we would have given something to have been present with Mr St John on the following occasion: —

"The red deer had just commenced what is called by the Highlanders roaring, *i. e.* uttering their loud cries of defiance to rival stags, and of warning to their rival mistresses.

"There had been seen, and reported to me, a particularly large and fine antlered stag, whose branching honours I wished to transfer from the mountain side to the walls of my own hall. Donald and myself accordingly, one fine morning, early in October, started before daybreak for a distant part of the mountain, where we expected to find him; and we resolved to pass the night at a shepherd's house far up in the hills, if we found that our chase led us too far from home to return the same evening.

"Long was our walk that day before we saw horn or hoof; many a likely burn and corrie did we search in vain. The shepherds had been scouring the hills the day before for their sheep, to divide those which were to winter in the low ground from those which were to remain on the hills. However, the day was fine and frosty, and we were in the midst of some of the most magnificent scenery in Scotland; so that I, at least, was not much distressed at our want of luck. Poor Donald, who had not the same enjoyment in the beauty of the scene, unless it were enlivened by a herd of deer here and there, began to grumble and lament our hard fate; particularly as towards evening wild masses of cloud began to sweep up the glens and along the sides of the mountain, and every now and then a storm of cold rain and sleet added to the discomfort of our position. There was, however, something so very desolate and wild in the scene and the day, that, wrapt in my plaid, I stalked slowly on, enjoying the whole thing as much as if the elements had been in better temper, and the Goddess of Hunting propitious.

"We came in the afternoon to a rocky burn, along the course of which was our line of march. To the left rose an interminable-looking mountain, over the sides of which was scattered a wilderness of grey rock and stone, sometimes forming immense precipices, and in other places degenerating into large tracts of loose and water-worn grey shingle, apparently collected and heaped together by the winter floods. Great masses of rock were scattered about, resting on their angles, and looking as if the wind, which was blowing a perfect gale, would hurl them down on us.

"Amongst all this dreary waste of rock and stone, there were large patches of bright green pasture, and rushes on the level spots, formed by the damming up of the springs and mountain streams.

"Stretching away to our right was a great expanse of brown heather and swampy ground, dotted with innumerable pools of black-looking water. The horizon on every side was shut out by the approaching masses of rain and drift. The clouds closed round us, and the rain began to fall in straight hard torrents; at the same time, however, completely allaying the wind.

"'Well, well,' said Donald, 'I just dinna ken what to do.' Even I began to think that we might as well have remained at home; but, putting the best face on the matter, we got under a projecting bank of the burn, and took out our provision of oatcake and cold grouse, and having demolished that, and made a considerable vacuum in the whisky flask, I lit my cigar, and meditated on the vanity of human pursuits in general, and of deer-stalking in particular, while dreamy visions of balls, operas, and the last pair of blue eyes that I had sworn everlasting allegiance to, passed before me.

"Donald was employed in the more useful employment of bobbing for burn trout with a line and hook he had produced out of his bonnet – that wonderful blue bonnet, which, like the bag in the fairy tale, contains any thing and every thing which is required at a moment's notice. His bait was the worms which in a somewhat sulky mood he kicked out of their damp homes about the edge of the burn. Presently the ring-ousel began to whistle on the hill-side, and the cock-grouse to crow in the valley below us. Roused by these omens of better weather, I looked out from our shelter and saw the face of the sun struggling to show itself through the masses of cloud, while the rain fell in larger

but more scattered drops. In a quarter of an hour the clouds were rapidly disappearing, and the face of the hill as quickly opening to our view. We remained under shelter a few minutes longer, when suddenly, as if by magic, or like the lifting of the curtain at a theatre, the whole hill was perfectly clear from clouds, and looked more bright and splendidly beautiful than any thing I had ever seen. No symptoms were left of the rain, excepting the drops on the heather, which shone like diamonds in the evening sun. The masses of rock came out in every degree of light and shade, from dazzling white to the darkest purple, streaked here and there with the overpourings of the swollen rills and springs, which danced and leapt from rock to rock, and from crag to crag, looking like streams of silver.

"'How beautiful!' was both my inward and outward exclamation. 'Deed it's not just so dour as it was,' said Donald; 'but, the Lord guide us! look at yon,' he continued, fixing his eye on a distant slope, at the same time slowly winding up his line and pouching his trout, of which he had caught a goodly number. 'Tak your perspective, sir, and look there,' he added, pointing with his chin. I accordingly took my perspective, as he always called my pocket-telescope, and saw a long line of deer winding from amongst the broken granite in single file down towards us. They kept advancing one after the other, and had a most singular appearance as their line followed the undulations of the ground. They came slowly on, to the number of more than sixty (all hinds, not a horn amongst them), till they arrived at a piece of table-land four or five hundred yards from us, when they spread about to feed, occasionally shaking off the raindrops from their hides, much in the same manner as a dog does on coming out of the water.

"'They are no that canny,' said Donald. '*Nous verrons*,' said I. 'What's your wull?' was his answer; 'I'm no understanding Latin, though my wife has a cousin who is a placed minister.' 'Why, Donald, I meant to say that we shall soon see whether they are canny or not: a rifle-ball is a sure remedy for all witchcraft.' Certainly there was something rather startling in the way they all suddenly appeared as it were from the bowels of the mountain, and the deliberate, unconcerned manner in which they set to work feeding like so many tame cattle.

"We had but a short distance to stalk. I kept the course of a small stream which led through the middle of the herd; Donald followed me with my gun. We crept up till we reckoned that we must be within an easy shot, and then, looking most cautiously through the crevices and cuts in the bank, I saw that we were in the very centre of the herd: many of the deer were within twenty or thirty yards, and all feeding quietly and unconscious of any danger. Amongst the nearest to me was a remarkably large hind, which we had before observed as being the leader and biggest of the herd, I made a sign to Donald that I would shoot her, and left him to take what he liked of the flock after I fired.

"Taking a deliberate and cool aim at her shoulder, I pulled the trigger; but, alas! the wet had got between the cap and nipple-end. All that followed was a harmless snap: the deer heard it, and, starting from their food, rushed together in a confused heap, as if to give Donald a fair chance at the entire flock, a kind of shot he rather rejoiced in. Before I could get a dry cap on my gun, snap, snap, went both his barrels; and when I looked up, it was but to see the whole herd quietly trotting up the hill, out of shot, but apparently not very much frightened, as they had not seen us, or found out exactly where the sound came from. 'We are just twa fules, begging your honour's pardon, and only fit to weave hose by the ingle,' said Donald. I could not contradict him. The mischief was done; so we had nothing for it but to wipe out our guns as well as we could, and proceed on our wandering. We followed the probable line of the deers' march, and before night saw them in a distant valley feeding again quite unconcernedly.

"'Hark! what is that?' said I, as a hollow roar like an angry bull was heard not far from us. 'Kep down, kep down,' said Donald, suiting the action to the word, and pressing me down with his hand; 'it's just a big staig.' All the hinds looked up, and, following the direction of their heads, we saw an immense hart coming over the brow of the hill three hundred yards from us. He might easily have seen us, but seemed too intent on the hinds to think of any thing else. On the height of the hill he halted, and, stretching out his neck and lowering his head, bellowed again. He then rushed down

the hill like a mad beast: when half-way down he was answered from a distance by another stag. He instantly halted, and, looking in that direction, roared repeatedly, while we could see in the evening air, which had become cold and frosty, his breath coming out of his nostrils like smoke. Presently he was answered by another and another stag, and the whole distance seemed alive with them. A more unearthly noise I never heard, as it echoed and re-echoed through the rocky glens that surrounded us.

"The setting sun threw a strong light on the first comer, casting a kind of yellow glare on his horns and head, while his body was in deep shade, giving him a most singular appearance, particularly when combined with his hoarse and strange bellowing. As the evening closed in, their cries became almost incessant, while here and there we heard the clash of horns as two rival stags met and fought a few rounds together. None, however, seemed inclined to try their strength with the large hart who had first appeared. The last time we saw him, in the gloom of the evening, he was rolling in a small pool of water, with several of the hinds standing quietly round him; while the smaller stags kept passing to and fro near the hinds, but afraid to approach too close to their watchful rival, who was always ready to jump up and dash at any of them who ventured within a certain distance of his seraglio. 'Donald,' I whispered, 'I would not have lost this sight for a hundred pounds.' 'Deed no, its grand,' said he. 'In all my travels on the hill I never saw the like.' Indeed it is very seldom that chances combine to enable a deer-stalker to quietly look on at such a strange meeting of deer as we had witnessed that evening. But night was coming on, and though the moon was clear and full, we did not like to start off for the shepherd's house, through the swamps and swollen burns among which we should have had to pass; nor did we forget that our road would be through the valley where all this congregation of deer were. So after consulting, we turned off to leeward to bivouac amongst the rocks at the back of the hill, at a sufficient distance from the deer not to disturb them by our necessary occupation of cooking the trout, which our evening meal was to consist of. Having hunted out some of the driest of the fir-roots which were in abundance near us, we soon made a bright fire out of view of the deer, and, after eating some fish, and drying our clothes pretty well, we found a snug corner in the rocks, where, wrapped up in our plaids and covered with heather, we arranged ourselves to sleep.

"Several times during the night I got up and listened to the wild bellowing of the deer: sometimes it sounded close to us, and at other times far away. To an unaccustomed ear it might easily have passed for the roaring of a host of much more dangerous wild beasts, so loud and hollow did it sound. I awoke in the morning cold and stiff, but soon put my blood into circulation by running two or three times up and down a steep bit of the hill. As for Donald, he shook himself, took a pinch of snuff, and was all right. The sun was not yet above the horizon, though the tops of the mountains to the west were already brightly gilt by its rays, and the grouse-cocks were answering each other in every direction."

A graphic and most true description! The same gathering of the deer, but on a far larger scale, may be seen in the glens near the centre of Sutherland, hard by the banks of Loch Naver. Many hundreds of them congregate there together at the bleak season of their love; and the bellowing of the stags may be heard miles off among the solitude of the mountain. Nor is it altogether safe at that time to cross their path. The hart – a dangerous brute whenever brought to bay – then appears to lose all trace of his customary timidity, and will advance against the intruder, be he who he may, with levelled antler and stamping hoof, as becomes the acknowledged leader, bashaw, and champion of the herd. Also among the Coolin hills, perhaps the wildest of all our Highland scenery, where the dark rain-clouds of the Atlantic stretch from peak to peak of the jagged heights – where the ghostlike silence strikes you with unwonted awe, and the echo of your own footfall rings startlingly on the ear from the metallic cliffs of Hyperstein.

What is it, Ian? As we live, Orleans is pointing in yon correi, and Bordeaux backing him like a Trojan. Soho, Tours! Now for it. Black game, we rather think. Well roaded, dogs! Bang! An old cock. Ian, you may pick him up.

LETTERS AND IMPRESSIONS FROM PARIS. [2]

The gay metropolis of France has not lacked chroniclers, whether indigenous or foreign. And no wonder. The subject is inexhaustible, the mine can never be worn out. Paris is a huge kaleidoscope, in which the slightest movement of the hand of time produces fantastic changes and still recurring novelties. Central in position, it is the rendezvous of Europe. London is respected for its size, wealth, and commerce, and as the capital of the great empire on which the sun never sets; Paris is loved for its pleasures and pastimes, its amusements and dissipations. The one is the money-getter's Eldorado, the other the pleasure-seeker's paradise. The former is viewed with wonder and admiration; for size it is a province, for population a kingdom. But Paris, the modern Babel, with its boulevards and palaces, its five-and-twenty theatres, its gaudy restaurants and glittering coffee-houses, its light and cheerful aspect, so different from the soot-grimed walls of the English capital, is the land of promise to truant gentlemen and erratic ladies, whether from the Don or the Danube, the Rhine or the Wolga, from the frozen steppes of the chilly north, or the orange groves of the sunny south. A library has been written to exhibit its physiognomy; thousands of pens have laboured to depict the peculiarities of its population, floating and stationary.

Amongst those who have most recently attempted the task, Mr Karl Gutzkow, a dramatist of some fame in his own land, holds a respectable place. He has recorded in print the results of two visits to Paris, paid in 1842 and in the present year. The self-imposed labour has been creditably performed; much truth and sharpness of observation are manifest in his pages, although here and there a triviality forces a smile, a far-fetched idea or a bizarre opinion causes a start. Mr Gutzkow partakes a fault common to many of his countrymen – a tendency to extremes, an aptness either to trifle or to soar, now playing on the ground with the children, then floating in the clouds with mystical familiars, or on a winged hobbyhorse. Desultory in style, he neglects the classification of his subject. Abruptly passing from the grave to the light, from the solid to the frothy, he breaks off a profound disquisition or philosophical argument to chatter about the new vaudeville, and glides from a scandalous anecdote of an actress into the policy of Louis Philippe. His frequent and capricious transitions are not disagreeable, and help one pleasantly enough through the book, but a methodical arrangement would be more favourable to the reader's memory. As it is, we lay down the volume with a perfect jumble in our brains, made up of the sayings, doings, qualities, and characteristics of actors, authors, statesmen, communists, journalists, and of the various other classes concerning whom Mr Gutzkow discourses, introducing them just as they occur to him, or as he happened to meet with them, and in some instances returning three or four times to the same individual. The first part of the book, which is the most lengthy and important, is in the form of letters, and was perhaps actually written to friends in Germany. This would account for its desultoriness and medley of matter. The second portion, written during or subsequently to a recent visit to Paris, serves as an appendix, and as a rectification of what came before. The author troubles himself little about places; he went to see Parisians rather than to gaze at Paris, to study men rather than to admire monuments, and has the good sense to avoid prattling about things that have been described and discussed by more common-place writers than himself. Well provided with introductions, he made the acquaintance of numerous notabilities, both political and literary, and of them he gives abundant details: an eager play-goer, his theatrical criticisms are bold, minute, and often exceedingly happy; an observant man, his remarks on the social condition of Paris and of France are both acute and interesting. Let us follow him page by page through his fifth letter or chapter, the first that relates to Paris. Those that precede contain an account of his journey from Hanover. On his entrance into France, he encounters various petty disagreeables, in the shape of ill-hung vehicles, sulky conductors, bad dinners, extravagant prices,

[2] *Briefe aus Paris*, 1842. *Pariser Eindrücke*, 1846. Von Karl Gutzkow. Frankfurt am Main, 1846.

and attempts at extortion, which stir up his bile, accustomed as he is to the moderate charges, smiling waiters, and snug although slow *eilwagens* of his own country. But he has resolved neither to grumble at trifles nor to judge hastily. A visit to France, and especially to Paris, has long been his darling project. His greatest fear is to be disappointed – imagination, especially that of a German, is so apt to outrun reality.

"Every *sou* upon which I read 'Republique Française,' every portrait of the unhappy Louis upon the coarse copper money, makes such impression on me, that I no longer think of any thing but the historical ground under my feet; and consoled for my trifling grievances, upon a fine spring morning I enter the great Babel through the Barrière St Denis.

"I am in France, in Paris. I must reflect, in order to ascertain what was my first thought. As a boy, I hated France and loved Paris. My thoughts clung fast to Germany's fall and Germany's greatness; my feelings, my fancy, ranged through the French capital, of which I had early heard much from my father, who had twice marched thither as a Prussian soldier and conqueror." Then come sundry reflections on the July revolution, and its effect on Europe. "These are chains of thought which hereafter will occupy us much. I must now think for a while of the France that I brought with me, because the one I have found is likely to lead me astray. Louis Philippe, Guizot, the armed peace, the peace at all price, the chamber of peers, the attempts on the king's life, the deputies, the *épiciers*, the great men and the little intrigues, art and science, Véry, Vefour, Musard – I am really puzzled not to forget something of what I previously knew. A hackney-coach horse, lying dead upon the boulevard, preoccupies me more than yonder *hôtel des Capucins*, where Guizot gives his dinners. A wood-pavement at the end of the Rue Richelieu sets me a-thinking more than the bulletin of to-day's *Débats*. They pave Paris with wood to deprive revolutions of building materials. Barricades are not to be made out of blocks. Better that those who cannot hear should be run over than that those who cannot see should risk to fall from their high estate."

Considering that, when this was written, all the wood-pavement in Paris might have been covered with a Turkey carpet, and that up to this day its superficies has very little increased, Mr Gutzkow's discovery has much the appearance of a mare's nest. A better antidote to the stone within Paris is to be found in the stone around it. The fortifications will match the barricades. But it would be unfair to criticise too severely the crude impressions of a novice, suddenly set down amidst the turmoil, bustle, tumult, and fever of the French capital. From the pavements we pass to the promenaders.

"Pity that black should this year be the fashion for ladies' dresses. The mourning garments clash with the freshness of spring. The heavens are blue, the sun shines, the trees already burst into leaf, the fountains round the obelisk throw their countless diamonds into the air. The exhibition of pictures has just opened. Shall I go thither, and exchange this violet-scented atmosphere for the odour of the varnish? In Paris the exhibition comes with the violets – in Berlin with the asters. I prefer the autumn show at Berlin to the spring exhibition in Paris; also intrinsically, with respect to art. Our German painters have more poetry. With us painting is lyric – here all is, or strives to be, dramatic. Every picture seems to thrust itself forward and demand applause. I see great effects, but little feeling. Religion is represented by a few gigantic altar-pieces. They are the offerings of a devotion which only thinks of the saints because new churches require new pictures. New churches consist of stone, wood, gold, silver, an organ, an altar-piece. These pictures of saints belong to the ministry of public works; it is easy to see that they have been done to order. Besides them, the gallery is full of Oriental scenes, family pictures and portraits. The first are to inspire enthusiasm for Algiers, the second illustrate the happiness of wedded life, the last are matrimonial advertisements in oil colour. In the family groups, children and little dogs are most prominent; of the male portraits the beard is the principal part. It is useless to look for men here; one sees nothing but hair. Everybody wears a beard *à la mode du moyen âge – flâneurs*, coachmen, marquises, artisans. On all sides one is surrounded with Vandyke and Rubens heads, poetical beards and hair, contrasting strangely with prosaic eyes, pallid lips, and the graceless costumes of the nineteenth century."

After some more very negative praise of French art, Mr Gutzkow gets sick of turpentine and confinement, and rushes out of the Louvre into the sunshine and the Champs Elysées, where the sight of the throng of dashing equipages, gay cavaliers, and pretty amazons, instead of causing him to throw up his hat and bless his stars for having conducted him into such ways of pleasantness, renders him melancholy and metaphysical. He is moralising on the Parisian ladies, when a cloud of dust and the clatter of cavalry give a new turn to his reflections. "Here," he exclaims, "comes an example of earthly happiness. Louis Philippe, King of the French, surrounded by a half squadron of his body-guard; a narrow and scarcely perceptible window in his deep six-horse carriage; a King, flying by, resting not, leaning back in his coach, not venturing to look out, breathing with difficulty under the shirt of mail which, according to popular belief, he ever wears beneath his clothes. But of this more hereafter." Quite enough as it is, Mr Gutzkow; and you are right, being in so gloomy a mood, to run off to the Theatre Français, and try to dissipate your vapours by seeing Rachel in Chimène. An unfavourable criticism of that actress, retracted at a later period, closes the chapter. Chimène is one of Rachel's worst parts, and her critic was not in his best humour. He found her cold, and deficient in voice. Subsequently, in Joan of Arc, she fully redeemed herself in his opinion, although he had seen the best German actresses in Schiller's tragedy of that name, with which the work of Soumet ill bears comparison. Here, he acknowledges, she raised herself to an artistical elevation to which no German actress of the present day can hope to attain.

The next actress of whom Mr Gutzkow records his judgment, is the queen of the vaudeville, the faded but still fascinating Dejazet. From the classic hall of the "Français" to the agreeable little den of iniquity at the other end of the Palais Royal, the distance was not great, but the transition was very violent. It was passing from a funeral to an orgie, thus to leave Phèdre for Frétillon, Rachel for Dejazet. "She performed in a little piece called the *Fille de Dominique*, in which she represents the daughter of a deceased royal comedian of the days of Molière. She comes to Paris to get admitted into the troop to which her father belonged. She is to give proofs of her talents, and has already done so before any one suspects it. She has been to Baron, the comedian, and presented herself alternately as a peasant girl, a fantastical lady, and as a young drummer of the Royal Guard. She is seen by the audience in all these parts. Her first word, her first step, convinced me of the great fidelity of her acting. She is no queen, no fairy, or great dame out of Scribe's comedies, but the peasant girl, the grisette, the heroine of the vaudeville. All about her is arch, droll, true. Her gestures are extraordinarily correct and steady; and in spite of her harsh counter-tenor, and of an organ in which many a wild night and champagne debauch may be traced, she sings her couplets with clearness of intonation, grace of execution, and not unfrequently with most touching effect. I am at a loss fully to explain and define her very peculiar style of acting."

Mr Gutzkow thought that the French public had become careless of Dejazet, even when he first saw her, now four years ago. We believe he is mistaken, and that she is as much appreciated as ever, in spite of her five and forty years, soon to be converted into fifty. Although haggard from vigils and dissipation, neither on the stage nor off it does she look her age. The good heart and joyous disposition that have endeared her to her comrades of the buskin, have in some degree neutralized the effects of her excesses. On his second visit to Paris, our author finds her grown exceedingly old, and depreciates as much as he before praised her – calls her a rouged corpse, and makes all manner of uncivil and unsavoury comments and comparisons. He goes so far as to style her acting in 1846, languid, feeble, and insipid. *Qui trop dit, ne dit rien*, and this is palpable exaggeration. We perceive scarcely any difference in Dejazet now and five years ago. Her singing voice may be a little less sure, her eyes a trifle hollower – she may need rather more paint to conceal the inroads of time on her *piquante* and *spirituelle* physiognomy, but she preserves the same spirit and vivacity, *verve* and vigour. Her appearance this spring at the Variétés theatre, in the vaudeville of *Gentil Bernard*, was a triumph of talent over time; and crowded houses, attracted not by the excellence of the piece, but by the perfection of the acting, proved that Dejazet is still, which she long has been, the pet of the Parisians.

She is an extraordinary actress – so true to nature, possessed of such perfect judgment, and grace of gesticulation. Not a movement of her hand, a turn of her head, an inflexion of her voice, but has its signification and produces its effect. Her performance in the picturesque and bustling second act of *Gentil Bernard* is faultless. The frequenters of St James's theatre have this summer had an opportunity of appreciating it. At Paris she was better supported. Lafont makes a very fair La Tulipe, but not so good a one as Hoffmann. The inferior parts, also, were far better filled on the Boulevard des Italiens, than in King Street, St James's, where the whole weight of the protracted and not very interesting vaudeville rested upon the shoulders of Dejazet.

The success of Rachel has roused the ambition and raised the reputation of the daughters of Israel, who are now quite in vogue at the Paris theatres. Mesdemoiselles Rebecca and Worms, at the "Français," are both Jewesses; at the minor theatre of the "Folies Dramatiques," Judith delights a motley audience by her able enactment of the grisette. Instances have been known of very Christian young ladies feigning themselves of the faith of Moses, in hope that the fraud might facilitate their admission to the Thespian arena.

A severe judgment is passed by Mr Gutzkow upon the present state of musical art and representations in the French capital. The opera, he affirms, and not without reason, is on its last legs, sustained only by the ballet, by the beauty of the scenery and costumes. Duprez has had his day, Madame Stolz is among the middlings, Barroilhet alone may be reckoned a first-rate singer. Our author saw the *Elísir d'Amore* given by a company which he says would hardly be listened to in a German provincial town. Madame Stolz was then absent on a starring expedition. The ballet of *Paquita* was some compensation for the poorness of the singing. "At the 'Italiens' I heard the *Barber of Seville*, with Lablache, Ronconi, Tagliafico, Mario, and Persiani. This opera is considered the triumph of the Italian company; but I confess that the magnificence of the theatre, the high charge for admission, the Ohs! and Ahs! of the English women in the boxes, just arrived from London, and who had never before heard good music, were all insufficient to blind me with respect to the merits of the performance. I look upon the Italian opera at Paris as a mystification on the very largest scale, a thorough classic-Italian swindle. That a German company, composed of our best opera singers, would be infinitely superior to this Italian one, appears to me to admit of no dispute; but even at an ordinary theatre in Germany or Italy, one hears as good singing, perhaps with the exception of Lablache in *Bartolo*– and even he is cold and careless, devoid of freshness, and always seems to say to the audience, 'You stupid people, take that for your twelve francs a-seat!' The quackery of this theatre becomes the more intelligible when we reflect that, in all Paris, there is no other where a single note of Italian opera music can be heard, the Italians having the monopoly of the sweet melodies of their native country. The Grand Opera, and the Opera Comique, deal in French music only; and the pleasure obtainable in any small German town possessing a theatre, that, namely, of hearing *Norma*, the *Somnambula*, and other similar operas, is nowhere to be procured except by paying extravagant prices to these half-dozen Italians." This statement is not quite correct. The Opera Comique, it is true, gives nothing but French music, and poor enough it is. In this particular, the Parisians are not difficult to satisfy. A good libretto, smart scenery, a hard-handed *claque*, a few skilful *reclames*, and laudatory paragraphs in the newspapers, will create an enthusiasm even for the insipid music of Monsieur Halévy, and sustain the *Mousquetaires de la Reine*, or similar mawkish compositions, through a whole season. But at the Académie Royale, good operas are to be heard, although the singing be deficient. Meyerbeer, Rossini, and Donizetti are not the names of Frenchmen; and the operas of these and other foreign composers are constantly given in the Rue Lepelletier.

"Several German opera companies have visited Paris; have begun well, and finished badly. And here our most brilliant singers would meet the same fate, because they would be allowed to sing nothing but German music; and German operas are not listened to in Paris. But if it were possible, with only a moderately good German company, to give *Norma*, the *Barber*, *Robert the Devil*, the *Huguenots*, and Mozart's operas, (omitting the dialogue,) that company, supported by a good

orchestra, and performing in a decent theatre, would carry all before them, and return to Germany laden with fame and gold. But that is the difficulty. In France every one must stick to a speciality. From the German they will hear nothing but German music, and the representation of other operas is positively forbidden him."

Without going the lengths that Mr Gutzkow does, or by any means coinciding in his sweeping censure of the artists who now furnish forth the Italian theatres of London and Paris, we doubt whether it is not fashion, as much as the excellence of the music, that draws the élite of French and English society to the Haymarket and the Salle Ventadour, and whether a German company of equal intrinsic merit would receive adequate patronage and encouragement in either capital, supposing even that they were allowed their choice of operas, and had the benefit of a handsome theatre and an able management. Certainly they would not get the enormous salaries which, in combination with the greediness of managers, and the manœuvres of ticket-sellers, render the enjoyment of a good opera, in London at least, a luxury attainable but by an exceedingly limited class.

Although the prices of admission to most of the Paris theatres are moderate, they are occasionally raised by illegitimate stratagems. This is especially the case when a new piece is performed from which much is expected, or concerning which, by puffery or for other reasons, the public curiosity has been greatly excited. On such occasions, the first few representations are sometimes rendered doubly and even trebly productive. The prices cannot be raised at the theatre itself without express permission from the authorities, and as this is seldom granted, another plan is resorted to. The box-office is transferred *de facto* from the corridor of the theatre to the open street. Whoever applies for tickets is told that there is not one left to any part of the house. Nothing then remains but to have recourse to the ticket-brokers, who carry on their disreputable commerce in the streets or at the wine-shops. In the Rue Montmartre, within a few doors of the Boulevard, there is a *marchand de vin*, whose establishment is a grand rendezvous of these gentry. They are the agents of the managers of the theatres. The latter sell all the tickets to themselves a fortnight beforehand, inscribing on the *coupons* the names of imaginary buyers, and then distribute them amongst the brokers, who sell them in front of the theatre to eager theatrical amateurs, as a great favour, and as the last obtainable tickets, at two or three times the regulation price. The theatre pockets the profits, minus a brokerage. In this manner a first representation at the large theatre of the Porte St Martin may be made to yield ten thousand francs. When a theatre is out of vogue, and filling poorly, the same system is adopted; but in the contrary sense. The *marchands de billets* are provided with tickets which they sell at less than the established price.

When De Balzac's drama, *Les Expédients de Quinola*, was brought out at the "Odeon," he compounded to receive the proceeds of the first three nights, in lieu of a share of each representation whilst the piece should run. The play had been greatly talked of, the steam had been got up in every way, and the public was in a fever. It is customary enough in Paris for dramatic authors, in order at once to get paid for their labours, to barter their *droits d'auteur* for the entire profits of the first representations. Scribe does it at the Français. When the tickets are sold at the usual prices, this financial arrangement is regular enough, and concerns nobody but author and manager. But that would not satisfy Balzac, who is notorious for his avarice. He set the brokers to work, and drove the prices up to the highest possible point, fifteen francs for a stall, instead of five, a hundred francs for a box and so forth. "Under such circumstances," says Mr Gutzkow, "it cannot be wondered if people forgot *Eugenie Grandet* and the *Père Goriot*, and hissed his play. To-day, nearly a hundred criticisms of *Quinola* have appeared. It is my belief, that, instead of reading them, Balzac is counting his five-franc pieces." The drama fell from want of merit as well as from the indignation excited by the author's greed. Although Balzac's books are read and admired – some of them at least – personally he is most unpopular. He is accused, and not without reason, of arrogance and avarice. His assumption and conceit are evident in his works. He has sacrificed his fame to love of gold; for one good book he has produced two that are trash; by speculating on his reputation, he has undermined and nearly

destroyed it. Moreover, he has committed the enormous blunder of affecting to despise the press, which consequently shows him no mercy. For a fortnight after the appearance of *Quinola*– which, although defective as a dramatic composition, was not without its merits – the unlucky play served as a daily laughing-stock and whipping-post to the battalion of Parisian critics. Janin led the way; a host of minor wasps followed in his wake, and threw themselves with deafening hum and sharp sting against the devoted head of M. de Balzac. He bore their aggravating assaults with great apparent indifference, consoled for want of friends by well-lined pockets.

At the "Ambigu Comique," Mr Gutzkow attended a performance of the *Mousquetaires*, a melo-drama founded on Dumas's romance of *Vingt Ans Après*. Its success was prodigious; it was performed the whole of last winter and spring, upwards of one hundred and fifty nights, always to crowded houses. The novel was dramatised by Dumas himself, with the assistance of one of his literary subordinates, M. Auguste Maquet. One or two of the actors at the "Ambigu" are to form part of the troop at M. Dumas's new theatre, now erecting, and which will open, it is said, this autumn. It is built by a company, and Dumas has engaged to write for it a certain number of plays yearly. The Duke of Montpensier gives it his name.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.