PARTRIDGES · AND PARTRIDGE · MANORS

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PARTRIDGES & PARTRIDGE MANORS

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"A FATAL MISTAKE" — A COVEY FLYING OUT TO SEA.

PARTRIDGES AND PARTRIDGE MANORS

BY
CAPTAIN AYMER MAXWELL

JOINT AUTHOR OF 'GROUSE AND GROUSE MOORS'

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

BY
GEORGE RANKIN

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1911

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PREFACE

So steady is the flow of sporting literature, so prolific has the last decade proved in works on every branch of the chase, that a word of justification seems necessary ere offering yet another volume to join the already serried ranks on those shelves of the library devoted to the subject.

Perchance some may find, in the delicate handiwork of our artist, sufficient excuse for all else there is between the boards; yet the writer hopes that, while there may be nothing in these pages which has not been said as well or better before, yet in this attempt at a monograph on the partridge and its relations to sport there may be found for the first time a fair and true summary of what is

known to-day about the bird and its ways.

In advancing this claim, the writer is by no means oblivious of Mr. Charles Allington's manual of *Partridge Driving*, a wholly admirable work which has proved an unfailing source of useful advice through seven years of practical application of its principles on partridge ground. But this is admittedly a book written by an expert for the use of experts, and for general purposes the volume of the 'Fur and Feather' series on the partridge remains the standard work on the subject. While Mr. Stuart-Wortley's chapters will always be delightful reading—perhaps no writer on sport ever achieved such facility and grace of expression—yet things have moved apace in the partridge world since this book was published fifteen years ago, and modern methods of preservation differ vastly from those then in force.¹

¹ For example, on page 33 of this work occurs the sentence, "Certainly it is best that the majority of

Due acknowledgment should here be made of assistance received in compiling these pages ; especially would the writer confess his indebtedness to the Duchess of Bedford for courteously supplying the notes on foreign partridges at Woburn Abbey in Chapter II. ; to Mr. C. Allington for the valuable information and advice in his letters ; to Mr. G. W. Taylor for allowing him the benefit of a wide knowledge and experience by revising and correcting the chapter on Driving ; and, finally, to the many kind and ready contributors of the notes in Chapter V.

partridge nests should escape attention altogether." In a text-book of to-day this sentence would have to be reworded, and would then read, "Certainly it is best that *no* partridge nest should escape attention altogether."

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PARTRIDGES AND PARTRIDGE MANORS

CHAPTER I

IN DEFENCE OF THE PARTRIDGE

The case for game preservers—Interests of sport and agriculture in this case mutual—Economic value of sport to rural communities—A plea for a right understanding.

“LAND by the square mile is thrown away in profligate extravagance upon stags and pheasants and partridges, and is doled out with miserly greed by the foot for the habitations of men, women and children.”

This is not a statement of fact—far from it—it is merely a quotation from the famous pulpit speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the year of grace 1910, a speech which the Rev. J. Campbell

modestly opined was destined to live for ever.

While this is no place to embark on the stormy waters of political discussion, at the same time it would be wrong to pass by unchallenged the many rash and ill-considered utterances to which we are now being treated, of which the above may serve as a sample,—utterances which ring only too plausibly in the ears of thousands who, having no shadow of knowledge about the subject, accept as gospel all they are told, and thus come to regard all game and game-preserving in this country through a false and distorted medium.

It is not the sayings themselves that do the mischief; when they come from the irresponsible tub-thumper in the park we may well afford to forgive him his ignorance, and leave him to battle the air in peace, knowing that his words are dead as soon as spoken; when, however, they fall from the lips of a responsible Minister of the Crown, with all the dignity of his

high office to lend them weight and ensure their wide circulation and ready acceptance, it is indeed time for some of us, who have the best interests of sport at heart, to bestir ourselves and make our voices heard in defence of what we hold to be a fair and legitimate recreation.

With stags and pheasants we have not here to deal, but in so far as our little friend the partridge is concerned in the sweeping condemnation above quoted, we can with confidence give the lie direct to such an absurd proposition.

One may even say, without any exaggeration, that unless the square miles, at which the finger of righteous wrath was pointed, are inhabited by numbers of men, women and children, well disposed to those who preserve and shoot over the ground, you may throw your land away in such profligate extravagance as you will, but you will seek in vain to make a good partridge-shooting.

For it is an axiom that partridges 'follow the plough,' and it is exactly on

those lands where farming most thrives, where the largest number of farm hands are engaged in cultivating the land, and where a considerate and conscientious landowner lives on the best of terms with tenant and labourer alike, that partridges do best, and it is there that the big totals at which our social reformers hold up their hands in horror, are obtained, not at the expense, but actually with the connivance and approval of the entire rural community.

The countryman, indeed, is not likely to be taken in by all the nonsense which is now talked about sport as part of the crusade against the amusements of the privileged classes. He knows well enough that partridges do no damage to farmers; that the whole neighbourhood benefits directly by the presence of the shooting tenant who spends his autumn in their midst; and that good watching by the gamekeepers saves many a poultry roost from the depredations of the local poachers, and farms from the dangers of gates left

open and straying stock, for these gentry do not bear the character of being over-considerate of others, such time as they are pursuing their nocturnal vocation.

But, unfortunately at least in this respect, it is the townsman who has the predominant voice in the management of affairs in this country ; he is being taught to be severely critical of the pleasures of the rich, and, among others, the man with the dog and the gun is constantly held up to him in an utterly false and untrue light.

Alike on ethical and economic grounds we would meet our detractors. While we do not seek to defend the man who, with means admitting of continued leisure, devotes the best of his life and energies to the pursuit of sport, we hold that he is in a negligible minority in this country, and that it is most unfair to take him as typical of a class, for he is simply the waster who is found in every walk of life, and by no means the normal example. Certainly in partridge-shooting it would be safe to say that ninety out of every

hundred who follow this sport are deserving members of the community, enjoying well-earned holidays in a peculiarly harmless fashion.

“Your partridges and your pheasants,” cries the Socialist and his like, “Nature’s produce, the rightful property of the people, and only withheld by the monstrous injustice of the game laws, framed only to suit the convenience of a privileged class.” Neither he nor his hearers care to know that the landowner or lessee pays, by the time he has shot them, something like £1 a brace for this public property, and that were game allowed to fend for itself with no protection against its legion foes, winged, biped, and four-footed, there would very shortly be no game left in the country for any one.

Vindictive legislation could easily stop the present class of sportsmen from enjoying their shooting, but such a short-sighted measure would defeat its own ends, which would be, presumably, the good of the many. Sport would by no means be thus

provided for the million, for sport would cease to exist. Abolish the game laws, and game in this country would be abolished by the same act. If we consider how many are dependent for their livelihood on partridge-shooting, how many more derive profitable employment therefrom, a welcome aid to their narrow means, how largely all trades in a country district depend on the money that circulates, directly or indirectly, through the shooting, and finally what a valuable source of food supply our shootings are—(does not France spend a million annually on imported game?)—we realize how strong a case we have, and one which, rightly understood, should make the most ardent reformer chary of interfering with so valuable a national asset, so important a factor in our rural economy.

The question seems simple enough; so long as human nature remains what it is, some folk will work with their brains instead of their hands, and make money at the expense of those who find

in manual labour the only profitable expression of their energy. The work of the head being in its nature sedentary, such folk will also desire to spend the money they have earned in outdoor pursuits, in the interests of their work, if for no better reason. Some of these will always hanker after the joys of partridge-shooting, and if they cannot get it in this country, which heaven forbid, they will betake themselves to Hungary, Belgium or Germany for their days of leisure.

It must surely be better for the country that the money earned here should be spent at home, to the betterment of the very class that all are agreed most want encouragement — the agricultural population.

And if any think that this is an exaggerated estimate of the dependence of the general prosperity in a country district on the sport it affords, let him go to the West of Ireland and study the conditions prevailing there. He will find that, where there is hunting, the district may

be poor, but there will always be a certain amount of money circulating, and consequently little real distress when compared with the districts where there are no hounds and consequently no sport, game-preservation being impossible and game naturally almost extinct. What he will notice chiefly then is the absolute stagnation and scarcity of money, trade at a standstill, and universal poverty ; and let us hope that he will profit by this object lesson, and talk less at the next election about popular rights and the game laws.

Meantime, it is well to ask, though difficult to answer, what security of tenure our game laws have in the near future. They have been openly attacked on hundreds of Radical platforms in the pléthora of General Elections from which we have suffered of late, often with the silent consent of the Radical candidate, himself not uncommonly a game-preserver on a large scale in some other county, — an anomaly which we do not seek to explain.

Fifteen years ago Mr. C. Stuart Wortley was able to write that "the game laws stand on safer ground than they have ever done in the history of England."

Could he say the same to-day? Sport, which must be the luxury of the few, is such an easy subject of attack, provided only that your audience be ignorant enough. Attack, however unjust, when virulent and oft-repeated, undoubtedly will have effects, especially when the defence is silent; and the difficulty of a right understanding lies not a little in a certain slackness noticeable among those most interested. It is quite common to hear it said in the smoking-room—"Let's have a good shoot now; who knows whether there will be any shooting in ten years' time." This deplorable attitude of *laissez-faire*, this philosophical pessimism, cannot be too strongly condemned.

We game-preservers must realize that though the arguments of our detractors

seem to us trivial and absurd, and scarcely worthy of contradiction, yet the masses do not share our special knowledge of the subject, and it is for us to enlighten their ignorance, dispel the fallacies before they take root, and lead them to a better understanding. It is neither right nor in any way expedient to obscure the issue, and evade the question of game-preserving on public platforms.

Rightly handled, our case is eminently a presentable one; lay it clearly before the people whenever the chance offers, and show how it rests on a firm base—the general welfare of the country. Do not talk overmuch about the rights of property; however strongly you may believe in them yourself, still you cannot expect them to appeal to those who only want a right to your property, nor indeed to the mass of the people, to whom property is but a name. You will not get them to admit the sanctity of human institutions, but on broader grounds they

will listen to your pleading, and your voice will not have been raised in vain. For surely we all share a belief in the reasonable nature of our fellow-countrymen; could they but understand some of the simplest facts about game-preserving, we may rest assured that they would listen with less patience to all the rant and cant, which, uncontradicted, is liable to work so much harm.

I have not touched at all on the pleasures of partridge-shooting, on the immense amount of enjoyment which it provides, for here I should be no impartial critic, and no eulogy, however eloquent, could be expected to influence the judgment of those who have never had the good fortune to enjoy this or any other form of sport.

Further, this is a utilitarian age in which we find ourselves. Matters are weighed in the balance of material good to the nation, and judged accordingly. All that we game-preservers ask for is that the scales should be held true, the

measures fairly balanced, and then we need have little fear of the verdict.

Let, then, those who profess to love the people more than we do—and certainly do express their affection more often and volubly—before they deal with the question of sport, consider the points in favour of partridge-shooting, the most universal and popular form of sport in this country. For their benefit let us summarize the arguments in favour of our pastime, viewed in the most materialistic spirit we can compass.

Partridge-shooting is a valuable by-product of successful agriculture, to the operations of which it is in no sense inimical.

It alone induces men with money to pass their autumns in remote country districts, where their presence stimulates the local trade, and puts much-needed money in circulation.

It permanently supports a numerous class, the gamekeepers of Britain, who preserve those virile qualities so necessary

to the well-being of a nation, besides offering to many thousands of poor people the chance of adding a few shillings to their narrow means.

Stripped of all the qualities which endear him to us, the partridge may still be regarded as a small machine, which turns noxious weeds and useless insects into a valuable food for humans.

One might add that partridge-shooting is a wholesome and manly recreation, teaching city dwellers something of the pleasures of an open-air life, and stimulating an interest in natural history.

If the game laws were rescinded, thousands of local tradesmen, who depend largely on the custom of the 'big house,' would be ruined; tens of thousands of gamekeepers, gunmakers, cartridge-factory hands, and the like would be thrown out of employment, and in return you would have established the principle, futile in conception and barren in results, that the land and all that on it is belongs to the people.

Social reformers of to-day seem only too apt to attack existing institutions which seem to minister to the pleasures of the few, without pausing to consider on what basis they rest, and how far they are conducive to the welfare of the community. Fair play all round has from time immemorial been the boasted characteristic of our race, and if people would only try to approach such a subject as this with a comparatively open mind, listen to what both sides have to say on the question, and then work the matter out to a reasoned conclusion, they would surely be led to better ways of thinking.

On the other side it cannot be too strongly impressed on sportsmen that their sport is a luxury, which they enjoy through the toleration of the community, and that their responsibilities are not at an end when they have paid the rent of the shooting and taken out a game license.

Their attitude towards the dwellers on the land they shoot over cannot be too considerate and thoughtful. Here, for

once, duty and self-interest walk hand in hand ; to make the lives of those around you a little brighter for your presence is not only right, but, on a partridge-shooting, is like bread cast upon the waters and brings a sure reward.

By having every man on your shooting a friend, you will best answer your detractors, strengthen your own position, and silence the voice of adverse criticism.

PARTRIDGE AND YOUNG.

CHAPTER II

NATURAL HISTORY

Distribution and life-history of the partridge—Red-legged partridges—Foreign varieties suitable for introduction—Cookery of the partridge.

THE common partridge, known indifferently to scientists as *Perdix Perdix* or *Perdix cinerea*, and more familiarly to sportsmen as 'the little brown bird,' is a member of a large family, no fewer than 152 species of partridges and their affinities being recognized by ornithologists.

Besides our own indigenous bird, but one other species is resident in the British Isles, the red-legged partridge (*Caccabis rufa*), which hails from the extreme south-west parts of Europe, and was first introduced into England in the reign of Charles II.

While we thus have in this country a representative of each of the two main branches of the family, tetraonine and galline (the latter comprising all the numerous species of red-legged partridges, distinguishable by the strong, blunt spurs of the cocks), it is still somewhat surprising, considering the almost infinite variety of pheasants that flourish in our midst, to note that no other kinds of partridges have been successfully established.

Mr. Walter Rothschild, one of the first authorities on this branch of ornithology, has given a list of over twenty varieties which he considers well adapted to hold their own in our somewhat uncertain climate.

Especially does he recommend the Lerwa partridge, a handsome bird with chestnut-red and grey plumage, a native of the high ranges of the Himalayas. Strong on the wing and as large as a grouse, this Indian species might be a very desirable acquisition on high and broken ground.

Then there are the snow partridges or snow cocks (*Tetraogallus*), of which each considerable range of mountains in Asia seems to have a distinct species. The two varieties which Mr. Rothschild deems most suitable for introduction hail from the high tops of the Caucasus and the Himalayas respectively. They are at once the shyest and wildest, and the finest of the partridge race, being as large as a hen capercailzie. Despite their size, they could not be mistaken for anything but a real partridge, and look a true and noble game bird in their beautiful plumage of silvery-grey and white, the naked patch behind the eye making a splash of orange vermilion, which contrasts pleasingly with the more sober and delicate tones of the general colour scheme.

While we would gladly welcome these fine mountain-dwellers as a splendid addition to our native fauna—and it would indeed lend a new interest to the scenery if one might look to flush the mighty snow cock among the barren solitudes of

the high tops—yet it is not easy wholeheartedly to subscribe to Mr. Rothschild's dictum, that it is certain that they would do admirably on our north country fells and Scots mountains. One scents difficulties in the path ; though, so far as the food supply is concerned, they would probably thrive on the same scanty fare of roots, berries, grass, and moss that keeps the ptarmigan so plump and lusty, yet surely the high mountain sides of Asia must have a climate far drier and colder than our own, and one cannot but doubt that, unless expense were no object, the cost of the experiment might be out of all proportion to its results.

Continuous wet and rain are far the most trying conditions to all wild life, and to a new-comer, unacquainted with all the clever devices which the natives employ to keep themselves dry, might well prove fatal at the outset.

Still, I have seen Crested Cranes from the sun-baked plains of Kordofan thriving among the damps and mists of the

west coast of Scotland, nor would I seek for an instant to discourage any one from the attempt; only let him 'gang warily,' and, despite what he may find in books on the subject, by no means consider success in his praiseworthy efforts assured from the start.

There is one partridge from Western Mongolia (*P. barbata* or *daiurica*), whom it would be quite reasonable to assume would do well with us, accustomed as he is to a cold, wet climate and a heavy soil. He is not unlike our own grey partridge in general appearance, save for the superior attractions of a black horse-shoe on a golden-buff breast, and the remarkable addition to the ordinary garb of a partridge in the form of well-grown ginger whiskers, or to speak more scientifically yet perhaps less descriptively, of certain elongated lanceolate feathers on the sides of the throat. He would be an attractive novelty in a countryside, and perchance one's eye might be caught by his flowing whiskers as he topped the

fence, giving us that extra six inches forward that some of us want so badly.

The partridge which is probably the best for introduction to this country is not, strictly speaking, a partridge at all ; but as he is at least a cousin of the grey partridges, and the members of his race (*Bonasa*) are commonly and indiscriminately, if erroneously, called partridges, pheasants and chickens by sportsmen, it may not be altogether amiss, after due apology for his presence, to accord him a passing mention in these pages.

The small hazel hen of the Carpathians (*Bonasa sylvestris*) is akin to the Ruffed Grouse, Sage Cock, and Spruce partridges of North America. He is a handsome fellow with grey plumage, blended with every shade of red and brown ; the back and wings have crescent-shaped black markings edged with white, the throat is black, surrounded by a white line, while the feathered legs betray his affinity to the grouse. The flight is noisy, rapid, but not protracted, a covey when flushed

soon settling again in the trees, where they remain motionless, and where only a trained and quick eye can pick them up.

Their note is a low melancholy whistle, and they are easily called by means of a peculiar instrument, extensively used in Roumania, where they abound, and so constructed that the performer can imitate at will the call of either cock or hen to attract members of the opposite sex. Apart from the sport he affords, the hazel-hen has a strong recommendation to our favour, for he is quite the best bird in the world to eat, with flesh white in colour, and of a peculiar and eminently palatable flavour.

Hazel hens find their natural home among rough and dense forests on hill-sides of no great altitude; their range extends northwards through Scandinavia, southwards as far as China and Japan, while the Ardennes form their western limit in Europe.

Their food consists of the shoots and

buds of birch and hazel, berries and other fruits, worms, insects and their larvæ.

There seems no reasonable cause why they should not thrive and multiply with us, if once introduced; and as their natural haunts in this country are now only tenanted by the occasional capercailzie, they would add greatly to the attractions of a type of country which is now practically gameless. This bird deserves especial notice at this present time, when the low estate of our woodlands and the advantages of growing our own timber have become questions of national interest, and every year we may expect to see more and more waste and unproductive hill land turned into forest and woodland.

Several other members of the partridge family have from time to time been given a trial in this country, but never with more than a partial success. Such inconclusive results do not, however, warrant the assumption that none of the strangers are likely to do well with us, for it must

be borne in mind that the initial attempts to introduce a new species have generally ended in failure, and that the eventual success has usually been gained by persistence in face of repeated disappointments.

It is only a hundred years since Yarrell, the best authority on birds of his day, wrote bewailing the approaching extinction of the Chinese pheasant (*P. torquatus*), then a recent and much-admired introduction; yet, after all, the new-comer proved more than capable of holding his own, ousting the old Indian pheasant wherever they met, till now not one in ten thousand of our pheasants but bears marked trace of ring-necked blood.

The Duchess of Bedford has kindly furnished me with the following notes on the various foreign partridges which have been turned out experimentally in the park at Woburn Abbey:—"We once turned out some Black partridges (*Francolinus vulgaris*—a native of Palestine and Asia Minor), but they disappeared.

We have a large number of Chukor (*Caccabis chukor* — an Indian species akin to our red-legged partridge), which do fairly well and would do better if they did not fight so desperately in the spring, even to the death. They do not appear to stray at all, and I only know of one ever having been shot outside the park.

“We have also turned out a good many Bamboo partridges (*Bambusicola Fytchii* — from N.E. India); these have bred with us and there are always a few about, but they cannot be said to do very well. They seem to disappear, as one sees them in summer with strong, well-grown broods, and yet they do not increase.

“One was shot near Bedford, twelve miles away, a few years ago, and a large drawing of it by Frohawk appeared in the *Field* as a ‘hybrid pheasant and partridge,’ Mr. Tegetmeier writing a long article upon the bird!”

The Red-legged or French partridge

is now firmly established in our eastern and southern countries, though still a stranger in the north and west. In Scotland he is unknown, though recently some have been turned down in the sandy soil of Aberdeen, where they would seem likely to thrive and multiply.

First brought over to this country about the middle of the seventeenth century and enlarged in Windsor Forest, by far the largest influx coincided with the rush of other *émigrés* from France, such time as the shadow of the guillotine lay dark on that sunny land. Most of the new-comers were turned out on Norfolk and Suffolk estates, spreading thence through the neighbouring counties.

Commonly known as Frenchmen, the name seems singularly apposite, for they have many of the qualities and characteristics we are wont to attribute to the French nation. They are gay in appearance, and their showy plumage of olive-brown back, blue-grey and rufous brown breast, black and cream throat, and flanks

boldly barred with black, pale buff, and intense red, forms a striking *tout ensemble* which quite throws into the shade the quiet, unostentatious dress of our native bird.

They seem fond of publicity, and are always *en evidence*, strutting about in the middle of the open fields, when the grey partridges have sought privacy in the seclusion of some quiet corner.

They are of a restless and nervous disposition, have marked and unaccountable dislikes for certain fields, and effectually disappoint the theorist, who would base on their actions in the past any guidance as to their probable behaviour in the future.

Their domestic arrangements seem strange in our eyes. While our English partridge is the most considerate and consistent of mothers, laying, sitting and hatching with a business-like punctuality, and generally conducting the affairs of her household with a commendable, if humdrum, regularity, so that under given

conditions you may with tolerable certainty forecast the progress of events, with the French partridges it is quite otherwise. In the first instance, they may travel miles before they happen on a nesting-place which suits their wayward taste; then they will lay their eggs at quite uncertain intervals of time, and desert the nest at any moment for no accountable reason. Even when sitting, they will suddenly leave eggs on the verge of hatching, stay away for days together, and unexpectedly come back to hatch off a brood, just when the nest has been written down as a failure.

While they have earned a bad reputation as mothers, they will often astonish the world in general by successfully bringing up a large family in a happy-go-lucky sort of way. For some reason they seem to suffer less from wet seasons than English birds, and often do fairly well when all the chances seem against them.

Finally, just as was the case with our

neighbours across the Channel, we hated and persecuted them so long as we misunderstood them; but now, happily, in the partridge world as elsewhere, a better understanding prevails, an *entente cordiale* has been established, and it is no longer deemed impossible for French and English neighbours to live together in amity.

Before the introduction of driving, French partridges were very unpopular. They have a marked proclivity for running, and were equally annoying to sportsmen, as detrimental to the manners of young pointers, in dogging days. They were also accused of driving away English birds from their nests, though under modern conditions this is certainly not the case, the grey partridges generally coming off best when it comes to fist-cuffs. Probably the truth was that owing to the difficulty of getting up on them when walking, many French partridges survived to a ripe old age, and the race suffered from the misdeeds of individuals, any barren or bachelor old

partridge being equally mischievous in the spring.

They suffered and survived severe persecution ; keepers trampled on their nests, and generally treated them as vermin ; now, however, they have been restored to favour, their value on driving ground admitted, and on most estates, where they exist, they are encouraged and preserved.

Apart from the peculiar propensities above mentioned, the life-habits of the red-leg are very similar to those of the common partridge. They seem to prefer waste lands, commons, or heath in the vicinity of cultivation ; object to grass lands even more strongly than their cousins, yet seem to do well on heavy clay soil where the English bird fails. They would always rather trust to their legs than their wings for escape from danger, in which event the covey breaks up, each bird fending for himself. Their flight, when they do get up, is rapid and short ; they hardly ever swerve, but fly

straight from point to point. The existence of any hybrid between the two species has yet to be proved.

The range of the common partridge is wide; draw a line on the map from Brussels to Venice; roughly speaking, the country east of this line is its natural habitat, stretching northwards through Scandinavia almost up to the Arctic Circle, and ranging southwards as far as the Caucasus Mountains, and eastwards into Northern Persia and Central Asia up to the Altai Mountains, east of which range its place is taken by a smaller but closely allied species.

In this country the partridge is generally distributed through every district where the land is cultivated and game preserved. The application of modern scientific methods to the care and preservation of partridges has gone far to modify their natural distribution.

The grey partridge with us has less traits of the migrant than perhaps any other of our native birds. Living in an

FRENCH PARTRIDGE.

equable climate, with a food-supply more or less assured throughout the year, he has become a real stay-at-home bird, and rarely cares to wander beyond the confines of his native farm. On the Continent, however, where they are subjected to more violent climatic changes, partridges are of a more migratory habit, and shift their quarters freely, travelling far afield in search of food and shelter.

Formerly the light soils of the eastern counties of England were alone considered capable of supporting great numbers of partridges, as indeed they were capable of doing without any help from the hand of man, beyond the casual attentions of the old-fashioned gamekeeper. Now, however, it has been proved beyond all question that the heavier lands of Hampshire, Notts, Yorkshire, and half-a-dozen other counties can, under the modern methods of higher preservation, carry as heavy and, in some cases, even a heavier head of partridges than those more naturally congenial to game.

The sober buff-brown and grey livery of our most familiar game bird is too well known among all country-dwellers to demand any detailed description. It was for long a popular and almost universal belief that the chestnut horse-shoe on the breast was the distinguishing mark of the cock partridge. This error was duly set forth as a fact in the early text-books on ornithology, and as solemnly repeated in each succeeding work on the subject, though a very superficial acquaintance with anatomy and five minutes' examination of some dead birds would have served to put it right at any time.

But when writers are content to accept their facts at second hand, without any attempt to verify their accuracy, mistakes once made are apt to linger long and die hard. Thus it was only of recent years that it has been shown that the horse-shoe is not uncommonly absent in the cock, and almost invariably present among hens of the first year; at the same

time the true external marks of sexual difference were pointed out and finally settled.¹

Thus, while the sexes are alike in general appearance, and it is impossible to distinguish with any certainty between cock and hen when on the wing, there are certain constant and trustworthy distinctions which may be easily recognized on closer view, even among young birds at the opening of the shooting season. These marks of difference may thus be shortly summarized :—

(1) Median and lesser wing coverts (the smaller wing feathers towards the shoulder, covering the base of the double row of flight feathers or quills).

(a) In the male.

Ground colour dark, blotched on the inner web with chestnut; stripe of buff down each shaft, but no cross bars.

(b) In the female.

Ground colour black, with two or three wide-set buff cross bars, in addition to buff shaft stripe.

¹ Letters of Mr. Ogilvie Grant of the British Museum, published in the *Field*, November 21, 1891, and April 9, 1892.

(2) Feathers of neck.

(a) In the male.

Ground colour, greyish brown to slate; fine irregular bars of black; *no shaft stripe.*

(b) In the female.

Ground colour, olive brown bars of black broader and more distinct; *shaft stripe of pale buff.*

(3) Crown of head.

(a) In the male.

Ground colour chestnut brown; small shaft stripes of same colour.

(b) In the female.

Ground colour chestnut brown; larger shaft stripes of pale buff.

Birds of the year may be distinguished till November by the yellowish colour of their legs and feet; towards the close of the year this is replaced by the slaty blue of the adult, the under part of the feet being the last to turn. A more certain distinction is the shape of the first flight feather of the wing, of which the end is pointed in a young bird, and rounded in birds which have undergone their second autumn moult.

Partridges from different districts vary somewhat in appearance; the finest specimens, alike in bulk and richness of color-

tion (if one may thus speak of so modest and Quaker-like a habit), come from light and sandy soils. In some instances the horse-shoe is nearly jet black, while in most old hens the horse-shoe becomes speckled chestnut and white, or even pure white.

Varieties in which the predominant hue is light fawn, pale buff, pied or pure white, are from time to time recorded from all parts of the country, but instances of true albinism or melanism are few and far between.

There is one type of variation from the normal so constant in its recurrence as to have at one time been granted the dignity of being classified as a separate species, under the name of *Perdix montana*. This honour has now been justly rescinded, for the question is simply one of a superfluity of red-colouring pigment in the individual, though probably to some extent a hereditary tendency, and doubtless one largely influenced by food.

This seems to be a common type in

the mountains of Lorraine, and though of less frequent occurrence in this country, yet scattered instances occur in every district where partridges are abundant, nor is it by any means confined to mountain and moorland, as some would suppose. The uniform characteristic of this variety is a more or less pronounced tendency to a rich chestnut-brown or rusty red colour which suffuses the natural plumage in varying degree, the most strongly marked specimens showing an almost complete replica of the coloration of a red grouse.

The hill partridge is another well-known, though unscientific, variety: he has learnt to be independent of the farmer, and is said only to mate with his own race. Hill partridges are smaller and darker in colour than the ordinary partridge, and, until the winter sets in, and they are hard put to it to eke out a livelihood, are generally found to be plump, well-conditioned, and of fine, wild flavour on the table.

Though the scanty food-supply and manifold hardships incident to life among the bleak surroundings which they have chosen for their home prevent their ever increasing to anything like the numbers of their more favoured brethren of the arable lands, still they manage to hold their own in the struggle for existence, and on our northern fells, the bare heaths of Surrey, and the borders of most moorlands there are always to be found a few coveys of these hardy stragglers. Seasoned perhaps by adversity, they seem to suffer less from the vagaries of our climate than the dwellers in the plains, and year in and year out little difference is to be noticed in their numbers.

The partridge chick, a tiny morsel of greyish-brown down, with black markings on the head and stripes down the back, usually comes into the world some time between the middle of June and the first weeks of July, the date of hatching being locally very constant, but varying in different districts, southern hatching

earlier than eastern, and northern a week or so later.

For the first fortnight of their life, the dozen chicks which may constitute the covey have but a slender hold on existence. A sudden thunderstorm, or a succession of those chill and sunless days and dropping skies which the doleful experiences of recent years almost lead one to expect as the normal accompaniment of an English midsummer, means a sad tale of infantile mortality among the rising generation of partridges.

As soon as the chicks have dried after quitting the egg, the hen, with the cock in close attendance, leads them away to the nearest patch of cover. Apart from the dangers of inclement weather, and the ever-present dread of attack by some marauder, furred or feathered, their welfare is now influenced chiefly by the available supply of insect life, on which they depend entirely for their food till they are at least a month old.

Thus all extremes of weather at hatch-

ing time are to be deplored, for while in wet and cold seasons, soaking grass, chilled and sodden lands, with undue prevalence of what golfers term 'casual water,' will claim their victims by the thousand, a time of protracted drought will equally spell disaster, though after a different fashion.

Heavy lands then open in cracks and fissures, pitfalls for the unwary innocents; cover from foes is scanty, and the chances of an epidemic of gapes, when the first rain comes, are much increased. These, however, are but minor evils; the main trouble then is a universal dearth of insect life, and, deprived of their natural sustenance, young partridges will continue to waste and die till well on in August.

Warm weather with light showers is what we all long to see at hatching time; the warmth to ensure a favourable hatch, and the showers to ensure a sufficient swarm of the smaller forms of life.

When all goes well, ants and ants' eggs, aphides, and all the unconsidered trifles

of the insect world are assiduously sought for and devoured, the chicks soon learning to follow the clucking call of the hen in their humble forays, and to answer with a little chirp of their own, so feeble as to be almost imperceptible to our ruder ears.

On these expeditions the cock generally looks after the safety of the party, running on a few yards ahead, and giving a low note of encouragement when he is satisfied that all is well around and above them.

The young birds grow apace, can fly when only a few days old and little bigger than sparrows, and should no casualties have thinned their numbers have, after a week, grown too big for the hen to cover all at once, some then being entrusted to the sheltering wing of the cock.

Both cock and hen are assiduous and unremitting in the care and attention they give to their family. In the face of danger they will display a singular devotion to duty. Naturally timid in disposition, when with their young they develop a rare courage, and besides the time-

honoured device of simulating a broken wing to draw away the unwelcome intruder, a stratagem so common in the bird world, they will fearlessly attack such formidable enemies as dogs and crows. A west country parson was recently driving along one of the winding lanes of Devonshire, and came suddenly on a brood of young partridges in the middle of the road. As he pulled up to avoid running over them, one old bird flew straight up at the pony's nose, and persisted in furious attacks until the other parent had led the whole brood over the bank into safety, when he quietly flew over the hedge to join them.

As the corn ripens, the covey spends most of the day among the growing crops, not with a view to any injury of the grain, which they rarely, if ever, meddle with while growing, but finding a plentiful harvest of their own among the wireworms and other noxious grubs and insects, and the multitude of smaller weeds which flourish among the corn.

At first streak of dawn the family are taken to dust themselves on the nearest sandy bank or roadway, a practice of which through life they are as fond as any ancient Roman of his bath, and which now helps to keep the young from wet and chill until the sun is up to warm the world. When the corn is led, they come to the stubbles as soon as it is light, to feed on the fallen grain, true perquisite of the wild, all kinds of seeds and grasses, spiders, slugs, beetles and such like. They then retire for the day to such cover as is available—turnips, clover, or waste land. They are particularly fond of a small aphid, which is found on the under side of turnip leaves in autumn. Late in the afternoon they seek the stubbles once more for the evening meal, and at dusk the covey, collecting with much conversation, betakes itself to roost or ‘jug,’ generally on some open and rising ground, sleeping bunched in a circle, with the heads pointing outwards, to guard against the approach of danger.

At three months the young birds are practically full-grown, and, undergoing the autumn moult, begin closely to resemble the old birds in appearance. When winter sets in, the diet of the covey is limited by force of circumstances; the ploughed stubbles afford them some pickings, which, with weeds from the hedgerows, grass, turnip leaves, and, when they can get it, young clover, are all they have to rely on. In times of protracted frost they suffer in common with all other wild vegetarians or insect-feeders, only the carnivora then reaping an easy and plentiful harvest.

Few birds feel the influence of coming spring so early as the partridge; a few warm, sunny days late in January, and the family which has lived together from the nest begins to disintegrate. The cocks, of which there are naturally a slight preponderance, fight freely, but for most part innocuously. So long as the fine weather holds, pairing goes forward apace, but a snap of cold reunites the

family again, and it is generally not till the end of February that the ties are finally loosened, each pair setting up house on their own.

During the early spring, partridges are very fond of fallow and pasture, staying in the open all day, and we see more of our little friend then than at any other time of the year.

The choice of a site for the nest seems to be a very weighty matter ; a pair will prospect for weeks before finally deciding, and their eventual selection is often governed by considerations which we cannot even dimly apprehend. Any form of roughness close to the open spaces where they live, such as tussocks of coarse grass, briars, bracken, whins, rough hedgerows and the edges of young plantations, are the favourite spots ; though in these times of over-tidy farming many are driven to nest in the open fields, where the blades of the hay-cutter often bring sudden destruction to mother and nest alike. They have a strange predilection

for roadsides and foot-paths, where the nest is in constant danger from passing boys and wandering dogs.

Some attribute this inconvenient habit to a desire for grit, which can thus be found quite handy to the nest ; but it seems more probable that this strongly marked tendency is rather due to the old birds welcoming the proximity of an open dry space where they can take their young when hatched.

The nest is a circular scrape in the bare earth, in which the drab-coloured eggs are daily laid, till the full number of anything between ten and twenty be reached. Nests with larger numbers, as many as thirty-five eggs having been recorded, can only be set down to the joint efforts of two hens laying in the one nest. Pheasants are sad offenders in this respect ; they constantly show a desire to set up house with the partridge hens, laying their eggs among the others, to the serious detriment of the family arrangements.

Partridges rarely lay their first egg

more than an hour or so before noon, each subsequent egg being laid a little later in the day.

The eggs as laid are covered carefully with leaves and grass, which saves them from late frosts, and most effectually conceals the nest. When laying is finished, the birds proceed to arrange the nest for incubation, now placing the leaves and grass under the eggs, which are then neatly arranged in circles. During the two days or so that they are thus engaged, partridges are, for some reason, peculiarly sensitive to any disturbance, and will desert altogether if interfered with in any way. The hen sits for three weeks, and like others of the gallinaceous tribe is able to secrete her natural scent while sitting, which serves to protect her from her many foes. This loss of scent is probably in some measure due to the fact that the feathers are all pressed close to the body of the bird, for the scent returns to some extent shortly before hatching, when the hen ruffles out her feathers.

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The cock takes no part in the actual incubation, but remains in close attendance on the hen while she is sitting. When the hen indicates that the eggs are due to hatch, the cock comes and sits close alongside of the nest, waiting patiently for the young birds to emerge; he then takes them under his wing, one by one, as the hen hands them over to him.

Partridges, though generally a fairly hardy and healthy race, suffer at times from various diseases; in a wet autumn numbers die from inflammation of the lungs, due to contact with the wet ground when their breasts are almost denuded of feathers; enteritis and tuberculosis will at times claim their toll of the race; while in districts where poultry-farming is largely carried on terrible epidemics of gapes occur at intervals, especially after a dry summer.

When overcrowded, young partridges are liable to a form of purulent ophthalmia, ending in total blindness or death.

Much has been heard of recent years about a mysterious and hitherto unknown disease, its exact nature undiagnosed, which is said to have decimated the partridges through wide districts in East Anglia and the southern counties, and which some would have us believe will eventually lead to the extermination of the race, if no measures of prevention be adopted.

Poisoning by arsenical wheat dressings, sickness induced by new-fangled chemical manures and sheep dips, contagion from the horde of Hungarians which have been let loose among our native birds, and a general deterioration of the partridge race from what they were in the time of our fathers, have been variously assigned as the *fons et origo malorum*.

But the fact has still to be proved, before the causes thereof need be considered. For though it may be admitted that occasional partridges have died from arsenical poisoning, and that there has been some wasting sickness where chemical

manures have been freely used or Hungarians extensively turned out, there is still no weight of evidence to warrant a conclusion that this disease can be dissociated from, or indeed be regarded as anything but the natural outcome of, the unhappy succession of wet summers. Where fine weather at hatching time is the rule, the exceptional cold and rain of the last three years have reduced the stock of partridges to within a measurable distance of vanishing point, and such districts alone constitute the supposed 'infected area'; in harsher, northern climates, where birds are better able to withstand unfavourable weather, no word is heard of unusual disease.

If in the years of plenty, which are surely due, partridges continue to die all the year round, the question will become one of urgency; but in the meantime we can only wait and see, believing that in two good seasons lies the surest remedy for the decrease of partridges, and that this evasive and nameless disease cannot

be regarded as a normal factor in the life of the partridge.

On heavy lands partridges are much troubled by the soil clogging on their feet. A ball of clay is formed, which will grow, in wet weather, till the unfortunate bird can scarcely move, and is left by the covey to pine and die. In some cases this ball has been known to reach a huge size, when compared to the pound or so of the bird's own weight. Darwin mentions having taken a ball weighing $6\frac{3}{4}$ ounces from the foot of a partridge, and succeeded in growing no less than eighty-four plants from seeds contained in it.

It is not easy to determine what, for the partridge, is the equivalent of the threescore years and ten of man. Fifteen to seventeen years have been assigned as the limit, but whether this is near the mark or not is open to doubt; nor is this question of longevity one which game-keepers can afford to solve for themselves, for on all preserved ground a partridge ceases to be at all a desirable resident

after his second year. Here the general welfare of the race, and not the convenience of the individual, is alone to be considered, and no partridge could be allowed to reach anything approaching his allotted span of years, whatever they may be, without serious detriment to the rest of the community. The ideal state of affairs, from the game-preserve's point of view, is that each pair of birds should fulfil their parental duties but once, or at most twice, and then, having achieved the object of their existence, make their exit, leaving it to their offspring to carry on the race.

Thus, since this chapter has been devoted to the life-history of the partridge, and his career traced through the various stages of his existence, we may now, not inappropriately, regard his life as having reached its fitting termination, and conclude by following him to the scenes of his last appearance—the kitchen and the dining-room.

On the table, the partridge can well

bear comparison with any other game bird. Gastronomically considered, a plump young English partridge must be conceded high place among the good things of this world. But he must be young and he must be English, for no amount of hanging will make a real old bird tender, while the Frenchman is a very inferior article in this respect, lacking the natural juices and delicate flavour of our native bird.

Given young birds, well-conditioned and properly hung, there is but one way to use them to the best advantage, and that the simplest. They should be roasted on the spit in front of a fire made up in such a manner as to produce more flame than glowing embers, cooking them not enough to make them dry, yet sufficiently to avoid all appearance of being underdone. The birds while being roasted may be partly covered with a thin slice of larding bacon; this shields the fillets of the bird from drying, while the legs, which the heat takes much

longer to penetrate than the other parts, are cooking. But with good and sufficient basting, the fillets may well be kept from drying even without this precaution.

This is by far the most satisfactory way, and does full justice to the bird. The alternative of roasting in the oven is very inferior, and should be avoided whenever it is possible. In the closed oven it is inevitable that steam should collect on the bird, and this tends to spoil the delicate flavour, which it is so important to preserve. When circumstances over which they have no control make it necessary for cooks to use the oven, they should take special precautions to neutralize the bad effects of the steam, but where a closed range is in use, it only costs a few shillings to add a bottle-jack and roast the birds in the proper way.

Served at once, with due accompaniment of bread sauce, bread-crumbs, and gravy made from the swilling of the dripping pan, roast partridge makes a dish, commonplace if you will, yet comparing

more than favourably with the thousand-and-one intricate recipes from the modern chef's repertory, of which more anon.

Such birds as survive the ordeal of the dinner-table should be eaten cold the next day without any further culinary attention. To deal with old birds satisfactorily is a very different and difficult question; probably it is best to use them only in the preparation of game stock or forcemeats. When they must be used for the table, they probably appear better as *perdrix aux choux* than in any other form; a common and homely dish on the Continent, though far rarer in this country than its merits deserve. The methods of preparing *perdrix aux choux* are legion; one simple and effective way is as follows:—

Quarter the cabbage, parboil and cool it. Defoliate the quarters; suppress the outside leaves and the midribs of the remaining leaves; season with salt and pepper, and put the cabbage in a saucepan garnished with slices of bacon, and

containing one quartered carrot, one onion stuck with a garlic clove, one faggot, two-thirds pint of consommé, and three tablespoonfuls of stock fat per 2 lbs. of cabbage. Cover the old partridges with slices of bacon, lay them in the bed of cabbage and then braise gently for two to three hours.

There are exactly a thousand-and-one other ways of cooking a partridge, but with such material as good young English birds to work on, any treatment but the plainest can only tend towards spoiling a good thing, reminding one of Browning's lines, written, it is true, on a more romantic theme—a pretty woman—yet here apposite enough to excuse their being put to baser uses :—

Thus the craftsman seeks to grace the rose,
Plucks a mould flower
For his gold flower,
Uses fine things that efface the rose.

In like fashion the many fine things which a modern chef uses to grace the partridge often result only in a triumph

of culinary art, probably very unwholesome, and in which the partridge itself is completely lost.

Most of these over-elaborated recipes were either devised on the Continent, where grey partridges are not always to be had, to give savour to the comparatively tasteless redleg, or else were invented in response to the insensate and insatiate demand for novelties to tickle the jaded palate of a certain over-luxurious class of modern society, the sort of people for whom the best is not quite good enough, a class with which let us hope that neither you, my gentle reader, nor I have anything in common.

One cunning concoction of this nature may serve as a fair sample of the rest; and indeed this one is not without a certain historic interest of its own. It is thus given by the *cordons bleus* of the Carlton :—

Perdrix à la mode d'Alcantara.

At the beginning of the campaign of

1807 in Portugal, the library of the famous Alcantara convent was pillaged by Junot's soldiers, and its precious manuscripts used in the making of cartridges. An officer of the commissariat who was present happened on an old book of recipes selected by the monks, and among them the one now under notice, which was applied only to partridges.

It struck him as interesting, and after trying it when he returned to France in the following year, he gave it to the Duchesse D'Abrantes, who preserved it in her memoirs. It was perhaps, as Monsieur L'Escoffier remarks in a pathetic aside, the only good thing the French derived from that unfortunate campaign. Here is the simple little dish on which the worthy monks, who among other things if we remember aright were called upon to renounce the flesh, used to regale themselves :—

Empty the partridges from the front ; bone the breasts and stuff them with fine duck's *foies gras*, mixed with quartered

truffles, cooked in port wine. Marinade the partridges for three days in port wine and a litter of aromatics (chopped shallots, rosemary, thyme, bay, and parsley), taking care that the birds be well covered therewith. This done, cook them *en casserole*. Reduce the port wine of the marinade; add to it a dozen medium-sized truffles; set the partridges on these truffles, and heat for a further ten minutes.

To which our authority adds this note:— This last part of the recipe may be advantageously replaced by the *à la Souvaroff* treatment—that is to say, having placed the partridge and the truffles in a terrine, sprinkle them with the reduced port combined with slightly buttered game glaze; then hermetically seal down the lid of the terrine, and complete the cooking in the oven.

Junot and Souvaroff—there is undoubtedly a fine Napoleonic ring about this preparation, but whether it be mere insular prejudice or not, still I would as lief have my partridges cooked in simpler guise.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL

Early records of partridge-shooting—Great sportsmen of the eighteenth century—Matches—England *v.* Scotland in 1816, etc.—Methods of other days.

FOR some 3000 years, from the days of Nineveh and Babylon, whose sculptured stones bear figures of falconers with their hawks on the wrist, down to our own early Hanoverian times, hawking was the one gentlemanly fashion of taking the partridge. Ousted by the coming of the 'vile saltpetre,' haggards and eyasses, sacres and sakerets, lannerets, tiercels, falcons of the rock and falcons gentle, with their lures, varvels, jesses and bewits, have all gone their way, and are now to us only sounds without meaning, though the intricate and comprehensive

language of the sport was once an indispensable part of the education of any one who could pretend to gentle blood.

Now only our London ‘mews’—or ‘places where hawks are kept’—and the somewhat Gilbertian office of Hereditary Grand Falconer of England remain to remind us of the noble art of Falconry, though there are still some twenty or thirty country gentlemen in England who keep and fly their own hawks. Of the twenty kinds of falcons and hawks which were commonly used in sport, the peregrine falcon, the goshawk, and the hen sparrow-hawk were generally used to take partridges.

When hawking first fell out of favour, there was nothing ready to take its place, for the fowling-piece of the day was a cumbrous and unreliable engine. Thus while arms and ammunition were slowly improving, there ensued an interregnum in the world of sport, during which the practice of netting partridges, now rightly considered as arrant poaching, was

almost universally followed by country gentlemen.

In the old game licences—to qualify for the possession of which landed property of a fixed value or the rank at least of esquire was necessary—besides the more legitimate means of bows, guns, and hawks, we find frequent mention of “setting dogs and lurchers, hays, nets, lowbels, snares, or other engines to take game.” The birds were either driven into a fixed net, or else found by dogs trained to lie down when near to game and allow the net to be drawn over them so that both dog and birds were entangled in the toils.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the old flint and steel locks had been greatly improved, and were better adapted for the purposes of sport. Shooting became more popular, and netting was no longer considered fit sport for gentlemen. The reign of George III. saw a marked advance in all the material of shooting; double barrels now came into use, the percussion cap and the patent breech were

invented, and gunpowder of reliable quality was for the first time readily obtainable. Even then, the man with the gun must have been at a great disadvantage to our notions; in the *Art of Shooting Flying explained*, published in 1767, 'Aimwell' gives as his advice to the 'young practitioner'—

Briskly draw the trigger as soon as you have got an exact sight at the object, and continue to keep your muzzle at it for some time after you have drawn the trigger, lest your gun should hang fire, which if it happen to do will render your shot uncertain, especially if your mark is moving any way from the line; but by means of keeping your gun in motion with the object, a shot may be recovered, though it hangs fire.

When one considers the doubtful execution of a piece about which such advice could be necessary, the tight and unsuitable attire then affected by sportsmen, the large and miscellaneous assortment of powder-horns, dram-flasks, shot-belts, canisters, wadding, pivots, copper caps or flints carried on the person in the field, one is inclined to believe in

PARTRIDGES ON WING.

Mr. Aimwell's final dictum that

sport is very uncertain, and even the best marksmen have oftentimes their miscarriages; you may go out several times and not get many shoots, and unless a man is very alert, and strong enough to undergo a deal of fatigue, he can attain the art of shooting flying but very slowly.

Still the sportsmen of other days managed to get quite as much fun out of their shooting—though their weapons were uncertain and game scarce and hard to find—as any one who takes part in the less arduous but infinitely more productive shooting of to-day. We have only to read their diaries, to find a naïve, whole-hearted enthusiasm about shooting in general, and their own deeds in particular, which seems somewhat lacking among their descendants.

The third Earl of Malmesbury, who began to shoot in 1798, closed the long record of his shooting career by entering in his diary that in 40 seasons he had fired 54,987 shots, killing 38,475 head of game (of which rather more than the fourth part were partridges), walking

36,200 miles in doing so, adding in conclusion that "during these 40 seasons I was—God be praised for it—never confined to my bed by accident or sickness one day."

Shooting then called for the exercise of other qualities than mere accuracy of aim, and the man with the gun had to possess both considerable bodily endurance and a thorough knowledge of the ways and habits of his quarry, if he looked to make good bags—in a literal sense—for the products of a day's shooting rarely exceeded the normal capacity of a game-bag. But one would be sorry to ask many of the present generation of shooters to walk the best part of a mile for every head of game they killed, as Lord Malmesbury did. The demand is for larger and easier-won results in these days, when one gun has been known to kill 300,000 head in some twenty-five years.

Another of the old school was the famous Colonel Peter Hawker, who followed his dogs on the stubbles of Long-

parish, his Hampshire home, and punted after the geese on the Solent, for the first half of the past century. The Colonel wanted no hecatombs of slain to make him a day's sport; he would cheerfully muster all hands on the report of a single pheasant in his woods, spend the whole day in pouring rain manœuvring after him, and come home in the evening to enter in his diary—"Never had a more successful day in my life; outwitted a magnificent old cock-pheasant."

To those who have no first-hand acquaintance with the Colonel, we would effect an introduction by an extract from the said diary.

1816. Sept. 16th. Never in my life had such a satisfactory day's shooting. Although the birds were rather wild than otherwise for the time of year, and the number of coveys the Longparish fields contained were by no means considerable, yet I had the good fortune to bag 36 partridges and 1 hare with literally never missing a single shot and without losing one bird. I had 8 doublets and bagged both my birds every time, and having once killed 2 at one shot with my first barrel, I made 37 head of game in 36 shots.

Had I at all picked my shots, I should not have thought this any very extraordinary performance, but so far from this a great number of my birds were killed at long distances, and with instantaneous rapidity of shooting. I had my favourite 14-gauge barrels of Joe Manton's and Mr. Butt's cylinder gunpowder. The same gun all day which was neither cleaned afresh nor even new flinted.

1828. Sept. 1st. Longparish. Strong east wind; ground as dry as Lundyfoot's snuff, but a moderate breed of birds, and my two dogs on their last legs. Therefore performed a miracle by bagging 60 partridges (besides 6 more lost), 4 hares and 1 quail. Never in my life had such a fagging day. Our army were literally worked off their feed, to the joy of my commissariat; but they drank their extra hog-tub full of stiff swizzle, which cost me more than the half of the sheep that they left.

3rd. By slaving like a negro from 10 till 5, I contrived to satchel 48 partridges (besides 3 brace lost). Weather so dry that the only plan was to walk all day with both barrels cocked, and snap down the birds as they rose wild from the stubbles.

6th. Was anxious to finish with 20 brace, and never had such a hard run to make up the number. The dogs were so done that even the falling of a bird would not move them from my heels, and I stood at 19½ brace for the last hour before night-fall. I had no alternative but marching up and

down at a rapid pace, without dogs, and treading the stubbles till I was ready to drop, but determined to die game. I fought to the last, but through over-anxiety and fatigue, I missed two fair shots; but, at last, just at the farewell of daylight a covey rose from the feed. I 'up gun' and down came a bird as dead as a hammer, a long shot; so gave three cheers (the butcher's halloo for 20 brace) and came home in triumph with 40 partridges on a pole.

Thus far the Colonel, no bad type of the old English country gentleman, albeit a man of the world and no mean musician to boot. If these samples have interested any, we can recommend the whole diary, preserved for us by the hands of Sir Ralph Payne Gallwey. A good book for the 'young idea,' wherein a later generation may take a lesson in pluck and endurance, for the Colonel would never own himself beat, handicapped though he was by somewhat indifferent general health and an unserviceable leg, for his thigh was shattered by a ball at Talavera, when serving with his regiment, the 14th Light Dragoons.

As guns and powder improved in

quality, and the reduction in their cost placed them within reach of almost any one, the necessity for game being preserved first became a matter of importance. So long as shooters were but few in the land, and their means of destruction so faulty, game contrived to take care of itself, little preservation was necessary, and sportsmen thought it no crime to wander on to other folk's ground and sample the game there. But with an ever-increasing horde of shooters, it soon became a question of either game becoming extinct or measures being taken for its preservation, and thus, of necessity, came the game laws and their enforcement. With the sixties came further advance, Laing introducing the breech-loader from France, a weapon of somewhat uncertain results at the time, but which fifty years of steady improvement has developed into the hammerless ejector of to-day.

However superficially the history of shooting in this country be considered,

one striking feature cannot fail to arrest the attention—how, step by step, the improvement of guns and shooting has been attended by a proportionate increase of game. So far, the supply has kept pace with the demand; but the limit must nearly have been reached; no ground will carry more than a certain stock, however good the systems of preservation, and if there be still further advance in our seemingly perfect sporting weapons, game will surely be the sufferer. To return to our records of the past.

In other days it was the fashion—happily now discountenanced in every form of sport worthy of the name—to stake large sums of money on shooting events. The actual stakes were not often very heavy, but betting went on apace, until the champions went out for a day's partridge-shooting with thousands depending on the result. Thus while Lord de Roos, Colonel Hon. George Anson and Captain Ross were passing a hot July afternoon in 1828 on the river, a casual

discussion arose as to whether Captain Ross, admittedly the finest pigeon shot of the day, would hold his own as easily at game. Before they reached Whitehall Stairs, the terms of a match had been arranged, Lord de Roos backing himself to find a champion to shoot partridges against Captain Ross for £200 a side on his own shootings at Milden in Suffolk; the match to be decided in a single day, the 1st of November, the guns to walk forty or fifty yards apart, shooting from sunrise to sunset *without any halt*; no dogs to be used.

Lord de Roos chose Colonel Anson as his champion, and the match duly came off, with unusually heavy betting on the result, Lord Anson offering to back his brother for £10,000. The guns paraded in the dark, and started at sunrise by the watch in a thick mist. Colonel Anson set the pace, estimated at between $4\frac{1}{2}$ and 5 miles an hour, and they kept this up to within a quarter of an hour of sunset, when the Colonel,

leading by one bird, found himself unable to go any further, and sent his seconds to offer a draw, which Captain Ross, who was still going as strong as ever, accepted, because he found it impossible to get a shot, the birds being all out feeding on the stubbles.

The number of birds killed was very small, only some 25 brace; which was scarcely to be wondered at, considering how late in the season it was, and that the guns were accompanied by two or three hundred men on horseback, all talking and betting on the shot, and making what Captain Ross calls an "in-describable row." When the draw was declared, Captain Ross, who, it must be remembered, had just walked close on forty-five miles in nine hours, offered there and then to start against any one present and race him on foot to London, some seventy miles, for £500 a side, but found no takers among the five or six hundred people present.

Such glimpses of the past are surely

enough to make us blush for our own generation of sportsmen, young gentlemen still on the sunny side of thirty, who call an eight o'clock breakfast "getting up in the middle of the night," must have a motor to take them within a few yards of the first drive, their guns carried for them from one stand to the next, and an aluminium shooting seat to support their weary forms at every halt. Truly there were giants in those days.

The match of most personal interest to myself is naturally that shot between England and Scotland, in which my home was selected to represent Scotland. From the windows of the room wherein I write can be seen the outline of a long wood of dark firs, where grand sport is to be had with the pigeon on a blustering winter's evening. This wood owes its name—Waterloo—to the great slaughter of partridges effected in the then newly-planted strip by Lord Kennedy on the day of his match.

My grandfather, Sir William Maxwell

of Monreith, resenting an account published of the match, in which it was stated that "Mr. Coke *of course* won easily," wrote a description of the event, which I cannot do better than give here in his own words.

Here is the account of the match shot by Lord Kennedy in October 1823: I was present all the time. My father made a bet, with I forget whom, that he would find a man to shoot a hundred brace of partridges in one day on his estate in Wigtownshire. He asked Lord Kennedy to do it for him, who, after pronouncing it impossible, backed himself to shoot partridges two days in Scotland against Mr. W. Coke in Norfolk, in the month of October, on two days to be fixed; chance of weather, etc., to be run by both parties. Lord Kennedy had intended to shoot his first day at Newton Don, near Kelso, and was not expected at Monreith for ten days. My father¹ was from home, and I, only a boy of seventeen, here to receive him. He had travelled all night, and arrived at Port William, a neighbouring village, about 9 A.M. Hearing of his arrival, I went and found him, Valentine Maher (umpire for Coke), and Farquharson of Blackhall,

¹ Sir William Maxwell, 5th Bart., locally known as 'Wunged Sir Wulliam,' having lost an arm from a round shot when commanding the 26th Regiment at Corunna.

just finishing breakfast, surrounded by game-keepers and dogs of his own.

Lord Kennedy gave me a letter he had from Sir Alexander Don, saying he could not ensure him twenty brace of birds at Newton Don, as the corn was all uncut, and advising him to shoot *both* the days of his match with Coke at Monreith; in consequence of which he had posted day and night, in order to be here in time for the first appointed day (as well as for the one hundred brace match). I told Lord Kennedy I could not let him go on the ground kept for the one hundred brace match. I went off in search of our gamekeeper. He said, at that hour in the day he could only take him to ground which had been shot over in September, or some which had been driven and disturbed with a view to the one hundred brace match.

About eleven o'clock Lord Kennedy started, and that day got between forty and fifty brace; Coke shooting the same day at Holkham ninety-three brace. My father came home in the evening, having been nearly lost in a gale of wind the previous night in his yacht. He wished Lord Kennedy to stay and walk over the ground before the second day of the match; but he did not, and only returned on the evening before the second day's shooting.

On that day (the one on which the hundred brace match was to be decided), at 11.30 A.M., when Lord Kennedy stopped to refresh at a farm-

house, he had sixty brace in his bag, and the best of the ground before him ; a fine still day. We had ready for him a brace of steady old setters, but he would not shoot a bird over them, insisting on using his own black pointers, never before shot over except on moors ; neither would he go to coveys marked into whins and broken ground ; he seemed to think that would not be fair, although Maher, umpire for Coke, agreed that he ought to do so.

The only 'hedge' my father had to a heavy book was a bet of some twenty guineas that Lord Kennedy would not get a shot in twenty minutes, if he persevered over a line of bare grass fields, instead of going to the marked and driven coveys.

As it was, he got ninety-three brace and a half, and Coke at Holkham ninety-six. I think these were the numbers ; at any rate, neither of them made the hundred brace to bag, while each shot more than ninety brace. A great many dead birds were picked up here afterwards. Both Val. Maher and Farquharson were disappointed in Lord Kennedy's shooting. I have never seen anything like it. Certainly very few birds were missed, and the whole ground was strewn with cripples for days afterwards. I recollect my father saying nothing on earth would induce him to allow another match on his ground. I am convinced Lord Kennedy killed and '*kilt*' 120 brace that day.

He shot homewards, and during the last two

hours of daylight lost a deal of time by his dogs bothering with hares and pheasants going out to feed, and his last two shots were a cock and hen pheasant.

None of us had the least doubt—nor, after the event, had Lord Kennedy himself—that he would have killed over one hundred brace had he shot over our old dogs and gone where our gamekeepers advised. I remember being told that Coke had his birds driven into turnips, and shot over an old pointer ‘as slow as a man’ both days.

Wigtownshire beaten by Norfolk, for two days, was by no means a matter *of course* in those days.

On a neighbouring estate Lord Garlies backed himself to shoot fifty brace in one day the year before. No preparation—no driving of birds. Despite a bad start through a wet and stormy morning, when the wind fell and the sun came out he made such good use of his time that he stopped at three o’clock, having killed some fifty-six brace, after offering to double his bet that he would shoot eighty brace; but the ease with which it might be done was so evident that no one would take it.

I have little doubt that if Lord Garlies had undertaken our match instead of Lord Kennedy we should have won; not that Lord G. was the better shot of the two, but he would have taken advice and kept his temper better.

Alas that Galloway should have fallen

so far from her high estate in the sporting world since those halcyon days. I have often seen this instanced as the results of bad management and slackness in preserving, but this has little to do with the matter. Slackness and want of method there may be, but in the disuse of the plough lies our real trouble. Formerly every available acre was cultivated, but now we have three or four grass fields to one that is under crop. Where this is the case, no human skill can produce a big stock of partridges, as stocks are reckoned nowadays.

We can still show good sport, drives from some turnip-field bordering on the moorland, where you shall have fair chance of killing every form of game, from a blackcock to a snipe, at the one stand, but for partridges alone we can never again hope to compete with Norfolk on equal terms, nor indeed with neighbours on our own East coast, where probably only one field in four is pasture.

CHAPTER IV

PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Partridge ground, good and bad—Keepers and their work
—The various systems of modern preservation.

PERHAPS the simplest way to deal with the questions of partridge ground good and bad, and the preservation and management thereof, will be to take as example an estate without a single ‘crab’ to it—the sort of place one dreams of sometimes after a good dinner, but never meets with in real life—and consider in some detail the leading features and characteristics of this earthly paradise. Needless to say, this gem without flaw is not one which any one can hope to materialize in all respects, but it is the right way to set about things, to set up an unattainable ideal—“to hitch your waggon to a star,”

(1) GOOD NESTING GROUND.

(2) BAD NESTING GROUND.

as Emerson says—and see how closely, with the more limited means at our disposal, we may attain to it in practice.

It may also serve as some guide for any would-be owners or lessees of partridge-shootings, who are not well acquainted with the business, as to what points should be borne in mind in appraising the worth of a shooting. Our estate, then, is of some 8000 acres in extent, wide enough scope to make of it a little world of our own, yet not of such size as would render it unhandy to manage or unwieldy to supervise. It all lies in a ring fence, with no awkward projections of land into neighbours' territory, or incursion of Naboth's vineyards among our own farms.

The general lie of the ground is gently undulating, with long, level slopes of a warm and sunny exposure. On every side the estate marches with other large and well-preserved manors, and the whole length of the boundary, principles of 'give and take' work to the mutual

advantage of all. This is an important consideration, for if, as is only too commonly the case, the neighbouring ground suffers unduly from powder and shot, there will be a steady drain on your *young* birds to replenish a depleted stock, while unpreserved ground harbours an unlimited supply of vermin, which periodically swarm over the boundary, joyfully to take possession of your swept and garnished house, giving the keepers all their work to do over again. The climate is as equable and dry as may be looked for in these islands, such rainfall as there is being well distributed, and storms of rare occurrence.

The soil is light but mixed, light loam and sandy ground predominating, with some admixture of stronger and heavier land. Scattered over the estate, small patches of waste and sandy land, not repaying the labour of cultivation, and covered with bracken, whins, and heath, make splendid natural nesting-ground and shelter. With this exception, and omit-

ting the 500 acres of park and policies, practically the whole estate is cultivated on a four years' course, most of the land being too light to be laid down in permanent pasture. This is, of course, an essential condition if you wish the land to carry a heavy stock of partridges, and in many parts of the country the ever-increasing waste—to the game preserver's eye—of land laid down in permanent grass presents a partridge problem of which no solution seems possible. The ground is fortunate in being well watered by a number of springs and streamlets, and a dry summer can be faced with equanimity.

No main line of railway, with deadly maze of telegraph wires, crosses the estate; roads, footpaths, and rights-of-way are not inordinate in number, while the population is purely agricultural and the farms above the average in size. The fields run big, some reaching 60 to 80 acres; they are, for the most part, divided by solid earthen banks with sloping sides, which,

fenced on either side and planted with broom, provide the best of ground for birds to nest in. There are no ditches to trap young birds. The whole ground is further divided into squares of from 200 to 250 acres by belts of hardwood trees, standing ten to twenty deep and some 50 feet in height. These again provide sites for hundreds of nests, and are invaluable for the purposes of driving in the autumn and for shelter at all times.

On this Utopian manor of ours the ground is watched and the game cared for by a most efficient staff. First there is the head-keeper, on whose qualities the welfare of the shooting so largely depends. He is one of the modern school, vigorous, alert, and enterprising ; perhaps not such an entertaining companion by flood and field as the veterans of other days ; he may fail to amuse by quaint turn of phrase or picturesque appearance, nor will he have the time to turn and saunter along with you for half an hour's leisurely conversation when you chance to meet.

But he is the right stamp of man for all that; courteous to all and yet familiar with none, considerate of the interests of others yet never unmindful of his master's, he has justly earned the respect of the whole countryside. Fair and just in all his dealings, his underlings know that while good work will not pass unrecognized, no slovenly or slipshod ways will be for an instant condoned. He has no slight knowledge of natural history, and moves through life with an observant eye and an open and adaptive mind, not wedded to tradition, but ever ready to consider new theories or suggestions and turn them to his purpose. In the field he never gets hustled or flurried, and is quick to make the best of unlooked-for contingencies when they arise. His books are accurately and neatly kept, and require little or no endorsement at the hands of the agent; for he is a business man with all his energies and faculties concentrated on his work, only asking of his subordinates what he freely gives himself—

cheerful and ungrudging service and a whole-hearted devotion to duty.

Not a man to be pitied our head-keeper, despite all Mr. Owen Jones says about keepering being such a badly paid profession. As head on a large estate he draws £70 to £80 a year in wages, £30 to £50 a year in tips, with a good house, garden, and the usual allowances; better pay than many a struggling parson can look for—and as he is really fond of his work for its own sake, our keeper may be fairly considered as one who is contented with his lot—which is no small thing to be in this restless generation. Finally, he is a good master to his dogs, careful of their welfare, patient with their education, and proud of their appearance and performances in the field.

There are eight other keepers on the estate; with two of these we have no concern here, for their duties lie entirely within the demesne where the two thousand pheasants which furnish the annual covert shoot are reared and main-

tained. The duties of the remaining six underlings are solely confined to the part-ridges ; each has his own beat to look after, each beat compact and self-contained, and varying in size from the 700 acre beat round the village, with small fields bounded by rough hedges and much intersected by roads and paths, to the 1500 acre beat where the fields are large and open, with little rough ground to harbour vermin or increase the difficulty of finding the nests.

The under-keepers also belong to the modern school ; they are to a man young, brisk, intelligent, and hard-working ; well-disciplined, they are still quite ready to accept responsibility on occasion. They are not permanencies, as they all mean to make their way in the world. Meantime, though they have a hard life and draw but modest wages, they are having the finest training in the world for their profession. Five years' insight into the workings of a really well-managed estate is worth half a lifetime of casual experience,

and will fit a man with his wits about him and his heart in the work for any head-keeper's place. The conditions and surroundings may be very dissimilar, but his education will apply anywhere. He will have learnt to work hard himself and expect others to work hard under him ; to live on good terms with all those around him, while avoiding undue familiarity with any ; to move about his business with energy, never quite satisfied with the past, always seeking to do a little better in the future ; to profit by failures, working out for himself how and why things went wrong ; and finally to take an honest pride in himself and his work. If they want their shootings run efficiently and economically, proprietors when selecting a head-keeper should always consider what school he has been trained in rather than what is the actual range of his experience.

So we lose the services of one or other of the under-keepers most years. This does not in practice prove such a handicap as would appear, for the head-keeper has

always got his eye on some likely lad, and the infusion of fresh blood is, on the whole, healthy, and tends to keep things alive.

The keeper's year may now be said to begin with the calendar, for the driving is all over before the end of December. The regular shooting once finished, a man is rarely taken off his beat, for it is recognized that there is quite enough work on his own ground to keep his time well filled.

The first three months are given up to getting the ground in order for the nesting season. Odd cock pheasants have to be pursued and killed, any superfluous hares taken off the ground, and wounded and wasting partridges cleared off. Then the rabbits have to be taken in hand, and trapped and shot to the verge of extinction, or they will multiply apace and give trouble later on. When foxes are preserved rabbits are of some value in occupying their attentions, but otherwise they are an unmitigated nuisance on partridge ground, a prolific source of

trouble, and a standing attraction to vermin. Then the nesting-ground has all to be thoroughly gone over, gaps in hedges filled, fences repaired, game covers trimmed and their banks strengthened—not work that the keeper has actually to do himself, but the necessity for which he must note and point out to the estate authorities, or it is apt to be overlooked.

Finally, and by far the most important of all, the early spring is the season to seriously tackle the ever-present question of vermin. Desultory warfare there always is between the keeper and the carnivora, but now stoats, weasels, hedgehogs, and cats must be sought for and trapped with unremitting energy. Crows, magpies, and sparrow-hawks have to be found and singled out for destruction, before other matters begin to press. Each beat-keeper is constantly round his ground at this season, with spade, ferret, and traps. Every trace of his enemies is carefully noted ; tracks, droppings, even a dead rabbit all tell their own tale, and

clearly bespeak their origin to the professional eye. Besides the common gin, each keeper knows how to use snares, deadfall, and figure-of-four traps on occasion, and has a large 'hugger' trap for the special edification of poaching dogs and cats. Every rabbit hole in the banks and hedgerows, once cleared of its occupants, is carefully filled up, lest it should acquire new tenants or serve to harbour wandering vermin. The use of the gun is not encouraged among the keepers, its employment only being sanctioned where the trap and the spade are useless.

Vermin money is never allowed, for we hold that it would be working on quite a wrong principle to allow extra pay—as if it was for something quite outside his ordinary work—for perhaps the most important of a keeper's regular duties. This widespread custom further places a dangerous temptation in a young man's path, and there have been many instances of keepers treating vermin as

“the goose that lays the golden eggs,” and practically farming them on a small scale, to their own profit and the detriment of the ground. Reprehensible, no doubt, but very natural, and if instead of paying a shilling for a sparrow-hawk in April you have to allow five shillings for five hawks in August, when all the mischief has been done, you have really only yourself to thank.

While on the subject of allowances, it may also be noted that farming by the keepers is not countenanced; each keeper may have his cow, but it is considered that his work, if properly attended to, will not allow him spare time enough to keep and look after stock. On the other hand, the under-keepers are well treated; their wages are above the average, each man getting from £1 a week, a good house, coals, and a cow's grass. In addition each receives annually a suit of the uniform worn on the estate, a tough and serviceable homespun of distinctive pattern, and a thick waterproof

cloak for night-watching, renewed when necessary.

In a work on keepers and their lives published last year,¹ it was laid down that all rabbits and pigeons killed were the fair perquisite of the keeper, and even that he had a fair claim to any game killed by vermin or 'chance-killed game' unsuitable for his employer's table. As in the same chapter it is stated that the keeper "puts his *best* work into his garden, which is often the model plot of a rural community," and also that he "may keep fowls at his employer's expense, make money by dog-breeding and exhibiting, earn vermin and rabbit money (whatever that is) as extra pay, and receive from his employer—if a generous master—a brace of pheasants and a hare to take home with him after every shooting party," it is fairly clear that this is not our standard of a gamekeeper; but it does seem a pity to advance such dangerous theories in an otherwise excellent and deservedly widely

¹ *A Gamekeeper's Note-Book*, by Owen Jones.

read book. A gamekeeper has every opportunity for cheating his employer if he be so disposed, and it is most important that the bargain between them should be clearly defined, leaving no shadowy boundary between right and wrong through which a weak man may drift from a casual regard of what is other people's property to a career of downright dishonesty.

However favourably we may wish to picture this estate, we cannot, if it is to bear any relation to actual fact, suppose that it numbers no rats among its inhabitants. In March, then, the rats are poisoned in their holes; not casually but most systematically, the joint efforts of the whole available staff being concentrated on each part of the ground in turn. Any rats fortunate enough to escape these attentions have still the beat-keeper to reckon with, and thus it is often the case that when the nesting season begins, there is scarcely a rat on the whole ground. This desirable state of

affairs would, of course, be impossible of attainment were our neighbours on every side not equally zealous in extirpation.

Hedgehogs are dealt with about this time too, an old dog having been trained to hunt them after dark on grass-lands, at which time they are easiest to find, though secure from human foes unless some one with a nose is added to the party. Thus, after steady trapping throughout the year—perhaps a trap to every four or five acres is always in use—culminating in a regular crusade in the early spring, the end of April finds the enemies of game a negligible quantity and there is one danger the less to be reckoned with.

Vigilance must, however, not be wholly relaxed; with May come wandering families of stoats, anxious to settle down where food is plentiful, and there are always other casual nomads of the vermin world to be guarded against.

The system on which we work in the nesting season is to assist the methods of nature in every way we can, but never to

supplant them by methods of our own, recognizing that the partridge is a better parent than any substitute we can hope to provide, and that birds reared under natural conditions in a wild state make the best and healthiest stock.

At the end of April each keeper has served out to him a large scale map of his beat, and a tabulated notebook in which to keep his records. From the first week in May till the old birds have begun to sit—after which time undue disturbance of the ground must be avoided—the keepers are out from dawn till close on mid-day systematically hunting for the nests. Each nest as found is marked on the map with a number in a circle, and under the corresponding figure in the notebook is entered the day on which the bird began to sit, the number of eggs hatched and addled, what eggs were changed or added to the nest, and the cause of any disaster, should it occur. About two-thirds to three-fourths of the total nests—the proportion varying according to the

season and growth of herbage—are thus found and accounted for.

The summarized results are valuable as a work of reference in after years, for they show most clearly what the work in the past has been worth, and how far measures taken to rid the partridges of their enemies, improvise or construct nesting-ground, or improve the stock by change of blood have proved successful.¹

The definite aim of keeping his records up to date also helps to keep a man up to his work. The maps and records of each beat-keeper are occasionally checked by the head-keeper and his master—for we naturally like to fancy ourselves as owner of this place, taking a real interest in the keepers and their work all the year round; the beat-keeper then produces his map, half-a-dozen nests are selected therefrom at random, and the accuracy of his notes tested first-hand. This guards against the possible danger of a man

¹ The benefits of a successful change of blood should be realized in an increase in the average number of eggs laid.

getting slack about his work, and drawing on his imagination to supply any deficiency in his returns.

Each nest is visited as far as possible once a day, the keeper not making a prolonged business of inspecting the nest, but just walking close enough, without stopping, to ascertain that all is well. He carries with him on his rounds a couple of traps for immediate use if any trace of vermin be discovered, a strong knife to cut branches which he may want to stick into the ground round any exposed nest he may find, artificial eggs to replace any he may see fit to lift, and a specially contrived belt in which eggs may be carried and kept warm. All the ground is searched twice, for the old birds nest a week or so earlier than the young ones. If a pair of old birds usurp an undue extent of territory for their nesting operations, they sometimes have to be cleared out. Each man knows that as soon as the partridge uncovers her eggs he must on no account go near the nest

for a day or two, as any disturbance at this critical time may make her desert.

All nests in safe places are left alone, except that some of the eggs are changed with other beats, with perhaps a few spare eggs added if the full clutch is much under twenty. Changing of eggs is systematically carried out all over the ground, both with other estates and also by free interchange between beats. Nests on roadsides and exposed places are treated according to the degree of danger to which they seem exposed; if there appears to be a reasonable chance of their survival, they are dealt with on the Euston system, as described later in this chapter when treating of foxes; but if their prospects of success are slight, the eggs are taken to the incubator as soon as the clutch is nearly completed, and the nest destroyed in the hopes that the bird may have a second nest of seven or eight eggs in a more favourable situation.

When any misfortune befalls a nest, should the sitting bird forsake or be killed,

the eggs are generally found before they are spoilt, and taken to the incubator. All these eggs are either added to contemporary nests, or else allowed to hatch in the incubator, and turned down with newly hatched coveys as soon as dry. Late in the season, the family arrangements of dilatory partridges are hurried on by the use of the incubator and the dummies, and the fortnight thus saved must often make the whole difference to the chances of the covey.

When the hay is cut, the beat-keeper is always there, working his dog in front of the mowing machine, and doing all he can to save his birds. Without offering rewards for partridge nests—a practice apt to do more harm than good by encouraging indiscriminate nest-hunting—great stress is laid on keeping the farmers and farm-hands not only neutral, but actively interested in the shooting. Some of the farm-hands are right good fellows, and are as useful as extra keepers in the summer. The farmers and the keepers

live on the best of terms ; the keepers can do them many a good turn in the year, and in return the farmers lend us their aid when most required, studying the interests of the game at all times, and most materially forwarding our efforts in a hundred different ways, by looking after their dogs, cutting their hay and corn with regard to the birds in it, and keeping their men from disturbing the fences—all helping to produce that extra fifty brace in October, which they are as proud as any one to see killed off their land.

After the corn is cut, the stubbles and grass fields are ‘bushed’ with thorns, more as a precautionary measure than for actual prevention, for where the ground is so well watched and the labourers so friendly, poaching is at a discount.

Before September comes each keeper has to furnish some estimate of the number of birds on his ground, from which data the amount of shooting can be anticipated. In a good year ten days’ driving can fairly be reckoned on in

October, and another five days later in the season. Six thousand birds off the 8000 acres is not an undue estimate on first-class ground, and a pair of birds to every 4 or 5 acres is about the stock that the ground will comfortably carry, seeing that the partridges have it all their own way, the merest sprinkling of pheasants being allowed to nest outside the home covers.

But all estates are not equally blessed, and we must now consider some of the problems which present themselves very forcibly in the ordinary course of preservation. Perhaps the commonest of these is provided by the rival sport of hunting. The presence of foxes on an estate vastly complicates the question of partridge preservation. The fox, deadliest foe to game, must not only be tolerated but encouraged, and though it has been proved beyond all doubt that both foxes and partridges can exist on the same ground in sufficient numbers for the purpose of sport, still the life of a keeper

in a strictly preserved hunting country is not altogether a happy one ; his cares and anxieties are very sensibly increased, and the uncertainty of reaping any fruit of his labours, one of the most trying features of a keeper's work at any time, is now doubled by the ever-present snake which he must cherish in his bosom.

Of course it may be said that the keeper's duty is to carry out his master's wishes, and that he should be as pleased when foxes are found in plenty as he was the year when mange had decimated their numbers, and two hundred brace figured in the game-book as the product of a single day for the first, and probably the last, time. Such a nice sense of proportion is, however, denied to human nature, and for the most part you will find the keeper either very much in earnest about his partridges, in which case the foxes remain a permanent thorn in the flesh, or else keen about hunting, the partridges then taking a second place in his estimation and suffering accordingly.

It is by no means every fox who takes to hunting for partridge nests, but once indulged in, the habit soon becomes confirmed and ineradicable in the individual. The worst offenders are mangy foxes, who alone hunt by day as well as night, and old vixens seeking food for their cubs. It is always advisable to keep a plentiful supply of rabbits for the foxes, unless the interests of forestry have to be considered. Rabbits are the staple food of the fox, and where they are to be had for the catching, the foxes *may* refrain from trying any novelties in the way of food.

Many and various are the devices employed to save the nests. The simplest way is to surround the nest with a smell which foxes dislike, such as handfuls of grass dipped in 'animal oil,' rags soaked in a mixture of oil of burnt hartshorn and creosote or gas tar, or one of many patent 'stinks' now sold for the purpose. These may serve their turn well enough for a time, but the fox is full of guile, learns to associate certain evil smells with

a dinner of two courses, and the keeper is hoist with his own petard. A further refinement is to lay a trail of the particular 'stink' used along the fence, passing wide of the nest by describing a semicircle round it; the fox may then follow the trail and miss the nest.

Wire of a mesh large enough to allow free passage to the bird but none to the fox is sometimes put up a yard or so from the nest on either side of the fence, and well fastened down into the hedge bottom. This may at times effect its immediate purpose, but is very liable to disturb the sitting bird, and further advertises the exact position of the nest to all and sundry, which is obviously undesirable.

Mr. Allington quotes¹ a keeper who improved on this device by placing a white flag on each side of the fence opposite to and about a yard from the nest, or farther off at first if the sitting bird showed any signs of uneasiness, and gradually brought nearer as she got used

¹ In *Partridge Driving*, edition of 1910.

to it. This plan was said to have been a complete success for four years, the fox not venturing to pass between the flag and the fence, and thus missing the nest. Still, with partridge eggs at £5 a hundred, many keepers would deem it an over-risky expedient to flag their nests like so many putting greens on a golf course, and as easily located.

Old and unset iron traps scattered round the nest are a common device, or an old chain laid all round the nest, which latter is *said* to form a magic circle through which no fox will ever pass: both these should be well handled at frequent intervals. Stable lanterns suspended a foot or so above the ground, with cheap roasting-jacks attached to them, have also been recommended as efficient protection during the night.

All these devices can be profitably employed on occasion, but it is very doubtful if any one of them could permanently be trusted to protect nests. The keeper who would outwit his wily

adversaries must not only ring the changes on every known device, but also for ever be devising new methods of baffling the enemy.

All nesting ground that admits of it should be enclosed by six feet of well and strongly set wire-netting, supported by a strong steel wire run through it at half its height. One authority¹ gives an ingenious and economical method of making this absolutely fox-proof. A single strand of stout wire is stretched from standard to standard above the wire-netting (the standards, if of wood, must be provided with an iron eyelet stanchion for the purpose). Suspended on this wire by means of bent wire cross-pieces are lengths of ridging, an inexpensive material of galvanized sheet-iron. The ridging has free play, working on the single wire, and any fox trying to jump on to the top of the netting fails to gain foothold and falls backwards.

While all these palliative measures are effective at times, it seems that in the

¹ Mr. W. Carnegie, in *Practical Game Preserving*.

adoption of the so-called 'Euston' system is to be found the only reliable remedy for the trouble caused by foxes. Marlow, head-keeper to Lord Ashburton at the Grange, rendered a great service to preservers of game in hunting countries when he discovered the fact that once a partridge hen has been sitting on her eggs for twenty-four hours, she may be handled and lifted or gently put off her nest without any fear of her forsaking altogether. This made it possible for the keepers to abstract, replace, or substitute eggs at will during practically the whole period of incubation, and, having got so far, systematic use of this idea soon followed as a matter of course.

Mr. Pearson Gregory was the first to practise the system, and has shown on his estate of Harlaxton in Lincolnshire, lying in the very heart of the Belvoir country, how by its means the damage caused by foxes may be minimized. The system should really be known as the 'Harlaxton,' but as Mr. Pearson Gregory was

tenant of the Duke of Grafton's shootings at Euston, and as the keepers there added chipped eggs to their wild pheasants' nests at the time of hatching, there arose some little confusion on the subject, and Mr. Gregory's invention became generally known as the 'Euston' system.

Its objects are twofold. In the first case, it seeks to protect the *eggs* by keeping them from all danger from the first week of laying to the hour of hatching; secondly, it aims at lessening the danger to the sitting *bird* and her *nest* by shortening the period of incubation from three weeks to one.

In brief, its methods are these: all nests possible are found and each bird is allowed to lay four eggs without interference; these, and all subsequent eggs as she lays them, are then taken by the keepers and either put into the incubator or set under hens, being at the same time replaced in the nest by artificial eggs.¹

¹ The original artificial eggs were found very unsatisfactory, and birds often refused to have anything to do

The partridge is allowed to sit for one week on the dummies, after which time she is willing to mother any chicks that may hatch. A batch of chipped eggs are then taken from the coops or the incubator, carried to the nest in a basket of warm bran, and substituted for the dummies. In a few hours the mother will have hatched and taken off the brood, thus evading all the dangers of the last two days of incubation, which, as is well known, is just the time that foxes do most mischief. For then the scent, which the sitting bird has been able to suppress since incubation commenced, returns to the nest (due perhaps to the chicks in the eggs), rendering it an easy prey to any passing 'varmint.'

Besides the main object of this system, its adoption is attended by several minor advantages. A constant change of blood

with them ; but now many excellent imitations of the natural egg are on the market. Mr. Malden, Horne, Horley, supplies an egg which, were it not for the small hole purposely left open at one end, would be almost indistinguishable from the genuine article.

all over the ground is assured; the wastage, caused by birds sitting on unfertile eggs, ceases; and the keeper can exactly regulate the hatching time of any nest so that the chicks start life under the most propitious circumstances. It might be supposed that the keeper would find himself left with more eggs on hand than he could dispose of, especially should accidents befall many of the hens who are sitting on dummies. But as it has been found quite safe to put as many as thirty eggs in a nest, questions of supply and demand are generally easy to regulate.

The working of this system is inexpensive, though doubtless it entails hard work on the part of the keepers, which might lead some to oppose its introduction, or demand an increased staff to cope with the work. To any urging such objections, let it be pointed out that in Lincolnshire one man has worked a beat of 1500 acres on the Euston system, with a hatch of 1200 birds in a season.

On dry soils, where no springs or

streams afford natural drinking-places for the partridges, it is advisable to give the birds drinking-fountains in dry and hot summers. It is true that they can manage well enough without them, but numerous self-feeding fountains placed in the fields and kept clean and sweet will well repay any extra trouble they may entail, by helping to keep the stock healthy. Mr. F. E. Fryer, whose management of a small estate at Newmarket entitles him to speak with the voice of authority—does not his land produce $1\frac{1}{2}$ birds to the acre?—considers this a sure precaution against gapes, which scourge may well, as he suggests, come from birds drinking in the nearest dirty puddle after a shower, and thus absorbing the embryo gape-worm.

Remises, or sanctuaries provided for shelter, food, and nesting, are scarcely germane to the subject of preservation in general, for they are a luxury which only the very few, to whom money is no object, can well afford. A description of

one will be found among the notes from Welbeck Abbey in Chapter V.

With ordinary care and attention the hand-rearing of partridges presents no peculiar difficulty, and demands only the ordinary appliances of pheasant-rearing. On principle, absolute certainty as to the source of supply in buying eggs should be insisted on; in practice, it is to be feared that this precaution is sometimes neglected, else were egg-stealing not so profitable a pursuit.¹

The treatment up to hatching time differs in no respect from pheasant-rearing, save only that it is advisable to set the eggs under a smaller type of hen than usual. Bantams and silkies, when they can be induced to sit, which is not

¹ To ensure an honest source in buying eggs, every one should be most particular in this country to deal only with Associates of the Field Sports and Game Guild, of which the Duke of Leeds is president, the Duke of Abercorn vice-president, and which numbers all respectable dealers in eggs among its associates. When buying eggs direct from Austria-Hungary it is well to communicate with the society of the same name in Vienna. It is said that close on 100,000 stolen partridge eggs annually find their way into this country.

always, make excellent foster-mothers. From 15 to 20 eggs may be given to each hen.

There is always considerable risk of the hen trampling on newly hatched birds when they are still weak and wet. This may be obviated by having an incubator set up under cover close by, and, when the eggs begin to chip, taking all but two from the hen and putting them into the incubator. The hen duly hatches her two and is therefore ready to undertake the charge of a family; the remainder hatch in the incubator, are kept for a short time in the drying box, and are given back to the hen before they have reached the active and independent stage, which comes almost as soon as they are dry. They then go straight under the hen, and she takes to them, which she will not always do if they have been left too long in the drying box and run off in search of food. This device was originated and very successfully practised by Mr. F. Hawkins, head-keeper at Eynsham Hall.

The natural food of the chick is the egg of the yellow meadow ant, but this should not be given from the start unless a continued supply be assured, for the young birds quickly acquire a taste for ant's eggs, and are then apt to refuse any other kind of food. Where ant's eggs in sufficient quantity are not available, the partridge meal supplied by any reliable manufacturer of game foods, mixed with custard and green food, will be found to answer the purpose fairly well.

The young chicks require to be fed five times a day for the first week or so, four times a day for the next fortnight, and three times a day thereafter. When the young partridges are half grown and about six weeks old, the coops should be moved to the edge of some oat-field, and placed in dry spots far enough from each other to prevent the various coveys collecting in a pack. After a few days of liberty the young birds will leave their foster-mother altogether, and then require little further attention.

In my own opinion, rearing partridges by hand where soil and local conditions are favourable to the wild birds must always—even on a small scale after a succession of bad seasons—be a short-sighted policy, eventually defeating its own ends. For while it certainly produces an increased number of birds for the one year, at the same time a number of birds, unlikely to make good parents in the future and unduly susceptible to disease, are turned out to lower the standard of the whole stock.

It would seem that the same rule applies to partridges as to pheasants—rear once and you are committed to rear always. If the truth of this be allowed, the profitable adoption of hand-rearing for partridges is limited to estates where a cold clay soil, a strict preservation of foxes, or other untoward local circumstances make it hopeless to look for any number of partridges under natural conditions. Here if 1000 eggs be bought every year, and 60 to 70 per cent hatched

and reared, driving days of 150 brace may be had, where, without such adventitious aid, 20 brace would be about the limit.

Hand-reared birds are almost always found to be deficient in the homing instinct, so strongly developed in the wild partridges. As they also have a marked tendency to gather in packs early in the season, especially if the coveys have been turned out too close together, their utility on a small shooting is always somewhat problematical, and they appear to best advantage when turned out in the centre of a large estate, whence they will have ample scope to wander without crossing the boundary.

So far as the actual shooting is concerned, hand-reared partridges differ in no particular from wild birds, flying just as well and giving equally good sport; yet at the best there clings about them some taint of artificiality to any one who cares at all for our wild game birds and their ways, and is not solely occupied

with the desire to let off his gun as often as possible.

The French system is another, and for many reasons preferable, method of artificially increasing a stock, but it is only applicable in natural partridge country, and therefore could not always be substituted for hand-rearing. This system was devised by the Duc de Montebello, and was borrowed by us from the Continent, where it has been employed with marked success. Briefly, the procedure is as follows :—

A large enclosure is first planned out; if 50 brace of birds were to be penned, a square of 75 yards would be enclosed. This pen must have plenty of rough cover, such as partridges affect in a wild state, both inside and out. The site should be dry, sheltered, and little liable to disturbance, quiet being essential to the welfare of the birds. The pen is constructed of wire-netting carried on stout standards 6 feet or more in height, roofed with twine-net of a small mesh, and has all its corners rounded off. The inmates, presumably Hungarians, are turned into this enclosure, cock and hen in equal numbers, about the end of October, with their wings brailed. By January they should be well acclimatized, and

more or less accustomed to the presence of the keeper who feeds them. During the pairing and nesting time there are two several methods of procedure. In the first the large enclosure has two or more small covered-in pens, each some 5 yards square, permanently attached to it, the doors shutting off the smaller from the larger pen being worked with a line by the man in charge from a hut at the main entrance. As the birds mate, each pair draws away from the rest and seeks the seclusion of one of the smaller pens, the door of which is then closed. The pairs are then taken to the rearing pens, a covered-in circle of some 20 feet in diameter being given to each pair, where they proceed with their family arrangements under surveillance of the keeper. When six days or a week old the coveys are turned out on the ground they are intended to occupy. Moving the coveys is always rather a troublesome business, and it simplifies matters considerably if each rearing pen can be constructed where the home of the covey is to be. On the other hand, it is naturally far easier for the keeper to look after the birds properly when all the rearing pens are in one field; when this is the case the pens should be at least 20 yards apart.

In the second method, the rearing pens are attached to the main enclosure, shut in the same manner when occupied by a pair, but used by the birds to nest in and only moved after the young are hatched. The old birds are then caught and

put in a small flat basket, the young in a carrying box, and all replaced in their pen on the ground which is to be their home; here they are allowed their liberty after a day or two, as soon as they seem to have settled down. Under this method a number of birds usually nest in the main enclosure, whence they are allowed to run with their young as soon as hatched. In either case, birds which fail to pair are turned out early in the season in the hope that they may find mates more to their liking in the outside world.

In this semi-domesticated condition the hens sometimes considerably exceed the natural clutch of eggs, many instances of one hen producing between 30 and 40 eggs being recorded; many eggs are also dropped about in the large enclosure. All eggs should be utilized, nests being made up to 20 or 22, and superfluous eggs used in making up wild birds' nests, or else set under hens. About 18 to 20 chicks are as much as one hen partridge can manage satisfactorily; and it should be remembered that the eggs of birds imported from Hungary often take longer to hatch than those of the native birds.

On the whole the French system has much to recommend it; the conditions under which the birds are reared approximate fairly closely to those of nature, and the stock thus produced can be fairly

trusted to be healthy and prolific in a wild state ; the safety of the nests is ensured during the whole period of incubation, and the young birds can be to some extent safeguarded in wet and windy weather by turning them down in dry and sheltered spots. From a pen holding 50 brace, at least 500 young birds should be, *under skilful management*, annually produced and turned down.

On the other side, it must be admitted that there have been many complaints from people who state that the system has been given a fair trial with them and found wanting, or at least uncertain in its results, in some years not more than half of the birds pairing in the pens, and all the rest having to be turned out, probably too late in the season to find mates and breed in a wild state.

But one must judge by results, and the uniform success achieved by many who have followed this system for a number of years would seem to point, in the case of failure, to the fault lying, not with the

system itself, but rather in the faulty application thereof. Neglect of such weighty considerations as finding a suitable site for the pen, providing proper food for the birds, and, most important of all, careful and skilful handling at pairing time, would be quite enough in themselves to account for any want of success without condemning the whole system.

In any case the French system is not one to adopt on a small scale, unless experimentally, with a view to extending operations should the results be favourable. The initial expense of securing and enclosing the ground is heavy, and the birds require constant attention and supervision; and if only 100 young birds or so are to be produced when all goes well, the results will hardly repay the time and money expended. It is a system best adapted for working on large estates, where each of five or six beat-keepers could have twenty rearing pens set up in suitable places on his own ground, receiving the paired birds to tenant them from the

large central enclosures, in which from 100 to 150 brace of birds would be penned. On such a scale the results of success would form a very tangible quantity in the shooting season. The whole idea of penning partridges for laying is undoubtedly capable of considerable variation at the hands of skilful operators, and it seems quite possible that semi-domesticated partridges might even be induced to abandon their monogamous habits.

The introduction of Hungarian partridges into this country is a novel feature of game preservation. When first suggested some fifteen years ago, the idea was welcomed as the panacea for all ills on partridge ground, but of recent years Hungarians have proved a fruitful source of controversy. Rightly or wrongly they have been blamed for impairing the stamina of our native stock and introducing new forms of disease. 'Hungarians' is, of course, a very loose term, and includes grey partridges from every part of Germany and the Austrian Empire. It

is no easy matter to pronounce finally whether their introduction is advisable or not; only, when so many close and accurate observers pronounce against them from personal experience, a feeling of mistrust is naturally engendered. That their introduction has in many instances been attended with evil consequences is beyond doubt, only the question remains as to how far these failures are attributable to mismanagement and mistakes on the part of those responsible for turning them down.

Hungarians are practically indistinguishable from our own partridges, and may be bought either in the egg or as full-grown birds. While eggs involve less initial outlay, they are probably just as expensive in the long-run, and buying the birds direct has the advantage of being the more certain method of the two, besides ensuring a change of blood in the first year.

Particular care and attention are absolutely essential in dealing with

Hungarians; if they are bought and turned down in a haphazard fashion, there can be no shadow of doubt that they will be more likely to do harm than good. Their reputed origin should, if possible, be verified, and some similarity between the climate of their old and new homes insisted on. In buying either birds or eggs, the foreign invoice must be checked, else it is quite possible to buy 'Hungarian' eggs which come from no more distant land than your own hedgerows.

The old and vicious system, still recommended by many game dealers, of turning birds out on the night of their arrival should be utterly discountenanced. When the birds arrive they should first be carefully examined to see that they are all in a healthy condition, and that a due proportion of sexes and young birds to old is maintained. They should then be placed in pens, which have been constructed in suitable spots on the ground which they are intended to occupy. The

pens should be 12 ft. long by 4 ft. wide and 3 ft. high, covered with twine-netting of about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. mesh, with fir branches in the centre and some shelters of boards at the sides. Each of these pens will hold about 4 brace comfortably, and should be placed on good dry turf. The birds should for the first day or so be given water, grit, and crushed and scalded grain, and then whole grain and plenty of green food. They should be procured by the end of December, and enlarged at the end of January; they will then be less likely to stray than if they were turned out before the pairing season began. Owing to the severer changes of climate to which they are subject in their own country, Hungarian partridges are more migratory in habit than our native birds, so this is an important consideration.

It is inadvisable to handicap the newcomers with rings on their legs for purposes of identification; a small hole punched through the web of the wing serves the purpose equally well, and in

no way inconveniences the bird. The ground on which Hungarian partridges are to be turned out *must* be cleared of old birds first, or the foreigners will be driven away as soon as they are set at liberty. When the birds are being freed, the pen should be left open at one end and food scattered close by for a day or two. On no account should any but good healthy birds be released; every one that shows any signs of being in poor health or condition must be inexorably destroyed.

Hungarians have no peculiar qualities in influencing a stock of partridges; a change of blood from ten miles away is as efficacious as one from a thousand. Their sole merit as compared with British partridges lies in the fact that they are readily procurable in a wild state from *reliable* sources. To import Hungarians in times of plenty is rather like taking coals to Newcastle; it is only after a succession of bad nesting seasons that their use seems in any way desirable.

When scarcely a young partridge has reached maturity for two or three years, and the ground is tenanted by nothing but hardy veterans of four and five years' standing, it is a tempting expedient to clear out all the old and useless stock and start afresh with a new lot.

The right course to follow in managing a partridge-shooting seems then to be this: first, make sure that your staff is efficient, that the wild birds are properly cared for, their enemies reduced to a minimum; that good and sufficient nesting ground is available for the breeding stock, and that the health of the race is ensured by a regular change of blood. When this point has been reached, and *not till then*, it may be advisable to adopt one of the systems of higher preservation; but to turn out Hungarians on ground covered with vermin or devoid of places for nesting, or to ask a keeper who has never really studied the habits of his own partridges to undertake the delicate work of successfully pairing penned birds under

A TIME-HONOURED CUSTOM. PARTRIDGE AND PHEASANT USING SAME NEST.

the French system, is simply waste of money.

In the present state of agriculture more land passes out of cultivation every year, and farms which once carried a fine head of game soon become useless for purposes of sport when laid down in grass. The fact that the occasional covey met with on grazing land is almost always a peculiarly large and strong one would seem to show that partridges can do well enough on grass if they like, but no inducement will persuade them to stay in any appreciable numbers where the land is unbroken.

The only way to keep up a respectable stock under these conditions is to plough a certain proportion of the land—about 10 acres to every 200 acres of grass is sufficient—and grow some cereal crop for the exclusive benefit of the game. Where fields run large, the cost of fencing these patches is a serious consideration, otherwise the whole expense of ploughing, harrowing, sowing, and paying compensa-

tion for the land should come to considerably less than £1 an acre, and the result is almost sure to repay the outlay. Wheat is often recommended for the purpose, but the crop that entails least trouble in cultivation is buckwheat. This cereal is not particular as to soil, and will grow almost anywhere, provided the ground is not waterlogged. It should be sown any time during June, about one bushel of seed to the acre. The ground should be lightly ploughed, thoroughly harrowed, and rolled after being sown. The seed may be obtained from any nurseryman, the grey or silver hulled varieties being the best. The grain matures in from six weeks to two months according to season. It is not a bad plan to sow a few strips of Hungarian millet in the same field; this makes good cover, which buckwheat does not, and gives birds a place of retreat when disturbed. Hungarian millet may be sown at the same time as buckwheat, under the same process of cultivation, but using only half a bushel of seed to the

acre. Buckwheat may be grown for two or three years in succession on the same ground without impoverishing the soil, and is an effectual agent in cleaning dirty land.

CHAPTER V

BY MANY HANDS

A series of notes from many estates—Summarizing present-day methods under varying conditions—With results, opinions, and suggestions.

As it is only some thirty or forty years since the idea of doing something towards improving partridge ground was first seriously considered, it could hardly be expected that the rules of modern preservation should be capable of being concisely and finally laid down in a few pages.

The new system probably originated at Elvedon, where, as long ago as 1870, Lord Ducie's keepers were successfully rearing large numbers of partridges by hand, exchanging pheasant's eggs for those of partridges with their neighbours.

Except on this one estate in Oxfordshire, it was then the universal custom to allow partridges to fend entirely for themselves ; the more prominent vermin were, it is true, probably destroyed, but beyond that, no interest was taken in the movements of the birds until the 1st of September drew near, and it became a question what sport they could be called upon to furnish.

Partridge - driving, demanding more birds on the ground and more certainty of their being there when wanted than the older methods which it supplanted, resulted in the trial of every conceivable means of assisting nature. These methods of driving and preservation—the two are almost inseparably connected—have in some countries been almost reduced to a complete system, but in many others, where driving is still more or less a novel introduction, the whole system has not yet emerged from a rude and barbaric infancy. At the best, modern methods are still largely experimental in their

nature, and rules which have proved successful in one part of the country are by no means necessarily adapted for universal application. In such a case the opinions of many, based on a variety of experience, must far outweigh the humbler judgment of one who has only the limits of his own narrower experience from which to draw his conclusions.

Any writer on partridge preservation cannot fail to be largely influenced by his own experiences at the game ; he is apt to argue from the particular to the general, and formulate for the guidance of others, working under vastly different conditions, a system which he has found successful in his own little corner of the partridge world.

The following series of notes from close on twenty different estates, ranging from the south of England to the north of Scotland, will, it is hoped, form a summary, more or less complete, of the various methods of to-day ; at least it was with this end in view that they were

collected, the idea being that any one desiring information about partridge preservation should first study the notes as a whole and get a good broad impression of the business, and then select an estate where the general conditions are somewhat similar to his own, and note how others deal with the same problems which he himself is called upon to face. The notes from each estate are answers to a uniform series of questions, and are in every case the opinions of owners or gamekeepers actively engaged in partridge preservation.

The points on which information was requested were as follows:—Extent of ground, nature of soil, proportion of cultivated land to grass, rotation of crops. Nature of natural nesting ground, and whether any artificially provided. The question of foxes. The relative demerits of other vermin. The desirability of hares, pheasants, and French partridges on partridge ground. The system followed in the nesting season. The question

of hand-rearing partridges, or using incubator or hens. The manner in which change of blood is obtained. Any diseases and their probable causes. The size of beat given to one man. The question of feeding wild partridges. The latest date on which partridges should be shot, and the desirable size of stock to leave. The question of replenishing stock after a succession of bad seasons. Results past and present—stock generally increasing or the reverse; acres to each bird killed on the best beat and all over the ground.

GORDONSTOUN, ELGIN

(From notes by Mr. ROBERT BELL, head-keeper to
Sir WILLIAM GORDON-CUMMING, Bart.)

Extent of ground about 7000 acres, mostly under cultivation on a five years' course—corn, turnips, corn, two years grass. Fortunately for partridges, the soil of Morayshire must be cultivated, as it is too light to lay down in grass. About half the ground has a light sandy soil, the rest heavier land and clay.

On the light soil, which is naturally the principal partridge ground, there is a scarcity of natural nesting ground; this is remedied to some extent by fencing off

and planting odd corners, which make good cover and nesting ground for the birds. These plantations become useless when the trees grow up, unless they are kept well pruned down and thinned out.

As many of the wild nests as possible are found before the birds begin to brood ; it is not considered safe to look among cover afterwards. Nests are visited in the early morning three times a week. Fifteen is the average number of eggs laid, but nests are often, and successfully, made up to 25 eggs. Eggs are constantly changed from one part of the estate to another.

The 'French system' has been employed here for some six years ; it has proved successful from the start, has never given any trouble, and is considered the best way to keep up a good stock of partridges. Thirty brace of Hungarians are bought each year in November for the pens, and the average number of young birds over a period of years is 360 ; in some years the broods have averaged as high as 19. Owing to wet and cold in June the wild birds suffered the last two seasons, but under this system the breeding stock has been kept as good as ever. Eggs from nests in hay-fields, roadsides, and dangerous places are saved and utilized with the nests in the pens.

There are no foxes ; rooks are found the worst enemies, followed in degree by rats and weasels ; hedgehogs are very destructive. Owls and kestrels are plentiful all along the coast, but do no harm and are not killed. French partridges are unknown ; hares and pheasants are not found harmful on partridge ground.

Partridges are regularly fed through winter on the refuse from thrashing mills, which is full of small seeds, of which the birds are particularly fond. These feeds are put on waste pieces of ground or in young plantations which birds frequent, and the partridges come there almost every day.

No disease has been noticed. Each beat-keeper has from 1500 to 1600 acres to look after.

Partridge shooting should begin September 21st and end on December 31st. Exclusive of the birds in the pens, a brace for every 17 to 20 acres is thought a fair stock over the whole estate ; a brace for every 10 or 12 acres is considered an average bag, and a brace for every 6 acres in very good seasons. The stock generally is always well kept up, and is, if anything, increasing.

Before the French system was started, the average for five years was 450 brace, all shooting being then walking in line. For the last five years, despite bad seasons and the ground being lightly shot, the average is just under 600 brace, all shot by driving.

PRESTON HALL, NEAR EDINBURGH

(Notes by Lord ELPHINSTONE.)

Extent of ground 4019 acres, of which 1825 acres are cultivated (1195 acres in grain crop, 630 acres turnips), and 2194 acres are pasture. The soil is on the heavy side, with some clay.

To improve the natural nesting ground, double hedges are made in places, and any natural rough hollow or bank wired to keep out dogs. Every keeper has a chart of his beat and marks down all the nests he can find. Nests are visited once a day, generally between 7 A.M. and 9 A.M., occasionally about 4 P.M.

Average number of eggs per nest : on first beat, 15 ; second beat, 14 ; third beat, 14 ; fourth beat, 14. Some birds lay as many as 17. Some eggs are lifted and put in other nests. Personally I would rather change eggs than put down Hungarians. I once put down 100 brace of Hungarians, and think they did good, but only by keeping them six weeks or so in pheasantries, and getting them strong and healthy, and less wild. In my opinion, importers of Hungarians are wrong in advising buyers to turn them out the same night they arrive.

There are practically no foxes ; rooks are undoubtedly the worst enemies here.

There are no French partridges. My personal opinion is that partridges always do better where there is no big quantity of hares or pheasants. Partridges are fed in hard weather.

In this country partridges are, I think, singularly healthy as a rule, a bad year being always directly traceable to a cold and wet season, or other adverse climatic conditions when hatching or soon after. Occasionally we have severe mortality from gapes.

Each man has 1000 acres to look after.

Personally, I do not like to shoot partridges after the end of December. I believe that, even in bad years, partridges should be driven and shot lightly.

Our stock is certainly not diminishing ; in fact, I think it is increasing all over the Lothians. In our best year, 1906, we killed 513, 303, 392 birds—604 brace in $2\frac{1}{2}$ days. The third day we were stopped first drive after lunch by a thick fog, or would have easily killed 300 brace.

CHARTERHALL, BERWICKSHIRE

(Notes by Colonel A. TROTTER.)

6000 acres ; loam soil ; two-thirds cultivated on a five-year shift.

The natural nesting ground is improved by fencing strips of land along the hedges (no nests in these first season, last year several). Artificial nesting places made in most hedges and alongside walls, by laying down thorn branches, etc., answer their purpose.

Wire-netting erected to keep sheep and stock from grazing into the fence, thereby retaining the summer roughness.

All nests possible to find are noted. Nests are visited

regularly as often as possible, in the height of the nesting season thrice a week. The average number is about 16 eggs to the nest. Eggs are lifted from insecure or forsaken nests and added to others.

Eggs are put into the incubator or under bantams when the bird deserts *while sitting*; these eggs, when hatched, are taken from the incubator or bantam and added to other broods which are known to be hatching off.

The following is one of many examples: A bird sitting on her nest was found dead and cold near the nest; she should have hatched off the following day. The eggs were put into the incubator, 17 came out and were put down with a brood that hatched off the same day.

No partridges are hand-reared. Eggs are changed to a certain extent from different parts of the estate.

In 1906, 100 brace of Hungarians were turned out, and in 1907, 20 brace. In 1908, 1909, and 1910, 500, 300, and 200 Hungarian eggs respectively were purchased through the Egg Guild Association, and distributed among nests.

There are foxes, but they have not given trouble to any extent latterly, owing to mange having killed a great many. Several devices have been tried to frustrate the foxes, such as:—

(a) Wire entanglement, made of thin wire about 2 feet high, placed round the nest and some distance from it. Result, wires broken and bird killed by fox.

(b) Placing old iron and sprung traps round the nest. Result, so far as known, to a certain extent successful.

(c) Reynardine on all nests on roadsides, sprinkled round the nest and along the hedge on either side; by this means we think that dogs, etc., coming along the road get the scent and follow the trail, which, leading at some distance round the nest, leaves it undisturbed. On one occasion we sprinkled reynardine on a sitting pheasant, and within two days she was taken by a fox. We have also tried liquid carbolic instead of reynardine.

(d) Luminous paint on iron pins, such as are used in

the garden for naming plants ; placed at a distance from the nest.

Our vermin in order of precedence at nesting time are rooks, rats, hedgehogs, stoats, cats, and moles. The cats frequent the roads, but their presence is easily detected by their footprints, and steps taken accordingly. Moles have given a certain amount of trouble by working under the nests and letting the eggs down. To remedy this, insert rags soaked in carbolic or reynardine in the runs and remake the nest.

Owls are numerous, and kestrels fairly plentiful ; neither are found to do any harm, and both are preserved.

Hares are not found harmful : close on a hundred have been killed in one day's partridge-driving. Pheasants I consider harmful and should be kept within limits. They interfere with partridges by laying in their nests, and leaving the eggs uncovered, even if they do not altogether drive away the partridge. We rear no pheasants here now.

Partridges are fed in hard weather.

Enteric in a mild form appeared in 1909, and again in July and August 1910. Gapes has been bad, and reduced the size of the coveys considerably before the shooting season.

The beat-keepers have each 1500 acres to look after. No partridges are shot after the first week in November.

We leave as large a stock as possible, and have not experienced a bad season since we commenced preserving.

The twenty-eight years from 1877 to 1904 give an average of 305 brace annually. In 1905 driving commenced, and the average of the last six years is 430 brace. No pheasants have been reared since 1906, and the last three seasons average 675 brace for about nine days' shooting. The present year is the best so far recorded, 2060 partridges having been killed, being one bird to 3 acres on the best beat, and one bird to 4 acres all over the ground.

BLACKADDER, BERWICKSHIRE

(Notes by Sir GEORGE HOUSTOUN BOSWALL, Bart.)

5000 acres, of a clay soil, with three-fifths cultivated on a four years' course, and two-fifths grass. A large number of double fences make excellent nesting ground, but, unfortunately, the partridges always seem to prefer the roadsides. I put this down entirely to their liking for dust and grit, and am trying to obviate this by making places in the double hedges where they can take their dust baths.

I have all nests found as far as possible, and consider that they should be visited once a day when the bird is sitting; there is then some chance of saving the eggs if anything has happened. Our nests average about 17 eggs. A lot of eggs are lifted from impossible places and put into other nests. Eggs are also changed from one side of the place to another. The incubator is not used. Some partridges were reared under the French system, which was most successful, but as we only had ten pens, it was not worth the trouble, as even if all ten coveys were reared, the man that looked after them would be, in my opinion, far better employed outside. I put in a lot of Hungarian eggs in 1909 and 1910, but shall not do so this year.

We always have some foxes, and they take a certain number of birds off their nests. We remove the eggs to other nests. Hedgehogs, rats, and rooks are certainly our worst vermin; owls and kestrels I do not consider harmful to partridges. Hedgehogs I consider the worst egg-stealers of all, as they will go all up a fence and never miss a nest. We have many hares, but do not find they do any harm. Pheasants would do mischief by laying in partridge nests, were the nests not visited and their eggs removed.

In 1909 and 1910, though our best years, a number of birds died from gapes and from some other disease, which I presume to have been a form of enteritis. I put this down to the evil influence of the Hungarian eggs, and possibly to the now prevalent practice of putting chickens on the stubbles. We feed our partridges with hay-seed when there is deep snow.

Our beats are roughly 1000 acres each. In an open season I never shoot any partridges after 31st December, as so many have already paired, and these are just the ones which would get shot.

I regret to say that I do not yet know what would be too large a stock to leave on the ground. For the last four years the stock and the bags have been steadily increasing, which is entirely due to (1) driving only, (2) killing vermin, (3) finding and looking after the nests. 1910 was our best year, when we killed 800 brace. We could have shot many more, but only had four days' shooting with six guns, and a few odd days, and I now think that there is as big a stock on the ground as it will carry. We have now had three very good seasons running.

LOGAN, MULL OF GALLOWAY

(Notes by Mr. M'VICAR, head-keeper to
KENNETH M'DOUALL, Esq.)

The Logan shootings are some 15,000 acres in extent, the soil for the most part of a light loam, sandy in some parts, and with occasional stretches of clay. Tillage and permanent grass are about equal in area, the land being worked on a six years' system of rotation—corn, turnips, corn, and three years in grass.

On part of the ground the natural nesting ground is good, mostly in the form of rough patches of whin and hedgerows, but over a large proportion of the estate bare

stone walls take the place of hedges, especially on the west and most exposed side to prevailing winds. Such ground is improved by putting down small patches of artificial cover close to the walls in likely nesting places.

A keeper who does his duty should know (as nearly as possible) all the game nests on his beat, and should visit each twice a week, in the afternoon, at which time he is least liable to cause disturbance to the birds while laying, though when incubation begins any time will suit. Nests on public roadsides and other dangerously exposed places should be taken up and distributed among other nests.

We do not hand-rear partridges here in a general way. One season, however, we purchased 300 eggs from Southern Germany and reared about 160. I used bantams as fosters, and when the chicks were a fortnight old they were allowed to roam in fine weather with their several fosters during the day, and herded back to their coops in the evening. The young stock did remarkably well on this system, but of course it requires considerable attention. I have also reared successfully by turning down the birds, fosters and all, into oats or other grain when three weeks old, continuing the feeding along the headland for a time after their removal. Light soil is important on the rearing field, and a couple of furrows ploughed up about every 20 yards give shelter in wet weather, also grit and basking ground, all of them important considerations.

I have tried Hungarians for change of blood, and must admit that there were decided traces of improvement on the beats where they were turned down: several were shot the next season out of large broods on the same ground, and with the marking rings still on their legs. Still there is no reason, evident to me, why British eggs or live birds from a distance should not be as efficacious in improving degenerated stock.

While on the subject of inbreeding, I may mention that I once reared large numbers of Pit Games (fighters) for six successive years with the best results. Yet these birds

"WARE CHASE."

had been inbred for 40 years without a single off cross. Their courage in the pit was perfect, they were very fast, and absolutely dead game. I never met with a single runner in this strain, and I witnessed (this in a whisper) many great mains against them in the United States.

This seems to prove the extent to which inbreeding can be carried without any apparent deterioration. On the contrary, this strain was improved, or rather maintained its qualities by inbreeding, for when crossed with other dead game strains there was always a certain percentage of runners.

It appears to me that the same law must apply to certain game birds, especially those which do not spread over a wide area, but cling to the spot where they were born. Nature must have her own protective methods against the extinction of species, which must of a necessity breed and interbreed for ages.

There are no foxes; the climate is our worst enemy here, heavy rainstorms in July generally destroying large numbers of partridges. The common rook I find a good second, but as they only take eggs, much can be done to protect exposed nests, by putting pieces of brushwood round the nest, but only after incubation has started.

I have not found the owls hurtful to game, though I have heard from reliable sources that they are more or less destructive in some localities. Kestrels generally I consider harmless. I have known occasional attacks and an odd chick taken at the coops, but the gun usually ended the matter in a day or two.

I have visited scores of kestrels' nests, and only very rarely found the remains of young game.

In over forty years' experience in game-keeping in many parts I have never been able to prove that the hedgehog takes eggs, but I am open to conviction on this matter. In a general way I do not consider either pheasants or hares harmful to partridges, though where pheasants are

extensively raised, special attention is necessary to prevent their free usurpation of partridge territory.

We only feed our birds during heavy snows, and the occasion has only arisen twice in the last twelve years.

The only bad disease we suffer from here is brought on by bad weather. The symptoms were very similar to those of enteritis, and autopsy showed that the birds had eaten certain grass seeds, usually found in very wet seasons, and inducing a form of enteritis. This disease swept off a great number of young birds, mostly when fully half-grown. I caught many of them which, though unable to fly, were otherwise in fair condition. The action of this trouble was slow, as birds I caught and marked showed little change when caught again some days later.

Though I have no proof that either dips or artificial manures are injurious to game, I have a strong suspicion that certain brands are responsible for the high death-rate prevailing in some parts of England.

One of the Logan men has a beat of 3000 acres, another one of 2000, the remaining beats being about 1000 acres each, which latter figure I consider quite sufficient for a good man to look after in good partridge country containing many villages.

Our regular shooting ends in December, giving the keeper a month in which to decide how his stock stands, and whether or not another short day can be had without undue reduction of his breeding stock. The desirable breeding stock varies largely on different ground; on grass-lands the birds will not increase beyond a certain figure. Generally, where all conditions are favourable, I would estimate that a brace of birds to every 3 acres is the maximum breeding stock to leave on the ground by January 1st. Our stock here decreased greatly in recent years, owing to a succession of wet seasons. In 1910 there was a marked improvement, and now we have a capital stock of healthy birds.

WELBECK ABBEY, NOTTS

(Notes by Captain H. HEATHCOAT AMORY.)

Our extent of partridge ground altogether is about 12,000 acres. Of course a lot of this is hardly shot over, and carries a very small stock on it. It is practically all cultivated. Soil varies very much in different parts of the estate, one side being sandy, the other heavy clay.

Rotation of Crops.—Average four years' shift, but on heavy land some farmers go five years.

Nesting ground hedgerows chiefly, the only artificial provided being the remises. There are five remises on the whole estate. On the best beat two—one about 11 acres, and one about 4. They consist of ground wired in, wire-netting 8 to 10 feet high, 4 to 5 inch mesh at the bottom, so as to allow the young birds to get through. Inside a belt of shrubs, or spruce and Scotch fir, according to suitability of ground, about 15 yards broad. Interior ones to be divided up into four divisions—(1) turnips, (2) barley, (3) first year layer, (4) second year layer. The only advantage for nesting is that the birds are safe from foxes, otherwise they don't use them for nesting any more than outside; in fact I think we find more nests in the hedges than we do in the remises.

Nesting Season.—All nests should be found if possible and visited once a day. Average number of eggs about 18 to the nest. Eggs are lifted from the outside of the estate and brought into the centre to fill up nests to 20 or 22 eggs, which works well, and often has the advantage of changing the blood to a certain extent. No eggs incubated at all here, and no partridges hand-reared.

We have had very little disease here. Our only trouble has been the wet in June, which has drowned the young birds. On one part of the estate, where there are a lot of flood meadows watered by sewage, we have had a certain amount of dysentery among the old birds. This is

probably caused by the sewage bringing up the young grass earlier on these meadows than in other places, and the birds feeding on it.

Hungarians are turned down every year, on an average about 400 brace of Hungarians for the whole estate. Some we pen for a short period, and some are turned out straight from the baskets through the hedges; it all depends on the state in which the birds arrive. If they look well and healthy, they are turned straight out, but if they appear to have suffered from the journey, then they are penned for a few days. As a rule we find the birds healthy and strong, but we always very much prefer our own birds for stock. They are imported straight from the Continent.

We have separate keepers for pheasants and partridges, the same man does not look after both. Our best beat is rather over 1000 acres. On it we have one beat man, and a man and a boy with him, but of course this probably would not be necessary in many counties; but as we are in the middle of a colliery district, we must have plenty of men to do the watching.

Foxes.—A fair number, but not troubled very much by them, as on the side of the best partridge beat it is not hunted, and therefore any litters found on that part of the estate are moved.

Vermin.—Worst enemies rats and stoats. Owls and kestrels not bad for partridges. Hedgehogs are bad egg-stealers.

Hares.—Too many are bad on a partridge beat, as they are continually running in the hedgerows and disturbing nests. Pheasants not desirable, as they often lay in partridge nests, and the length of incubation for pheasant and partridge eggs is not the same. French partridges do not do well on cultivated ground, and also do not become sufficiently numerous to do any harm. They do better on rough heavy land. They are good birds for driving.

Partridges ought to be fed in hard weather, principally with wheat. Partridge-shooting, if possible, should end by the second week of November. Of course, if possible, it is good to leave a brace of birds to the acre for stock, but practically one thinks the ground well stocked if you have a brace to 3 or 4 acres.

There is no doubt that too many old birds on a beat is a very bad thing, and I believe the best thing to do is to kill down your stock of old birds fairly well and re-stock with Hungarians.

Our best day at Welbeck was in 1906, when we killed 739 brace on the Blue Barn beat, some 1000 to 1200 acres in extent, and of a light and sandy soil. That year the total bag for this beat was 1669 partridges. Since then, owing to the wet summers, we have only shot lightly, but there is a good stock on the ground, and with a good breeding season we ought to do as well as ever.

PATSHULL, STAFFORDSHIRE

(Notes by the Hon. G. LEGGE.)

About 4000 acres, of which nearly 1000 is grass or plantations. The rotation of crops is on a four years' course, and barley is grown extensively.

Ninety per cent of the birds nest in the hedgerows ; no artificial nesting places are provided, though scattered young plantations afford good nesting ground.

I certainly believe in finding all nests possible, especially in a fox country. They should be visited frequently until the bird has been sitting for eight or ten days, after which they should be seen every day ; then, if the bird has been put off through any cause, the eggs can often be saved before they get cold. They are then added to nests of birds which have been sitting for same length of time, or, failing them, put in the incubator, and, when hatched, taken out and put to an old bird with young of the same

age. This latter course was successfully adopted with three or four nests this year. Eggs laid in unsafe or undesirable places are always lifted, and nests in good situations made up to 20 or 22 with them.

I believe in changing eggs. Here we change every year with three other estates widely separated, and also between different beats on the estate. This mixes the blood, even if no shooting is done owing to a bad season.

I can see no use in turning down Hungarians unless the stock is very low and you want to make it up to a certain number per acre. We have not enough French partridges or hares to interfere with the grey partridges; pheasants we only find a nuisance when they lay in partridge nests. We only feed the partridges in very severe winters.

Foxes are the worst enemies to the partridge here; but it is by no means every fox that interferes with the birds. Judging from my own experience, I should say that *nothing* will keep a fox away from partridge nests once that individual fox has taken to hunting the hedgerows for nests. Probably the best protection to nests are old unset traps put down near the nest and well handled once or twice every week. After foxes, our worst enemies are rats and stoats, then hedgehogs, and every year we lose two or three nests from moles burrowing underneath and letting the eggs down into the run. Rooks do a certain amount of harm in late or dry seasons, or where nests are exposed. I am convinced that hedgehogs take eggs; bait a trap with partridge eggs and see what you catch at it. Owls do *no* harm to nesting birds here, nor have I seen or heard of an owl doing harm to young birds. Individual kestrels may do a certain amount of harm, but not enough to justify their being killed. Though not exactly coming under the head of vermin, fowls on the stubbles are most injurious to partridges.

The only time our birds suffered from disease was in 1908, when several coveys were found dead, old and

young together, when the corn was cut, but all in too advanced a stage of decomposition to admit of a post mortem.

In summer, when a spell of dry weather checks the growth of barley and wheat, the ground becomes covered with a tangled mass of weed locally known as 'mountain flax.' Before flowering, the buds of the flax are covered with a gummy substance, not unlike that found on the buds of the horse-chestnut. At this time it is most dangerous to game. It was very bad with us in the dry spell of July 1910, and it was noticeable how young birds grew darker in colour in and around the fields where the flax grew thickest.

There was a brood of young pheasants, 13 in number, which flourished in the corner of a barley-field till the beginning of July. They then began to grow darker in colour, and could only fly with great effort when flushed. Some were picked up dead, and were found to have their feathers all stuck together, just as though they had been dipped in treacle. When last seen, only two young birds remained with the hen, and their fate was uncertain. In many other places, where the flax was thick, broods were seen in the same condition, and several young birds picked up dead. Some old hen pheasants looked quite black, but no old birds were known to have died from this cause. Though pheasants only were observed in this condition, partridges on the same ground must doubtless have also suffered. As soon as the flax flowers the gum disappears, and the surviving birds resume their normal colour.

Each beat-keeper can manage 1500 acres in this country; foxes give him a lot of extra work.

I would say that a brace to every 6 or 7 acres in this country is a good stock.

In old days when partridges were walked up and shot most days in September, the annual bags were much the same as they are now, when two weeks' driving takes place in the year—one day on each beat.

Since driving commenced in 1898, I think our stock increased steadily till 1905, since when the weather has been all against us. In 1905, our best year since driving began, we killed 1600 partridges, shooting over each beat once only ; our best day that year was 156 brace. A large stock was left, perhaps too large, but the following three years were the worst on record, and very few birds were killed, with the view of keeping up a sufficient stock. This year (1910) we have left a better stock than ever before, excepting perhaps the great year 1905.

STAPLETON, SHROPSHIRE

(Notes by R. LL. PURCELL LLEWELLIN, Esq.)

It would be fallacious to take my estate as an example, because I sold nine-tenths of it three years ago, and have only kept about 1000 acres. In days before the steady decrease of partridges began, I have commonly killed from 20 to 25 brace in a short day, shooting alone over setters. If I had, like my neighbours, shot with a large party of six guns or more and a number of beaters, I could have killed 60 or 70 brace or more ; now, even if I tried, I could not get more than ten or a dozen brace.

This part of the country is ideal partridge land, light, loamy, turnip and barley soil ; half arable, half pasture, plenty of brooks for water, and a dry soil. The nesting is chiefly in the thorn hedges. There is no rough or uncultivated land, as all is well farmed. The worst vermin are foxes, which are highly preserved. Farmers' dogs are a nuisance too ; wherever a man goes, nine times out of ten a sheep-dog (collie) follows, and even when hoeing turnips the dog is there, often occupying himself in the hedges. There are also collieries not more than a couple of miles off, and there is sometimes not a little poaching. The country is well kept, the keepers are good, the

nests are found and watched. Until this year no Hungarians have been turned down in this district.

But all these conditions—foxes, collieries, colliers—have been the same for years (and I can remember this part for thirty-six years), yet until the last five years we never heard complaints about any steady decrease of the stock. Since of recent years I have spared my partridges, only shooting a few for the use of the house, I can only speak for my neighbours. They also have spared their birds to some extent, but as none of them (following the usual style nowadays) ever use a pointer or a setter, they are bound to go out in a party. Yet even with their way of doing it, their bags have been surprisingly small. On one estate where years ago 100 and 150 brace were easily killed in a day, I have not heard of more than 19 brace being killed with six or seven guns. I did hear of 30 brace being killed there in 1909 on one day, but was told that *nearly the whole* estate was driven to do that, and seeing that this comprises some 8000 acres, it is easy to calculate how things are.

The estate on the other side is in much the same condition. The owner is no dog-man, and drives, and I hear his birds are just as bad, about 19 brace being his best day; years ago they thought it a poor day when they did not kill 70 brace. From two other neighbouring places comes the same story; all this, including my own land, which lies in the centre, comprises some 30,000 acres, and I know things are much the same all over the West Midlands and Wales.

As to the cause of this steady decrease, I formed a theory, which time has only served to strengthen, that the partridges are poisoned (not intentionally) by the farmer through the use of new 'pickles' for grain, spraying materials, and artificial land dressings.

I waited while things went from bad to worse, wondering at the apathy of sportsmen, and hoping that some abler pen than mine would take up the subject, but no

one did, and so I started the correspondence in the *Field*.

I held a trump card to prove my case in a letter from the editor, saying that arsenic had been found in birds sent to his office for investigation. But that editor died, and his successor closed the correspondence before the matter was settled.

Meantime, while all admit the decrease of partridges, many continue to give the old reasons as the cause. Bad weather in the nesting season, a succession of unfavourable years, overshooting, egg-stealing, poaching, and vermin are all advanced by different people as the true cause. But none of these account in any way for the steady diminution in the stock of partridges between the close of one shooting year and the ensuing nesting season, the old birds getting fewer and fewer before the breeding time, many being picked up dead, and others continually seen in a wasting condition and hardly able to fly. Nor would any or all of these reasons serve to account for arsenic found in birds picked up dead and sent for examination.

The cause of all the trouble must be a *new* one, as the disaster is ; if the trouble is to be stopped, the old reasons advanced to account for it must be abandoned, new ones sought, and preventive measures undertaken.

PICKENHAM, NORFOLK

(Notes by G. W. TAYLOR, Esq.)

Five thousand acres, varying in quality from light land that will pay for cultivation up to the best mixed soils—200 acres woodland, 500 permanent grass, 4300 acres under the plough.

The banks and hedges are very good natural nesting ground, and there are 150 acres of heath and bracken (permanent sheep pasture). On the big and open fields

about 40 acres of belts and broom covers for nesting have been planted, which are also found most useful for shelter. The size of beats vary from 700 to 1500 acres.

It is quite impossible to find every nest, and no good purpose can be served by hunting large fields and corn-fields. The nests most likely to be attacked are those on the bank and hedgerows. In a dry season the rooks take several nests in the hay and corn-fields, as eggs get exposed for want of cover. At Pickenham in some years I believe 85% of the nests have been found, but this is unusual, 70% being nearer the average. This last season, which was wet and the growth consequently rank, I can quite believe that 60% to 65% would represent the proportion of nests found. The nests as soon as found should, if possible, be visited daily by the beat-keeper, who should thoroughly examine the nest if things do not appear normal; he should know how each bird is laying to her nest, or if two lay to one nest. We have great trouble with moles that run the fences and disturb the birds on their nests; I have actually lost eggs in mole runs, though I do not think that the mole eats them. One year I should have lost 30% of the nests on the estate by moles, if they had not been regularly visited.

On a large beat a keeper must get round his nests *when he can*: I have known 300 nests on one beat at Pickenham (divided into 5 beats), and it takes a man nearly two days to get round the number. There is one time when I consider it fatal for any one, including the beat-keeper, to go near the nest. For three days after the bird has made up her nest, which you can always tell by the eggs being exposed, it is best to keep well away, for, if flushed off during this period, it is a 100 to 1 chance against the bird returning and the eggs are all spoilt.

If at any time a keeper flushes a bird off a nest during the first week of incubation, it is best to put false eggs in the nest and keep the real eggs under a hen till he can find the bird has come back to the nest, and then wait till

she is off to feed and replace the eggs. The average all round at Pickenham for years has been nearly 16 eggs in a nest, and the hatch 14. The incubator is always useful, but use it sparingly, and always remember in rearing partridges that, given a decent season, you will never bring up as many chicks as the wild bird will herself. If you rear partridges at all, rear under hens; but I would *never* recommend rearing on a large scale.

Change eggs—change, change, change. Change every year from one side of the estate to the other, and change a large proportion with a *not too near* neighbour wherever possible. This changing of eggs is going to be the solution of a lot of our trouble on the driving grounds, where coveys are sometimes never broken up. It involves an immense amount of labour, but is well worth it, and it would be ideal if every partridge on an estate could sit on—

$\frac{1}{3}$ eggs from other corner of estate.

$\frac{1}{3}$ eggs exchanged with neighbours (say 20 miles off).

$\frac{1}{3}$ her own eggs.

I have the greatest mistrust of Hungarians, and have seen very bad results in my neighbourhood. Not actually being in a hunting country, we are not much troubled by foxes; occasionally in spring great damage is done by them to paired partridges. Our worst vermin are stoats, rats, and hedgehogs. The big tawny owl is troublesome at times; other owls should be encouraged, with perhaps the exception of the little owl, a bird we have not got here, but which I understand hunts by night and day, and is very troublesome in the Midlands. Kestrels are harmless, except on a rearing field, where at times they play havoc, especially if they have their nest handy. I consider the hedgehog one of the worst enemies of partridge eggs; he will take them at all times, and will occasionally destroy quite a young bird.

We kill about 1000 hares every year, and have never found them harmful on the partridge ground. Where

a large stock of partridges is required, the out or wild pheasants *must* be kept in bounds as regards numbers. The bulk of the hens left will cling to the woods and feed on the rides and not go far afield to nest. On our 5000 acres I consider 200 *out* hens the maximum that should be left. The ground will only carry a certain head of winged game, and if the wild pheasants are successful in bringing up their broods, it will be at the expense of the partridges, where these are numerous. The ideal partridge ground would be denuded of pheasants; here I always leave a small stock of pheasants all over the estate, as driving in October (we never shoot till then) they give splendid shots out of turnip-fields, especially in a wind. Pheasants are always more harmful to partridges on those estates where their first lots of eggs are collected for the estate rearing fields, as they then nest later and farther afield from the main woods, and often disturb, and indeed appropriate, the nests of partridges that are laying and sometimes sitting. When there is deep snow on the ground, we run a plough along the sunny side of a fence and feed the partridges with barley or wheat.

With regard to disease, gapes is the chief trouble always; enteric we have also at times; both are very difficult to combat, and are generally the result of unseasonable weather. On my own farm (1300 acres) I use no artificial manure to speak of, and yet I am no better off as regards disease than my neighbours.

Our beats vary in size from 700 to 1500 acres, the difference depending on the character of ground and nesting space, the quantity of stock left, and whether near a preserved area or the reverse. The right time to stop shooting depends on the season, but I never care about shooting partridges in January if the weather is open. I think the maximum stock, under the most favourable conditions, that can be usefully left is a brace to every 4 or 5 acres. I have left this amount and had over

10,000 birds hatch out, but wet seasons never gave me the chance of seeing if the ground could carry this number.

I think the ground should be shot over *once*, however bad the year. If things are desperate, I go out on September 1st and walk up the coveys, killing the old birds and sparing all the young. I have left a *good* stock every year, but owing to bad seasons this is getting old and weak. The stock generally is decreasing for the same reason.

In 1905 we killed 4123 partridges in eight days off 5000 acres, and in the same year 1350 partridges in two days off 800 acres.

WITCHINGHAM HALL, NORWICH

(Notes by W. BARRY, Esq.)

The extent of partridge ground on which my observations are based consists roughly of about 4000 acres. The soil is mostly a light, sandy loam, none of it very heavy ground. It is nearly all cultivated land, with a few strips of old pasture intersecting it. The rotation of crops is on the four years' system—wheat, roots, barley, hay.

We have plenty of hedgerows for nesting. I have also made a good many belts for birds to nest in, consisting of furze, birch, broom, and hazel. These have to be kept low and thin, otherwise partridges will not nest in them. I generally throw up a bank with a thorn hedge on top of it on each side of the belt, for shelter and dusting purposes. I believe in finding every nest; the keepers visit them every two days. I attach the greatest importance to this; in no other way can the nests be properly preserved. If a nest is destroyed, traps are at once set and the vermin caught before it can do more damage. If the nests were not watched, a stoat would clear off nest after nest within a very short time. Another

advantage of finding all the nests possible is that by the end of June you can estimate the number of your breeding stock. I lift very few eggs, practically only those in very dangerous positions or deserted. These I place in nests round corn-fields and make them up to 21.

I believe in changing the eggs as much as possible, and especially in getting eggs from a distance and from bad, heavy partridge grounds. Personally I am not in favour of turning down Hungarians, and have never done so.

We suffer severe losses among our young birds from the machines in the hay harvest. Here every fourth field is a hay-field, and cut, as a rule, during the last ten days of June. If the season is a late one, as generally happens, most of the young birds are only a few days old and practically unable to get out of the way. The result is that enormous numbers are killed in spite of every precaution. I get my farmers to leave the last acre, and the keepers cut it with scythes early the next morning; but if the night is wet or cold, and the old birds have not come back, many of the little ones die. It is very necessary to have keepers in the fields whilst they are being cut. Of course, if the farmers could be persuaded to begin cutting in the middle of the field and work outwards, all would be well, as the old birds would gradually lead the young ones to the outsides; but I have been quite unable to persuade my farmers to do this. Numbers of old as well as young birds get killed or mutilated during the hay-cutting, and altogether I lose hundreds of birds during this fortnight. The young ones that escape also receive a check in being deprived of their food in the grass-fields. There is, in my opinion, far more food there than in the corn.

Of course in an early season—and, in my experience, all the good years are early ones—the birds, or a good proportion of them, are a fortnight older and can fly or run away from the machines. In that last very bad season all the young birds that survived here were the early

ones, which had sufficient stamina to resist the rain and cold winds which set in at the end of June.

We also suffer from the increasing custom of putting poultry down on the stubbles, a custom which deprives the partridges of food and quiet, and is undoubtedly shockingly bad for preservation.

There are no foxes. Rats, stoats and cats are my worst enemies. Owls and kestrels do me no harm. Hedgehogs are harmful; they destroy partridge eggs, especially just before the eggs are ready to hatch. I know of a score of cases when hedgehogs have eaten the eggs and have been found fast asleep in the nests.

I do not consider French partridges at all harmful to English partridges. Here they live together very amicably, and I have seen a French and an English bird sitting on their nests within a yard of each other. I encourage Frenchmen as much as possible. Hares, within moderation, do no harm. Pheasants need to be carefully watched on a partridge beat in nesting time. They worry the partridges by driving them off and laying their eggs in the nests. The pheasant eggs must be removed and the pheasant frightened as much as possible to prevent her going back to the nest to lay. My keepers try to find the pheasant on the nest and flush her off with much noise; occasionally they catch her and carry her a few hundred yards away before letting her go. With the exception of being a nuisance in the nesting season I do not think that a moderate stock of pheasants does any harm on a partridge beat. If my sole object, however, was to have a large stock of partridges, I would do away with pheasants altogether on that particular ground.

In hard weather, severe frosts, and prolonged snow, I feed the birds by the hedgerows, in the larger fields, or in any pits, plantations, etc., to which they are in the habit of resorting.

With the exception of gapes, I am not troubled with any special form of disease, but after every wet season I

lose a certain number of hen birds. I imagine they get chilled and poor from continual sitting in wet weather, and then contract lung diseases. My own opinion, such as it is, is that the artificial forms of manure are not harmful. A friend of mine, who has one of the best partridge manors in Norfolk, keeps in his own hands 1000 acres of land on which no artificial manures have been used for the last three or four years. The birds, however, on this land have done no better than on the adjoining ground, where artificial manures are used.

Size of Beat.—A good deal depends on the lie of the ground, whether it is a straggling beat intersected by villages, etc. If the beat is compact, and in one block, I consider that a really good keen keeper can look after 1500 acres.

My stock was biggest in 1905. We have had no good year in Norfolk since, although 1908 was fair. The last two years have been unusually bad, and in consequence the stock of young birds is small. In 1905 I only had 3200 acres of shooting, and on this 2400 birds were killed and a very large stock left. This acreage included 130 acres of wood and a 300-acre farm, which was rented for the first time, and was not seriously driven or shot over.

WEETING HALL, BRANDON, NORFOLK

(Notes by C. COCKBURN, Esq.)

Soil and Cultivation.—Extent of ground 8000 acres, only 300 acres grass, the rest arable and bracken. The soil is light and sandy, chalk and flint.

Nesting Ground.—The partridges nest in the corn, sainfoin, and clover, also at the edges of the woods; there are no hedges. I always have keepers walking ahead of the mower when the sainfoin, etc., are being cut; if they are cut early, many scores of nests are cut out and smashed.

Nesting Season.—If you find the nests and visit them

frequently, you generally act as a guide-post to egg-stealers. In this respect keepers must exercise great caution ; nests should not be visited when the dew is on, or when very wet, or in long grass, when the keeper's tracks are visible.

Taking early nests and late nests, I think the average number of eggs will be about 15. I once counted 84 nests and that is what they averaged, the highest having 23 eggs and the lowest 5. I always pick up a few partridge eggs from ruined nests and put them in an incubator ; if they are not sat on, I always put them in other nests if possible. I have no system for rearing partridges beyond getting bantams or small hens as foster-mothers.

Change of Blood.—I change eggs with friends every year. I used to turn out from 300 to 500 brace of Hungarians every year, but gave it up five years ago, as I found my birds were getting weaker, and were dying in small numbers practically all the year round. In old days the English partridge was as tough and sturdy a bird as existed, and seemed able to stand anything ; but now the partridges are much more weakly, they do not weigh as much, and I do not think their eggs hatch out as well as they used to twelve to fifteen years ago.

Vermin.—There are no foxes. Rats are by far the worst vermin ; we kill between 5000 and 8000 every year. Small birds are a great nuisance ; owing to the killing of the hawks we have hundreds of thousands of small birds—sparrows, linnets, and chaffinches. They do untold damage to the corn, eat quantities of the pheasant chicks' food, and, I believe, convey disease (enteric, etc.). They ought to be kept down. I have seen flocks estimated at over 40,000 in a piece of rye left standing in December. Owls and kestrels ought to be encouraged ; they do far more good by killing rats than they do harm by taking an odd tame pheasant chick or two. They do not touch wild chicks as a rule, and if a keeper leaves his small chicks out of their coops at night, he deserves to lose them. One rat does more harm in a single week than an owl does in ten years.

If I could get them, I would turn out a hundred owls; they are the only sure way of killing off the rats.

After rats, our worst vermin are the receivers of stolen eggs, too often gentlemen owning shoots.

Too many pheasants, of course, affect the partridges; they drive them off the stubbles and take the food. In the nesting season I have seen pheasants drive partridges off their nests and take possession of them.

The French partridge and the English do not disagree to any great extent; besides, the Frenchman lives on warren and bracken lands, where the grey bird could not exist. If you open his crop you find it full of the seeds that grow on the fronds of the bracken. We have killed 500 French partridges here in one day's driving.

I do not think that an ordinary stock of hares are detrimental to partridges.

The partridges are fed in severe weather with Dari seed and the tailings of the stacks. I think they ought to be fed for about a fortnight before the corn ripens in August in cold seasons, when there is very little insect life about. I have seen birds at the end of July that I am sure were short of food.

Disease.—Diarrhœa and worm have been very prevalent for the last five years. The only artificial manure used in the place is a little superphosphate and bones with the root crop.

Size of Beat.—I have a head-keeper with eight to twelve men under him (8000 acres). Partridges should not be shot after December. I once shot on a friend's shoot on 11th January, when the birds had paired; they came in pairs over the guns, and we practically wiped out the stock. It took him three years to get them up again.

Stock.—As to stock to leave, that is entirely a question for each farm. I have known a 250-acre piece with over 80 pairs on it in March, which had not 10 brace on it in December; I had purposely killed them down. I regard old partridges three years old and upwards as worse than

useless ; they will not lay themselves and chase the young pairs away. I knew a 7-acre piece of Kidney Vetch which was haunted by 9 pairs of young partridges in the middle of April, evidently going to nest there ; then appeared one old pair and drove the lot away.

PARTRIDGE BAGS

	Days' shooting.	Numbers.	Total.
1899	3		237
1900	3	208-264-270	742
1901	4	462-430-233-335	1460
1902	5	398-453-273-486-309	1919
1903	3	146-244-212	609
1904	4	637-431-417-347	1832
1905	4	383-361-697-265	1706
1906	2	386-397	783
1907	2	490-371	861
1908	2	360-345	705
1909	2	298-270	568

NOTE

In Nov. and Dec. 1899 turned down 500 brace of Hungarians.

„	„	1900	„	450	„	„
„	„	1901	„	400	„	„
„	„	1902	„	300	„	„

SWAFFHAM PRIOR, CAMBRIDGE

(Notes by G. TOSETTI, Esq.)

My shooting extends over about 3000 acres, of which 2000 acres form my real partridge ground, with soil of a light nature, partly white land, partly red. The remaining 1000 acres are mostly fen-land, which is not used for regular driving. The high land, which borders with

Newmarket Heath, is highly cultivated on a four years' system, and sheep are regularly kept on it. There is no grass-land, beyond artificial crops, such as sainfoin and clover. The fields are very large, some nearly 300 acres, for the most part divided by closely cut-down fences, raised on low banks. There are no ditches, which I consider an important point, as many young chicks get lost in them, or drowned in bad weather.

The short thick fences form excellent nesting places, and are chiefly used by the partridges, though a fair percentage of nests are found in the sainfoin and clover fields, principally in the former. Nests are also made in wheat-fields, the site of nest depending a good deal on the season, according to the advance of the various crops. No artificial places for nesting are provided. I have found nests of both French and *English* partridges round and on the top of straw stacks. Partridges here are fond of making their nests near roadways and farm buildings, and, unless very much exposed, I do not interfere with them.

I am a great believer in finding every nest possible, and have the nests regularly and carefully watched. The reason for this is that should anything go wrong with the nest the keeper will find it out and discover the culprit, whoever it may be, man, beast, or bird. The average number of eggs in a nest on my place is about 16. I have had many nests over 20 and up to 28. I always lift eggs and change them about from one end of the shoot to the other, my keepers having specially-made belts to carry the eggs carefully and close to the body. I only have partridges hatched from eggs found in nests cut out by the mowing machine, or otherwise disturbed. These eggs are put under ordinary hens, and when chipped all but 5 or 6 are taken away from under the hen, and put in the incubator. When hatched and dry they are returned to the hen. This is done to prevent the hen from stamping on the chicks and killing several, which might happen when she has a large number to hatch.

These young chicks are only kept at home for three or four days, when they are distributed amongst wild coveys. To do this efficiently my keepers keep regular plans of the nests found, against which they put the date when the bird has gone down to sit. This enables us to get the date of incubation fairly close. The nest is watched, and a day after the wild birds have been hatched, 5 to 10 tame chicks are put down near the place where the wild covey has been disturbed. Invariably the old birds take away with them the additional lot of tame ones. I have watched this interesting performance over and over again, and have found it very successful. Of course I am running the risk of losing tame and wild together should heavy rains or bad weather follow, but I am strongly against hand-reared partridges, as I feel convinced such birds will always be weak and spoil your stock. For the same reason I am dead against the introduction of Hungarian partridges. I attribute my success to the healthy state of my birds; being strong, they can stand better such adverse weather as we have had for the last two seasons.

I am also much opposed to the practice of lifting eggs from nests, although they may be in very exposed places. It makes the birds dislike the place and move to neighbouring ground. In the case of nests badly exposed and in dangerous places, I use the Euston system, and the results have been excellent. This year we treated twenty-seven nests successfully in this way. There being no woods about this part of the country, and consequently no hunting, we are not troubled by foxes. I use reynardine round nests in exposed places to prevent dogs and cats interfering with them, and with good results.

Vermin of any kind must be carefully kept down, otherwise no fair partridge-shooting can be expected. Rats I consider the worst enemies, and it is the duty of a good keeper to see that possibly no rat is left on the place by the time the nesting season begins. Stoats and weasels

give trouble, and a sharp look-out must be kept for them. Hedgehogs suck eggs and also kill young birds. Rooks should be very carefully watched. I have seen them hunting for eggs in quite a systematic way all along a fence. If not stopped, they would do great damage, for, having once taken an egg from a nest, they will come back to the same nest till no egg is left. I do not allow owls to be killed; I have been told they do harm, but no case has ever come under my personal notice.

There are many hares on this shooting, but I cannot say that they affect my stock of partridges, though they are a nuisance when driving. Pheasants ought to be kept to a very limited number on a good partridge shoot. It is my opinion that many partridge shoots have been spoiled by too many pheasants being reared. Partridges require a clean, healthy soil not tainted by numbers of pheasants running over it. Pheasants disturb the partridges, are very fond of laying in their nests, and I have seen a partridge chick killed by an old spiteful cock-pheasant.

There are only very few French partridges on this shoot; I do not consider their presence harmful, but would not care for too many. I believe in feeding partridges from January almost to the time of the breeding season. Wheat I consider the best food, for it keeps them warm when no other grain can be got by them, and gets the birds into good condition for the laying season. I have often been complimented on the size and fine condition of the birds killed on this place, and there is no doubt that they are good fliers and give sport.

I have not found that artificial manure is injurious to birds.

I employ two keepers: the shooting being a very open one, they are sufficient to look after it. Besides, the farmers, shepherds, and labourers are all good fellows here, and take an interest in my shooting.

I rarely shoot partridges after Christmas, except,

perhaps, a few brace for the house. I leave a large stock, quite 500 brace to the 2000 acres.

My best day's driving was 314 brace over not more than 500 acres, six guns, and only one set of beaters, as I am adverse to having two sets of beaters. My best total was for the season 1907-1908, 2704 partridges. The last two seasons were bad ones, still I had the good luck to kill over 600 brace last year, and over 700 brace in the present season. It is in bad seasons that the healthy and strong condition of birds will tell most.

STETCHWORTH, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

(Notes by Mr. R. HERSEY, head-keeper to the
EARL OF ELLESMERE.)

This shoot is about 5500 acres, of which 2500 acres have a light and sandy soil. On the rest of the ground the soil is heavy and sticky, and not suitable for game, as it adheres to their feet. Almost all is ploughed, and cropped on the four-course system.

The nesting ground on the light land consists of beech and fir belts and some quickthorn hedges; on the heavy land all hedgerows. We have two long narrow estates adjoining. Each has a large village in the centre, which does not improve them, and both have a great many roads and footpaths: quite half our partridges are hatched by the roadsides. Dogs are our worst trouble—of course they are well watched all the nesting time. I never take a man off his beat after the partridges begin to lay, as I expect him to find every nest he can, and visit it at least once a day. This keeps a man up to his work, and makes it more interesting to him. I visit the nests as often as I can during incubation.

All eggs are marked with a rubber stamp, which checks egg-stealing. A good keeper will have his own marks to a nest from each side of a hedge, and will know at once

if anything is wrong. If a good watch is not kept, one stoat might soon spoil several nests by sucking the eggs. Every hedge or belt should be rigidly trapped, and any trace of vermin noticed at once, or great havoc may be done.

I believe in taking up say twenty nests in a hundred, making sure that the bird has laid her first lot by adding sham or clear pheasant eggs. She will then lay 8 or 10 eggs, sometimes more, that would never have been laid had she been allowed to continue with her first lot. I do not believe in making up nests, unless a very small nest in the case of a bird known to have lost some eggs by vermin, but prefer to hatch under hens, timed to hatch the same date as the majority of the first nests, so that 8 to 10 chicks can be put down with each pair of birds hatching at the same time. I do not hand-rear any if I can avoid it; they have all the disadvantages of hand-reared pheasants, and are given to migrate. I believe in changing English eggs, and prefer eggs from the north of England or Scotland. I do not like Hungarian birds; I have noticed that the stock has shown a tendency to decrease on ground where they have been put down in numbers for three or four seasons running. They do not seem to stand rough weather as well as the English birds, and are more given to nesting in the open fields.

We are not troubled much by foxes as the woods are at the heavy land end of the shoot. I find reynardine, paraffin, and old iron laid round the nests a good protection. Rats, stoats, weasels, house cats, and hedgehogs are our worst vermin; the latter a bad thief, and his handiwork easy to recognise, for he always bites a piece out of the side of the egg. Kestrels are very destructive to young partridges on our large fields until they get their feathers, after that the sparrow-hawk is a worse danger. Owls counteract any harm they do by the numbers of rats they kill, and I do not think they all kill game. Some rooks are bad egg-stealers, and have become worse of late years.

I do not believe in keeping a lot of hares or pheasants on partridge ground; partridges will migrate if their ground is overstocked. I do not consider the red-legged partridge harmful to the English birds; the latter can hold their own, for they are very pugnacious, and I have seen one thrash a game bantam. I feed with a little wheat, barley, or seeds in the belts when snow lies for long.

We have had a few birds die from a wasting disease, but although I have had them analysed, the cause of death was not discovered; they are mostly found after a very cold and wet spring. Gapes are worst when such a spring is followed by a hot, dry summer; this is the first disease to attack all game birds when there is a lack of natural food. I consider many of the artificial manures and dips injurious to partridges; I have always noticed birds found in a wasting condition on land where a lot of artificial manure is used instead of farmyard dung.

I consider 1000 to 1200 acres plenty for a man to see after properly.

I think partridge-shooting should end first week in January. I prefer a fair stock to a superabundant, something like 150 to 200 brace per 1000 acres, but this varies much on different ground according to how much feed there is.

Our bags have steadily increased except in very bad seasons, such as the last two. On the 3rd October 1906, seven guns killed 724 partridges here on about the same number of acres. Our best season was 1907-1908, when 2598 partridges were killed, of which 2180 came off the light land, and only 418 from the heavy; so you will see the vast difference there is in good and bad land for partridges. In my opinion heavy land is not worth keeper's wages for partridges. In fourteen seasons our best day off the heavy land was 130 brace.

THE HOO, HERTFORDSHIRE

(Notes by Mr. Ross, head-keeper to
VISCOUNT HAMPDEN.)

Extent.—4500 acres. Soil, loam on chalk. 85 per cent cultivation to grass. The land tilled on a four years' course of cropping.

Nesting Ground.—Hedges with additional quicks planted, with annual planting of some young plantations in narrow belts, or in clumps with a southerly exposure, with a view also, if possible, for driving over. Where free from public footpaths, small enclosures of about a yard square are made of wire-netting, left open for 6 inches at the bottom, to allow the birds to pass through freely.

Nesting Season.—We find as many nests as possible early in the season; when the herbage gets long, much harm may be done by poking about, making birds forsake. I find that the weather is very often unsuitable for doing much among nests in the early morning, and that it is better to give attention to vermin traps, etc., when heavy dew or morning frost show footprints too plainly, and visit the nests later. From 3.30 P.M. till dark I find a good time, and the best to tell what birds are preparing to sit down. The nests are visited, as far as possible, every day. Our nests average 14 eggs. All eggs in dangerous places are lifted, and incubated to chipping point, when they are changed again with the sham or clear eggs which were given to the partridge instead.

I cannot say that rearing partridges has been very successful here so far. In this hunting country some of our neighbours rear a few partridges in wired enclosures of about 20 acres with 4-inch mesh netting. It is true this helps to keep a good stock, but the birds are found to give poor sport, and the expense is out of proportion to the result. I do not believe in Hungarian birds for change of blood. I think that they spoil the stamina of

our English birds, and make the stock less capable of withstanding wet summers, like those of late years.

To keep our stock healthy we change eggs from one part of the estate to another, and also with eggs from a distance.

Vermin. — Foxes are strictly preserved here, which means a heavy annual loss of both partridge and pheasant nests. Where there are a fair quantity of rabbits, foxes do not trouble the nests quite so much. To guard against foxes, we wire in the young covers with 6-foot netting, sprinkle human urine, paraffin oil, and tar near the nests, and leave sprung traps, old and broken traps set, or iron hoops lying close by. Some of these remedies have been successful at times.

Hedgehogs are our worst vermin, eating eggs and even attacking sitting birds from behind, though I do not think they meddle with young birds much. Rooks, cats, and rats are the next worst enemies. The brown owl sometimes plays havoc among pheasants just taking to roost; and in this district there is a Dutch or small owl, nearly as bad as any hawk, flying about in the daytime, and doing much harm among the young partridges. The kestrels are quite as bad as sparrow-hawks with young birds.

Pheasants are mischievous if too plentiful on partridge ground, laying in and taking possession of partridges' nests, defacing nests, and opening them out for rooks, etc., to find. Turkeys on farms are sometimes troublesome in the same way. Hares and rabbits give much annoyance unless kept well within limits. French partridges I consider good for nothing, neither for change of blood nor for sport.

We feed our partridges in snow and continued frost; also on ground where green crops or pasture-lands are scarce.

Our birds sometimes suffer from gapes, scouring, and red tick on the head. I believe basic slag to be bad for

partridges, except when washed into the soil early in autumn.

Our beats are compactly situated and 1200 acres each in extent.

We consider a brace of partridges for every 10 acres a fair stock to leave. Our stock has been decreasing of late years, chiefly owing to bad seasons, but partly from changes in crops, very few roots being grown now, and the corn-fields getting ploughed up so early, leaving little feeding ground for the winter.

In a good year we have killed 1 bird to $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres all over the ground ; in an average season 1 bird to $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres, and in the last three years only 1 bird to 12 acres.

ORWELL PARK, IPSWICH, SUFFOLK

(From notes by M. J. READER, head-keeper to
Capt. E. PRETTYMAN.)

Several thousand acres of a light soil, mostly under the plough, on a four-course shift. No artificial nesting ground is provided. Each man has about 1000 acres to look after. It is found impossible to know of all the nests, but every nest found is visited daily.

The average number of eggs varies greatly according to the weather. All roadside eggs are lifted and put into other nests, no partridges are reared. Eggs are occasionally changed ; Hungarians have been turned down, but were thought to have done far more harm than good.

Partridges are never fed. There are no foxes. Rats and stoats are found to be the worst vermin, owls and kestrels are only occasionally found to do any harm, while hedgehogs, though destructive, are very scarce. Hares are considered quite harmless.

Pheasants and French partridges lay in the grey bird's nests, but if well looked after in the nesting season, are found to cause little harm.

In a good year shooting continues to the end of the season. The stock is judged while shooting. No special form of disease has been noticed, though a few birds have been picked up dead at different times. Three hundred brace a day and over have been killed in good seasons, but of late years the totals have come down to less than 100 brace a day. Six thousand birds off 18,000 acres has been given as a fair year's total at Orwell Park. Mr. Reader concludes by saying: "I consider the recent failure of partridges to be entirely due to bad weather, as we were never short of partridges when the weather has been good. I have never known so many bad seasons in succession, and I have been here over thirty years."

STRATTON, HAMPSHIRE

(Notes by the EARL OF NORTHBROOK.)

Extent about 5000 acres, with a chalk subsoil; on the top of the hills there is some depth of clay. A large proportion of the land is cultivated. The nesting ground is natural, with the addition of a few belts planted. All nests are found when possible and visited daily; the average number of eggs in a nest is 14. No partridges are reared except very occasionally, when nests are cut out in mowing.

Eggs are changed from nests on one part of the ground to another, and we also exchange eggs with neighbours and with friends in other counties. We have turned down Hungarians on three or four occasions, but I cannot say with any marked result, though they certainly have not done me any harm by introducing disease as has been alleged to have occurred in some places.

No eggs are hatched in the incubator. We take eggs from nests 'cut out' or from outsides, and put them under hens; when the eggs 'bill' they are substituted (19 to a nest) for the eggs on which a hen partridge

has been sitting for some time—a fortnight or more. This plan has proved very successful in hatching off substituted eggs.

We suffer little trouble from foxes. The rats are our worst vermin ; there are more in this part of the country than in any other district that I am acquainted with. In the year ending March 1, 1911, the keepers killed 11,961 rats. We have not many hedgehogs, but they are undoubtedly harmful, and will drive the hen bird off the nest and eat the eggs. We have few stoats, but a litter of stoats on partridge ground is most destructive. The keepers are warned not to kill owls. The white owl does no harm, though the brown owl will take young birds, as will the kestrel ; but I do not believe they do so much harm as keepers allege. Rooks are troublesome at times, but are less numerous than formerly. It is undoubtedly bad for partridges to have too many hares or pheasants on the ground. I do not think that French partridges interfere with common partridges here ; but we have few French partridges. We kill a certain number every season ; they neither increase nor decrease, probably because in driving they come over singly and get shot.

The only disease we suffer from is ‘gapes’ in wet seasons. We have no suspicion of any injury being caused from the use of dressings or artificial manures. Each beat is about 1500 acres. Partridges are only fed in severe weather. I do not think partridges should be shot after Christmas.

I do not know what to suggest as to stock when reduced by one or two bad seasons, but I do believe that it is a mistake not to shoot over the ground lightly once, even in a bad season. We had a better stock in the spring of 1909 than we have had for many years, but two bad seasons have much reduced this: we now have a fair stock over all the ground.

It is difficult to answer your question about acres to each bird killed on a beat and all over the ground with

any accuracy. The area of ground driven in a day varies according to the season—*i.e.* the number of birds on the ground.

My calculation of extent of ground available is a rough one : taking the acreage of farms, which includes roads, buildings, gardens, etc., I put it at 5000 acres. Taking this as approximately correct, we killed in 1906 1 bird to 1·8 acres, and in the last two years, bad seasons, 1 bird to $4\frac{3}{4}$ acres. In a good season we have killed a bird to the acre on a beat.

"VERMIN."

CHAPTER VI

VERMIN

What the real enemies of game are, and how they should be dealt with—What animals and birds are unjustly included in the list of proscription.

SINCE the dim and distant age when our primitive ancestor first won the mastery over those monstrous forms of early life, whose uncouth lineaments we may still outline in shadowy fashion from the grim bony structures in our natural history galleries, Man has advanced from a precarious supremacy to a complete dominion over all the beasts of the field.

That the heavy weight of responsibility, which such power over his fellow-creatures must of a necessity involve, has lain lightly on the soul of man in the past, let the shades of the vanished gare

fowl, dodo, moa, and a hundred other lost or vanishing forms of bird-life, bear abundant testimony. Happily, however, for what remains of our native fauna in this country, the last fifty years have seen a marked change for the better in our attitude towards the wild life around us. A new and wholesome interest in nature and natural history has accompanied the advance of education, and found favour with the general public, till lately caring nothing for these things and viewing them only with the indifference born of ignorance.

The spread of a better feeling among all classes and the useful legislation of the Wild Birds' Protection Act have done good work, and though the damage wrought in the past is in large measure irreparable, for the bustard and the spoonbill are gone for ever, nor may we again hope for the graceful form of the kite or the harrier to gladden the eye on a country ramble; though the ruthless collector, indefatigable in his

errands of destruction, is still rife in the land; though ignorance and the dictates of fashion still allow women to deck themselves unchecked in beautiful feathers cruelly torn from egrets on their nests, yet, on the whole, the outlook is hopeful, and many of our rarer native birds, which till lately seemed doomed soon to disappear from the land, have taken a new lease of life, and are responding generously to the protection now accorded to them by increasing their numbers and extending their range.

In this regard, we must all welcome most gladly the change from the old order to the new in the race of gamekeepers. The old gamekeeper had much to answer for; he knew little and cared less about any beast or bird on his ground which did not come under the category of Game. The justice which he meted out to the creatures of the wild was that of the Revolutionary Tribunal—all suspects to the guillotine or the gallows tree.

Sad reading are some of the vermin

lists of other days, dismal records of mis-directed energy ; here is the tale of vermin which Mr. Edward Ellice gives as trapped in Glengarry between the years 1837 and 1840 :—

11 Foxes.	371 Rough-legged Buz-
198 Wild Cats.	zards.
78 House Cats (going wild).	3 Honey Buzzards.
246 Martens.	462 Kestrels.
106 Polecats.	78 Merlins.
301 Stoats and Weasels.	63 Hen Harriers.
67 Badgers.	6 Jerfalcons.
48 Otters.	9 Ash-coloured Hawks
15 Golden Eagles.	(Montagu's Harrier).
27 White-tailed Eagles.	1431 Hooded Crows.
18 Ospreys.	475 Ravens.
98 Blue Hawks (Sparrow-	35 Horned Owls (? Long-
Hawks).	eared Owls).
7 Orange-legged Fal-	71 Fern Owls (Goat-
cons (? Peregrines).	suckers).
11 Hobbies.	3 Golden Owls (? Barn
275 Kites.	Owls).
65 Goshawks.	8 Magpies.
285 Common Buzzards.	5 Marsh Harriers.

Of the thirty-one beasts and birds classed as vermin in this remarkable list, eleven at least may be safely acquitted of any serious damage to game, while for no less than thirteen of these species you

may search not only Glengarry but the whole of the Highlands to-day in vain; they are gone beyond recall, and are known to us now only as the rarest of visitors. Fortunately the intelligence of keepers and the interest of their masters have at last been aroused, the age of indiscriminate slaughter may be said to be past, and though careful supervision of the vermin list is still the duty—too often neglected—of every owner or tenant of a shooting, most of the modern school of gamekeepers unite some knowledge of natural history to their many other good qualities, and may be fairly trusted not to abuse their powers of summary jurisdiction. Abroad it is to be feared that a less desirable state of affairs prevails, even apart from those countries where almost every creature which cannot be classed as vermin is regarded as legitimate game and pursued accordingly.

The following is the list of vermin killed on the estates of Count Andreas Csekonics, at Zsombolya in Hungary,

during a period of ten years, from February 1, 1889, to January 31, 1899 :—

1,337 Foxes.	121 Eagles.
2 Wolves.	4,724 Hawks and Buz-
1 Badger.	zards.
6 Wild Cats.	4,394 Sparrow-Hawks.
488 Polecats, Hedge-	41,903 Crows.
hogs, and Ham-	10,783 Magpies.
sters.	6,770 Owls.
19,856 Weasels.	36,481 Other Birds of
908 Cur Dogs.	Prey.
904 Cats.	

making a total of 128,678 head.

Nearly seven thousand owls, some thousands of presumably harmless hawks, and between thirty and forty thousand unspecified and probably unidentified “other birds of prey,” among which there must surely have been numbered many a rare and interesting innocent, many a humble and harmless farmer’s friend. Unless this be an isolated instance, it would seem that in Hungary the interests of natural history and agriculture alike receive small consideration at the hands of the game-preserver.

Let us then, in dealing with the

question of vermin in this country, hold a court of justice before which we shall summon all supposed offenders, duly weigh evidence, both for and against the accused, and pronounce judgment, not, indeed, tempered by mercy—for proved vermin must be placed beyond the pale—yet, we will trust, equally untainted by prejudice.

If we deal with our suspects in order, according to the gravity of the charge presented against them, few will deny the common brown rat priority of place over all comers. Since, under the more humane influences of modern legislation, the horrors of the rat-pit were abolished, and live rats ceased to fetch 3s. a dozen in the open market, the rat cannot be said to have a single friend left in the world. His crimes are legion and his omnivorous voracity beyond all belief: he destroys untold quantities of grain in the stackyard, while he will tear the very nails and skin off the elephants' feet at the Zoo; he will eat a turnip or a five-

pound note with equal avidity ; has killed babies in the cradle,¹ and tramps sleeping in a barn. He has been known to eat his way straight through a live fat pig, while it is recorded that when the bandstand of the Gaiety Restaurant was removed a few years ago, beneath were found the remains of no less than 1728 serviettes, dragged there and destroyed by the rats. The zenith of his sublime audacity may be said to have been reached when we read that in many public gardens the mighty hippopotamus, turning over in his sleep, has squashed flat numbers of rats which had come to gnaw at his extremities.

In the ordinary course of events, and without taking into any account the serious hurt done to game, or the perhaps somewhat abnormal damage to hippopotami or table-linen, it has been estimated, at a very moderate computation, that rats cost the community in this country some

¹ The last recorded instance was at Lewisham in November 1905, when a six weeks' old child was gnawed to death in the cradle.

twenty millions a year—a heavy price indeed to pay for the entertainment of so unlovely and undesirable a guest.

Up to the present time, despite the heavy tax he levies on rich and poor, countrymen and townsfolk alike, the rat has enjoyed a strange toleration at the hands of man. This can only arise, one would think, from ignorance; the bulk of his depredations take place unseen or underground; what the eye does not see the heart will not grieve for, and while the farmer seldom fails to take instant notice of a single turnip broken by a hare, he often acquiesces with seeming indifference in supporting a host of hungry dependants on the produce of his farm. Spasmodic efforts are indeed made from time to time to deal with the trouble in places where the rats have increased beyond all measure, but such local and independent efforts can scarcely touch the fringe of the evil, and leave no permanent effect. This may be easily understood when we consider the amazing fecundity of the rat. Mr. Millais

estimates that a young doe rat of three months old, giving birth on the 1st January to a litter of thirteen, the average number, and thereafter repeating the process every six weeks, can, within the span of a single year, potentially be responsible for no less than 35,044 descendants. Should we take the actual increase to be but one-fortieth of the potential, it remains quite obvious that only the universal action of the whole country can rid us of this pest.

We have dwelt at some length on the general aspects of the rat problem, apart from the more technical point of view as affecting game only, because we hold that in this respect we game-preservers are in no small degree responsible to agriculture.

We have taken it upon ourselves to destroy the natural enemies of the rats, which enemies, but for the unremitting warfare we wage against them, would exist in enormous numbers and serve to restore the balance of nature, keeping the rats within some limits. This may be an

unpopular theory to advance, but it is best to have justice all round, freely admit our partial responsibility in this respect, and impress on our keepers the absolute necessity of placing the rat first on his list of proscription.¹ There are too many keepers who would regard the presence of a hawk's nest on the most distant corner of their ground as a serious reflection on their professional character, at the same time regarding with comparative equanimity a hedgerow overrun with rats at their very door.

Yet rats are in reality the keeper's worst enemies, confirmed and pertinacious egg-stealers, deadly foes to all young game, both winged and ground. Their destructive powers are almost incredible; Mr. Nelson Zambra describes, in a recent

¹ Since these lines were written the Chambers of Agriculture have, by request, presented to the Government their views on the rat question, urging immediate legislation on the subject. *Inter alia* they recommend that "complete protection should be afforded to all species of owls, kestrels, hawks, and weasels—the natural enemies of the rat." Comment on the effect that such protection would have on game preservation is needless.

number of the *Estate Magazine*, how fifty-two of his six-weeks-old pheasant poults were killed in a single night by one old buck rat, every one being carried away and carefully hidden in the grass.

The rat is becoming a greater danger to game-preservers every year, for since the modern use of cement flooring has driven him from many a stable and granary, there has sprung up an ever-increasing race of hedgerow rats, who remain in the open country all the year round.

Since the rat has been proved to be an active agent in spreading disease, bringing bubonic plague from India into our seaports, and being held responsible for the recent outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis in Suffolk, County Councils have been given statutory powers to enforce the destruction of rats within their counties; let us trust that even in districts where no plague can be traced among the rats, Councils will nevertheless not be slow to avail themselves of the

power of ensuring a wholesale campaign against such pestilent vermin.

It is not generally known that no rat is a true native of this country; the old English or black rat, now practically extinct, is first recorded in the twelfth century, while the brown rat, probably hailing from Western Mongolia, crossed the Volga about the close of the seventeenth century, spreading with amazing rapidity over the whole continent of Europe, and was firmly established in these islands fifty years later.

Like most other undesirable aliens, he seems to have come to stay; he quickly polished off the black rat whom he found in possession, and is now a chronic plague in most of our eastern counties and an abundant evil everywhere.

Guilty on all counts is, then, the verdict on the rat.

The pine marten and the polecat—sweetmart and founmart of local phraseology—now only exist in such scanty numbers that the presence of an odd

one may well be tolerated should it occur. It would be a shame wittingly to hasten their already inevitable extinction, though, were they plentiful, they would rank only second to the rat as agents to destruction. We dismiss this case, then, as 'Charge not pressed,' the interests of science bidding us stay our hands, even though it may involve some slight mischief among our game.

The stoat can claim no such immunity, for constant persecution—and he is one of the easiest animals to trap—never seems to reduce his numbers below the normal; relax the strain for a single year and stoats literally swarm on the ground. To this graceful and graceless murderer—for the stoat kills for sheer love of slaughter—nothing in the nature of game comes amiss, birds old and young, chicks and eggs, all being alike destroyed. Some service the stoat certainly does render to mankind by preying on the smaller rodents, but these virtuous deeds weigh but light in the balance against

the mass of his enormities, and the extreme penalty of the law is all that this cunning and enterprising ruffian can look to receive at our hands.

The weasel, often, though needlessly, confused with his larger congener, is a more difficult case to dispose of. There is certainly a strong opinion among outside authorities—that is to say, naturalists who have never had a hand in preserving game themselves—that keepers bear an unjust grudge against the weasel, and wrongly place him on the list of proscription. We are told that the misdeeds of the stoat are attributed to the weasel, and that in truth the good he does to agriculture far outweighs any trivial injury he may inflict on game. But is this injury so trivial, we would ask? Doubtless rats, voles, mice, and small birds form his staple diet, but that so swift and fearless a hunter can ever be expected to spare our game is more than we can believe, nor can he be acquitted of being a persistent egg-thief. One

must be prepared to admit that in destroying the weasel game-preservers become, in some degree, responsible for the presence of the rat and the vole ; yet that the interests of game demand this destruction seems a matter beyond all doubt.

The hedgehog—an archaic form of Insectivore, or insect-eater—next claims our attention. Would that his diet was restricted by his name, but it is to be feared that this nocturnal marauder plays sad havoc among the partridge nests. But he has his defenders too : Mr. J. G. Millais, in his monumental work on *British Mammals*, argues that—

The attacks on poultry and game are nearly always the sins of individual animals, and are not the practice of the whole species, . . . the mischief is generally stopped by the killing of the individual sinners, and only the ignorant, which is another name for the unobservant, will extend their anathemas and acts of retribution to a whole race of practically innocent creatures.

Even were this the case—which cannot be admitted when the weight of evidence

"THEIR WORST ENEMY." HEN HOUSE AND POULTRY ON STUBBLE FIELD.

on the other side is considered—it would be almost impossible to convict the individual offender, for he works under cover of darkness, and only by the rarest of chances can the hedgepig be caught *flagrante delicto*.

Had the lines quoted above been applied to the kestrel or any of the owls, they would have been very much to the point, but written as they are about the hedgehog, we cannot help feeling that this conclusion is erroneous, and the suggestion based on it impracticable. Gamekeepers of any experience in the matter always claim to recognize at a glance the handiwork of a hedgehog in a partridge's nest; the traces are those of a clumsier marauder than rat or stoat, and the egg-shells are all bitten to pieces. Traps then set by the damaged nest constantly catch the supposed criminal, especially if there are any eggs left in the nest—good enough evidence in itself for a strong *prima facie* case against the accused. But more direct proof is avail-

able : Mr. T. Speedy—competent witness where the evidence of the eye on a point of natural history is in question—has placed it on record that he has caught a hedgehog red-handed in a pheasant's nest on the Ladykirk estate in Berwickshire. Mr. S. H. Copsey, Summerfield, Norfolk, writes¹ :—

I went early one morning to a fence to change some partridge's eggs, and found the first nest gone. I concluded a hedgehog had been there. Although no shells were left in the nest, there were plenty a few yards away in the field. Another nest was within 40 yards, and to my surprise a fine old hedgehog was sitting in the nest eating the eggs. While I was looking at the beast he moved out of the nest to sit in the morning sun. He grunted as fat pigs do. It is needless for me to say that in my anger I put my foot on him, to squeeze out of him some of the eggs and his life with them.

Again, to quote Mr. R. Russell, Benhall :—

One night, on a well-known estate in Hampshire, I heard a partridge fly from her nest. Going stealthily to the spot I struck a match

¹ Letter to the *Gamekeeper*, January 1911.

and beheld a hedgehog devouring an egg. Another time I heard a hen cackling in the wood. Knowing she had a nest and was due to hatch, I went to investigate; getting near I could hear a chicken. When I lit a match, there was a hedgehog eating the chick which was still in the shell, and the hedgehog's snout was covered with blood.

The first letter is important evidence, for here is the keeper's diagnosis justified; he recognized the hedgehog's handiwork before he saw the hedgehog. Admit this, and the suspicions—amounting in their own minds to a certainty—of a thousand other observant keepers, who have never had the chance of obtaining direct proof, tell very heavily against the accused.

We have gone into this question at length, for if we are to differ from the leading authority on our mammals, chapter and verse must be quoted to support our case. So we now confidently pronounce against the hedgehog, finding that the race as a whole, and not merely the occasional individual, is guilty of egg-stealing, with strong presumption that

many young birds and old partridges sitting on their nests are numbered among the victims of the hedgepig, who would doubtless like us to believe that he spent all his nights in "routing up the cow-dungs for the blackbobs."

The case of the cat—including the domestic cat gone wild and the puss of the farm and cottage, law-abiding by day but more than possibly lawless by night—is simple. In its proper sphere, a useful member of the community, destroyer of small undesirables, rats, voles, mice, and sparrows; out of its proper sphere, an arrant and inveterate poacher, and to be dealt with as such whenever apprehended.

Of the crow tribe, the carrion crow may well claim the doubtful honour of precedence in our list. Cunning and wary in all his doings, he ranks second to none as an egg-thief, and his depredations extend to nearly full-grown young partridges. The jackdaw, whose presence is too often tolerated, is equally

harmful in the nesting season ; nor need these two look for any mercy at our hands.

The rook has taken to evil ways of late years, and is rapidly becoming a habitual criminal in his relations to game. It is true that the guilt rests with individuals and not with the whole race ; but these individual evil-doers are for some reason increasing so rapidly, and are further so impossible to single out for punishment, that the whole community must needs be held responsible for the misdeeds of some of its members. Inquisitive, enterprising, quick to put two and two together, rooks on partridge ground at nesting time are no favourites with the keeper. Let him incautiously leave traces of his visit to a partridge nest, and the rooks will soon be there. Their presence is most felt after a dry spring, when the nests are readily discovered by their keen and curious eyes as they systematically work the hedgerows in pairs. Even when the partridge is

sitting there is no security, for, like a true bully, one rook, having made the find, will return with a party of his fellow-roughs to mob the unfortunate sitting bird off her nest and fall to on the spoil.

While eggs are the staple attraction, the poaching rook will make short work of any young partridge that comes in his way. On the whole, whatever his benefits to agriculture—and farmers are by no means of one mind on the subject—there is little doubt that the rook is an undesirable neighbour where game is to be preserved.

The grey or hooded crow is only with us from October to April, nesting in more northern latitudes, so on most partridge manors he can put forward a satisfactory alibi to any charge of malfeasance.

There is no need to draw any attention to the misdeeds of the magpie, for his striking appearance and easy destruction ensure him immediate attention at the

hands of every gamekeeper. He is mischievous, be it admitted, yet no more so than the jackdaw, whose less obtrusive garb often procures him immunity. The magpie must certainly be kept within limits, but the utter extermination of so fine a fellow would be a sorry business, and one would always feel inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

The jay is another beautiful dweller in our woodlands who deserves more consideration at our hands than he usually receives. If individual misdeeds—and an egg-baited trap readily brings the miscreant to book—be dealt with as such, the trouble often ceases altogether. Jays are the keeper's watchdogs in the woods, giving early warning if aught be amiss; and a fair sprinkling of one of our most beautiful native birds will not be found an unmixed evil.

Of the birds of prey, the peregrine must take first place for its destructive powers among game. Fortunately for its continued existence in this country,

this noble falcon is protected in many counties, and while no great numbers could be tolerated on preserved land, we can well suffer the presence of a few without complaining.

There is some divergence of opinion about the merits and demerits of the sparrow-hawk. One authority¹ states that "the successful rearing of game is an impossible task where this bird is allowed to exist"; another,² with ten years' practical experience of game-keeping to give weight to his opinion, writes that—

It is high time that sparrow-hawks were placed under the protecting wing of the law. Generations of gamekeepers have persecuted them relentlessly. . . . If sportsmen would consider the evidence for and against sparrow-hawks as despoilers of game—if they would rely no longer on prejudice and crass ignorance—we feel sure they would take steps to stay the wanton slaughter by their gamekeepers of these handsome, useful birds. . . . But sparrow-hawks grow scarce, they are seen far less commonly than kestrels. . . .

¹ Mr. Tom Speedy in *The Keeper's Book*, 1903.

² *A Gamekeeper's Notebook*, by Owen Jones, 1910.

A third writer¹ describes the sparrowhawk as "one of the most numerous and destructive of our hawks."

Now the universal habit is to condemn sparrow-hawks unheard, and class them with the worst of vermin; nor would it be an easy matter to induce a gamekeeper to stay his hand when there is a nest of blue hawks on his ground. The utmost we could hope to do would be to persuade gamekeepers to accept nothing but the evidence of their own eyes, and to prove to their own satisfaction that such damage as is wrought to the game is the work of the species in general, and not of isolated individuals, before they condemn the whole race. In this context it would be very useful if keepers could be induced to examine the contents of the stomach and crop of all the predatory birds that they kill, and keep notes of the result for future guidance.

The useful work of kestrels has at last received tardy recognition, and few con-

¹ Mr. Carnegie, *Practical Game-Preserving*, 1906.

tinue to shoot them at sight, as every gamekeeper used to do but a few years ago. A clear case of gamecide should invariably be established against the individual before the life of the handsome and useful 'windhover' be taken.

The merlin can only be looked on as an enemy to game in the summer, for a full-grown partridge is quarry beyond his reach. As this diminutive falcon always nests on moorland, he may well be spared on partridge ground, for he will be gone long before any young partridges are hatched.

Of the owls, the short-eared species is the only one that hunts by day, and would beyond all doubt play havoc among young partridges were it not, for the most part, only a winter visitor to this country. Good evidence should be forthcoming as to its depredations among full-grown partridges before destroying it on ground where it does not breed.

No tawny, long-eared, or barn owl should ever be killed without direct

proof of guilt. There is no difficulty in finding out what owls have been eating; a very slight examination of the pelts dropped under their roosting places gives an infallible *résumé* of their diet.

The poaching dog cannot rightly be classed as vermin, nor indeed can he be legislated for as such by our court. At the same time stray dogs are the very mischief, and their disappearance is all to the interests of the shoot.

Poultry on the stubbles are another adverse influence; they usurp the territory and the food of the partridge, foul the ground, and are by no means above suspicion as agents in spreading disease. When a new lease is being drawn, the interests of the partridge should be considered in this respect, and some restrictions placed on this rapidly spreading practice of chicken-farming.

In summing up we would classify the enemies—real or supposed—of the partridge in this country as follows:—

1. Pestilent vermin at all times.

The rat (*Mus decumanus*).

The stoat (*Putorius ermineus*).

The hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*).

The weasel (*Putorius nivalis*).

The carrion crow (*Corvus corone*).

The domestic cat (gone wild or strayed).

The jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*).

2. Vermin more or less injurious according to local circumstances.

The rook (*Corvus frugilegus*).

The peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

The sparrow-hawk (*Accipiter nisus*).

The magpie (*Pica caudata*).

The jay (*Garrulus glandarius*).

The short-eared owl (*Asio brachyotus*).

3. Not true vermin, nor to be classed as such — individuals may at times offend and have to be destroyed, but the race should always enjoy protection.

The long-eared owl (*Asio otus*).

The tawny owl (*Syrnium aluco*).

The barn owl (*Stria flammea*).

The kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*).

The buzzard (*Buteo vulgaris*).

4. Species whose rarity should ensure their protection.

The polecat (*Putorius putorius*).

The marten (*Mustela martes*).

The rarer hawks, such as the goshawk, hobby, and harriers.

5. Naturally destructive to young game, but innocuous on partridge ground owing to their absence in summer.

The hooded crow (*Corvus cornix*).

The merlin (*Falco aesalon*).

6. Doubtful cases—probably do little real harm.

The squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)—has been known to take the young and eggs of game.

The badger (*Meles meles*)—omnivorous, may destroy nests.

The otter (*Lutra lutra*)—sometimes takes rabbits and possibly game.

The water-hen (*Gallinula chloropus*)—said to suck eggs.

7. Harmless, though sometimes persecuted.

The water-vole or water-rat (*Arvicola amphibius*).

The nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).

The view is often expressed that game-preservers are unduly handicapped in their dealings with vermin, by the legal protection now accorded to many of our rarer birds and the statutory abolition of the poletrap. It is hard to endorse any such opinion, for the County Councils may with justice be said to have exercised the powers conferred on them by the

Wild Birds' Protection Acts with singular discretion, while the poletrap was a cruel and casual method of dealing with birds of prey, and one by which many of our rarer hawks and falcons were destroyed. By its abolition, the difficulties of the keeper on the moor were doubtless sensibly increased, for there fowls of the air are the chief enemies of game; but on the partridge manor the real danger is on the ground, and such few hawks as do mischief can easily be dealt with.

There is little need to describe the means of destruction by which vermin are kept under. For the stoat, the unbaited trap on his run; for the hedgehog, the trap also, but now baited with an egg; for the crow family in general, the doctored egg; while the hawks can be ambushed on their daily rounds.

Only the rat needs mention in this regard; here trap and gun are only palliatives; the much-vaunted virus is often slow in spreading the seeds of disease among the colony, and careful

and systematic poisoning remains the surest remedy. If due precaution be taken, a large area can be poisoned without appreciable danger to any of its other inhabitants. And so the curtain falls, as it rose, with the rat—the real problem of the play—in possession of the stage.

CHAPTER VII

SHOOTING THE PARTRIDGE

On partridge-shooting generally—Guns, cartridges, men, and dogs—Shooting over dogs—Walking in line.

“FIFTY yards is as great a distance as a Sportsman will in general attempt to shoot at, and indeed greater than he ought to shoot at. For if we will make the lives of poor birds our diversion, we ought to put them to as little misery as we can; and therefore should not shoot without being certain that they are within our reach, so that the shot will fly thick enough to kill them outright.”

These lines have stood the test of a century, and may well open any dissertation on partridge-shooting in general, for they apply as well to the present generation as to the one they were addressed to. It is devoutly to be wished that the firing of long and doubtful shots

(1) THE RIGHT SHOT.

(2) THE WRONG SHOT.

could be condemned by public opinion, but unhappily the tendency seems rather the other way round, and you may commonly hear the shooter congratulate himself in such wise : “ My word, that bird was a long way off ; I never thought I should have got him.” To which the proper answer—never given—is, “ Well, sir, if it was neither pace nor curve but only distance that made the bird hard to kill, you are condemned out of your own mouth, and are guilty of a most unjustifiable and unsportsmanlike action, for you deliberately, in the hope of bringing off a fluke, took every chance of wounding the bird ; and I fear would have eaten your dinner none the less comfortably this evening for the thought, which would never have occurred to you, that the poor brute was cowering somewhere in misery through your heedless action.”

Enough of a distasteful subject. But boys, when they first enter the shooting field, cannot be too carefully taught to play the game by the birds, and never

to abuse their powers over the creatures of the wild. Like most other virtues and vices, such consideration is largely a question of habit and early training, and soon becomes a second nature to any one who is brought up in the right way. But we are apt to gloss over our responsibilities light-heartedly, and many a boy is now watching his father cheerfully firing at birds quite beyond the killing range and will as thoughtlessly do the same when his turn comes.

Partridge-shooting is, of all forms of sport with the gun, essentially the one best suited for the man of moderate means. Pheasants are costly creatures to entertain ; the fancy rents cheerfully asked and given for moors place so fashionable a sport as grouse-shooting quite beyond the reach of all but the wealthy ; changed times have driven the wild fowl, once so plentiful on our coasts, to harbour in remote fastnesses, where few have leisure to follow them ; only the little brown bird remains to gladden the hearts of the

multitude of sportsmen whose expenditure must be limited, yet who would not rest content with competitions at clay pigeons. Naturally, if big days are wanted, they must be paid for both in rent and heavy expenses of management; but while thousands may be profitably expended in turning a wide stretch of country to its best sporting uses, at the same time it is quite possible in humbler fashion to enjoy very good sport at surprisingly small cost.

A man who knows what he is doing can sometimes pick up 500 acres of good partridge land at a rent as low as sixpence an acre. If he then takes care to make friends with the people living on the ground, most of his keeping will be done for him gratis, and his expenses for management may well be covered by a ten pound note in the year. Off this land he might quite easily kill 100 brace in the season, the market value of which would be about £10; he would probably kill other game—odd pheasants, hares,

and rabbits—to the value of fifty shillings, making his net outlay £10 for the year, irrespective of the cost of a game licence and his cartridge bill. This is quite a realizable estimate, but even were it doubled, our friend would get some twenty enjoyable little days in the season at £1 a day, a very reasonable figure when compared with the expenses of other forms of sport.

Of course, to be successful on so small a scale, the active goodwill of the farmers is essential; for if they be so disposed, they can keep a good watch over the ground while going about the ordinary routine of their business. Some of the labourers must be subsidized to keep the vermin down and care for the nests in spring, their efforts being best recognized by a system of paying for results, which, in the inevitable absence of constant supervision, ensures some attention being given to the interests of the shoot. Nor has the tenant of such a shooting any real cause to envy more fortunate people whose

sport is made easier for them. As he stretches his pleasantly wearied limbs to the fire, after a long and healthy day in the fresh country air, and recalls every shot, every manœuvre that went to make the bag of 5 or 6 brace of partridges with sundries enough to complete the 20 head, he is tasting to the full such pleasure as sport can afford ; nor does the crack shot who has killed his 40 birds in one drive experience one whit more satisfaction. Only let him rest content with what he has ; to dabble in big days may well breed discontent with the humbler results which formerly pleased him so well.

Certainly every novice should be trained to hunt and kill his game for himself in the earlier days of his shooting career. Just as a guardian should be averse to giving a young fellow £10,000 a year to play with, however well the state of his finances might seem to warrant it, so in the world of sport I feel convinced that it is a grievous error to allow any one still in his teens to take

his place among his elders and sample the easily-won results of what journalists term the 'modern battue,' without first serving his apprenticeship with the gun, learning how to rely on himself in the field, and not always to expect everything, except pulling the trigger, to be done for him by others as a matter of course. To feel that success or failure rests entirely with yourself, that you must work hard and use your wits to some purpose if you would realize but a modest total at the end of the day, develops in time a faculty for close and accurate observation which nothing else can give.

To the possessor of this faculty each day's shooting is a new lesson; he is for ever making mental notes for future use—at first perhaps consciously, but soon intuitively, till at last he comes to have something akin with the wild hunting animal, knowing without knowing why he knows, and failing to understand how others can miss seeing what to him is so obvious. Turn such a man loose in a

strange part of the country, and you will be amazed to see how quickly he will find his bearings, how naturally he will spot the likely places for a head of game. You would scarcely believe that he had never seen the place before; yet there is nothing really wonderful about his performance, only he knows something of the habits of beasts and birds, and attaches a meaning to all the simple little details which pass unnoticed by the unobservant.

In the ordered sequence of a regular 'shoot,' the working of this faculty is not so evident; only the good shot—as one would like to call him, though the term has of late been limited in common parlance to imply mere accuracy with the gun—seems always to be getting more than his fair share of the shooting. When you hear it commonly said of any one, "Oh, X is an extraordinarily lucky fellow, the birds always go to him," you may rest assured that the true reason lies less in chance than in a keen appreciation of opportunity.

There seem to be only two methods of shooting the partridge practised to any extent at the present time—driving, which is almost exclusively employed whenever the shooting is organized on anything like a large scale, and marauding with two or at most three guns and as many retainers when the material for driving is not available.

Occasionally, but only very occasionally now—so much have things altered in the last ten years—you may still meet with the long ordered line of guns, keepers, and beaters manœuvring about the country in the orthodox manner of other days. But ‘walking in line’ is nearly extinct, and surely few can be found to regret its disappearance. For what a dull performance it was at the best; easy of accomplishment, it is true, demanding little of the ingenuity and resource which make the successful conduct of a day’s driving almost as much fun without a gun as with one. But the shooting was a clumsy business,

and the endless repetition of the same end-on shot compared but poorly with the almost infinite variety of pace, angle, and curl that driven birds offer.

Early in the season the birds lay close, and there was little or no excuse for ever missing, and consequently as little pleasure in killing; later in the year when the cover was down, the birds rose wild, and were only difficult to kill because they were at the limit of killing range, and should not have been fired at at all. And the dreary monotony of the interminable turnip-field in which you solemnly wheeled, marched, counter-marched, and wheeled again for half the livelong day! As soon as you had finished one half of the field and passed on to the other, fresh birds were driven on to the old ground, and you had to retrace your footsteps and start the same old evolutions all over again, till at length it was with a heart-felt sigh of relief that you stumbled over the last turnip by the gateway and left the field you devoutly

hoped never to see again. For this form of shooting combined all the disadvantages incident to any formal shooting with an absence of any of its counterbalancing advantages. On all, so to speak, official days there is bound to be some feeling of constraint in the air; your host is at least preoccupied if not actively worried; the head-keeper—an old acquaintance—has scarce leisure to greet you, for he bears a heavy burden of responsibility; even your fellow-guns take the business somewhat seriously. On the bye day the trammels of discipline are relaxed; every one is at his ease, and though hard work and not loafing is still the order of the day, there is a happy feeling that it does not really matter if things do go wrong. In driving you look to the constant test of your skill as a marksman and the pleasure of seeing birds artfully handled to more than compensate you for any loss of individual freedom.

Such, at least, were the writer's im-

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pressions of walking partridges in line, once the age was past when to carry a gun in the field at all was a pure joy; his sympathies were all with the gentleman who was overheard to remark wearily to himself, as the party was leaving a perfect sea of turnips, where birds had been scarce and the 'shaws' soaking wet and near waist high—"Well, I've read that every star differeth in glory, but I'm d—d if each turnip does."

The methods of walking partridges in line call for little comment; the general principle is to collect the birds into good cover—usually turnips—by detached parties scouring the surrounding country, and walk the field up and down in narrow beats, either swinging the line right round when within wheeling distance of the fence, or else walking the field right out and filing along the fence to take ground for the next beat. The latter is the best plan, for many birds run on to the edge of the turnips and squat there till the line is close on to them,

fearing to cross the open headland. If it seems very desirable to push all the birds on in one direction, all the beats must be taken the same way, the party retracing their footsteps in file over the old ground between each beat.

The line should always walk across the drills, and include a little of the last beat in each new beat, for birds often run back on to the old ground. On the outer flank, which is moving over completely new ground, the gun should be on the outside, while on the inner flank one or two beaters should be 'making good' the edge of the last beat, outside the flank gun.

The line must often be slanted at an angle to suit the wind or the proximity of a boundary fence. The party must be well drilled, and the intervals and line preserved throughout the evolutions, the guns walking a pace or so in front of the line of beaters, and about 50 yards apart.

Picking up is a difficulty, and it

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simplifies matters considerably if the beaters on either side of a gun are taught to mark alternate birds as they are shot and put in a thin stick, carried for the purpose, to mark the exact fall of each bird, as the line comes up to the place. The line should never stand for long, but should move on, leaving any birds not picked at once to be dealt with by the dog-man—by which is meant a keeper whose sole duties for the day are picking up, having no concern with the beaters or the shooting—a most valuable adjunct, for have we not all kicked our heels for half an hour in the middle of a beat while the head-keeper's young retriever had an ill-timed lesson in the difference between a runner and a rabbit? Some system in picking up there must be, or much loss both of dead birds and of valuable time will inevitably result.

The pace set for the line must be varied to suit the occasion; in good cover it cannot well be too slow, but late in the season, when birds are wild

and cover scanty, the line must needs move at a fair round pace to get anywhere near the birds. At all times—as the military text-books lay down for the movements of all composite bodies—the pace of the whole is regulated by that of the slowest unit, and weight and age must be treated with some consideration in this respect.

‘Half-mooning’ is a pleasing variation of walking in line, demanding more skill in execution, both from guns and beaters, to make it a success. It is a manœuvre best suited for a country where large fields are the rule; and can be used to advantage in walking up heaths, commons, or any stretches of rough and uncultivated land. Where fields are small it is no easy matter to keep the proper formation, though this difficulty may be overcome to some extent by giving the beaters flags on long poles, so that they remain visible to each other even when a thick hedge intervenes.

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This is a capital way to outwit birds late in the season, for though they would not allow an ordinary line to get within a quarter of a mile of them, they will still lie like stones when once they feel that they are surrounded. The 'half-moon' is also a very useful expedient to fall back upon when a high wind makes successful driving near impossible; the guns shoot all the better for being on the move instead of shivering behind a hedge, and every bird flushed will give a sporting and difficult chance to some one as it swings back with the wind. To 'half-moon' a large field the line first deploys down the narrow end, covering the whole width of it. When all are in position, a signal is given from the centre of the line, and the two flank guns start walking down the outside fences, followed at regular intervals of 10 yards or so by each successive pair of beaters or guns in turn, the centre gun moving off last of all, when the half-circle is complete. The birds that rise wild as

the centre advances are dealt with by the forward guns on the flanks, while the centre guns—although they naturally cannot shoot at birds rising in front of them—get some very pretty shooting at birds breaking back from the horns of the crescent.

Whether undertaken on a large or a small scale—and the numbers engaged may be anything from six to sixty—the beaters must always be thoroughly drilled, and the guns such as may be absolutely relied on never to fire a dangerous shot under any circumstances, if the manœuvre is to be carried out both with success and safety.

Five minutes' explanation with a pencil and half a sheet of paper will show any but the stupidest of beaters the part he has to play. Without some such precaution, if the men do not understand clearly what is wanted of them, the whole performance rapidly degenerates into farce, which the presence of a gun who is at all likely to lose his head in

"TOWERED."

the heat of action may easily turn into tragedy.

The one disadvantage of this method, apart from the care in execution it entails, is that the birds cannot be pushed on in the direction that they are wanted to go with any certainty, for it may well happen that as many will squat and eventually go back as will rise wild and go forward.

In the good old days when turnips were sown broadcast, when hedges were rough and tangled, and the sickle left the stubble knee-deep after harvest, the pointer or the setter was an inevitable accompaniment of partridge-shooting. The trim hedges and close-shorn stubbles of modern farming give no scope for shooting over dogs on the manors of the south, yet nothing but the fact that they have gone out of fashion—reason enough for nine-tenths of the imitative human race—prevents the profitable employment of dogs in many a wilder country where good holding cover is always plentiful.

Even without keeping a regular kennel and following this beautiful sport in orthodox manner, most owners of partridge-shooting would still find a steady pointer a useful addition to their kennels. On big days the dog would not be of very much use, though even then one cannot see why he should not be employed to save the beaters from walking over birds in thick cover; while on all 'marauding' days, when two or three guns and as many keepers constitute the whole party, the presence of a good dog makes the work very much easier, provided that the coveys are not unduly wild. Perhaps a single covey is flushed and marked down in a big turnip-field late in the afternoon; there is not likely to be another bird there, for they will all be out on the stubbles. The dog would find this covey in a few minutes, whereas, wanting his assistance, the little party of humans must needs waste half an hour or more tramping up and down the field, before the birds are at last flushed

—if they are ever flushed at all, which is by no means certain, for so small a party covers a narrow front, round which there is plenty of room for the birds to run and get left behind.

The best stamp of dog for the work is not the stylish high-bred dog who dashes off at a rare pace and knocks up after an hour's work; a less showy dog is often better for the purpose, chosen not so much for his looks as for the points that bespeak good stamina—a dog well proportioned, light and strong for his size, with good shoulders and powerful legs. Apart from his staying powers, the pointer or setter should have a good nose and be well under control, and if he is taught to retrieve, so much the better. Such a dog will still be found to earn his keep well on most partridge estates.

While pointers and setters may still play an important part on bye days, to the retriever there must always fall the lion's share of work in partridge-shooting under modern conditions. For many

years the poor quality of the work done by retrievers in the field was a common cause of complaint in the shooting world. In this respect, it is very satisfactory to be able to record a marked advance of late years. This improvement is, without doubt, due to the beneficial influence exercised by the various Field Trials Associations. Field trials are often the subject of severe criticism; their advantages to sportsmen in general are often questioned, and it is pointed out that the education of a dog for ordinary sporting purposes has little in common with the special training which results in a win at the trials. This is probably to a certain extent true, under the keen competition that now prevails, but after all it really matters but little whether the individual field trial winner may or may not be a useful dog for practical purposes; the fact remains that the trials annually held all over the country have certainly been instrumental in raising the general standard of retrievers' work.

Most keepers now get the chance of watching the highly finished performances of champion dogs at the trials, and thus come to realize that the retriever is not such a fool after all, and that with care and method in breaking, the normal puppy will develop into a creature of surprising intelligence.

Dog-breaking is not really a difficult art, only it calls for more than the casual kicks and kindness which is all some can find time to bestow on their dogs. In training a retriever, the first essential is good treatment; the dog soon knows that his wants are well cared for, and the beginning of a good understanding is thus established. Then the trainer must instil the principles of implicit obedience; the dog must understand that he has found his master; not the master—incomprehensible to the canine mind—who at one time allows disobedience to pass unchecked, and at another inflicts condign punishment for the same mistake, but one who gently but firmly corrects each fault.

After that it is mainly a question of patience and attention on the part of the trainer ; most dogs are eager and keen to learn their work if only their master is consistent in his behaviour. In this consistency lies the whole secret of success. You are angry—the dog knows he has done wrong ; you are pleased—the dog understands that he has done well ; but if you appear angry because your liver is out of order, or pleased for some reason no more connected with the business in hand, the dog gives up trying to understand you as a bad job, and another ‘useless brute’ has been created through no fault of his own. Throughout a dog’s education, kindness should always be the rule, correction the exception. Before using the whip, pause to ask yourself—“Does the dog clearly realize why he is being beaten ?” If you do not feel sure of this, put the whip away ; for such chastisement can only do harm and induce a stubborn disposition. Should you ever beat a dog to ease your own feelings,

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and not with any view to his improvement—an event of far too common occurrence—you are distinctly not fit to have a dog at all.

The shooting season is *not* the time to train dogs; if the keeper has been at the pains to handle his young dog for even half an hour a day through spring and summer, working away quite quietly with an old glove or a handkerchief, when the autumn comes the dog will be ready to step straight into his proper place as a useful and trustworthy member of the shooting party.

Personally I must confess to having a strong aversion to shooting partridges under a kite at any time; it somehow seems that one is taking an unfair advantage in enlisting such adventitious aid to one's own efforts. When birds must be had for the pot—and it is then that the use of the kite is often recommended—they are surely never so wild that a few brace cannot be got by some happy combination of driving, walking, and stalking.

I can well remember sending out a friend on my own ground to try and get a brace or so for the house on a short winter's day. The fields were bare, the partridges very wild and not over-plentiful; yet by means of some very clever work by my friend, who was young, active, and a born poacher, the keeper, who was always full of resource on a 'mooching' day, and the old retriever, who would drive a turnip-field as well as half-a-dozen beaters, no less than 17 brace of partridges found their way into the bag before the end of the day.

As in every other form of shooting, little advice of any real practical value about shooting the partridge can be given on paper, which will assist the beginner to hold his own in the field. Every one can learn, if he will, to be a good sportsman—much misused word—even if he cannot always learn to be a good shot, and the standard of modern shooting is somewhat exacting. Much may be learnt about shooting at any of the shooting schools

which abound round London—marksmanship; much may be picked up by having to work hard with a good keeper for a small bag—woodcraft; and many hints may be taken by watching good performers at work in the field—form. The good sportsman—as we understand the word—should not only possess some modicum of these three qualities, marksmanship, woodcraft and good form, but he should in addition have learnt to be master of himself at all times, cheerful when things go wrong, making the best of rough and smooth, and always doing what he can to make the day a success. We are all apt to grumble too much if things are not exactly to our liking, forgetting that ‘grousing’ is not among the best traditions of British sport—as fine a code of honour as ever man devised.

The last few years have seen considerable changes in the standard patterns of our sporting guns. The modern nitro powders are almost entirely consumed

in the chamber, and the strength of the guns that are turned out now lies in the action and the breech, not some 8 inches down the barrels as was formerly the case. For the same reason long barrels are no longer necessary to ensure a good pattern, and the tendency now is to shorten the barrels to 28 inches to get a better balance. Improved steel barrels have superseded the Damascus, and are now the best and safest to use. For some reason almost all 'best quality' guns are now fitted with 'side-locks'; though 'box locks' are simpler in construction, and give a much pleasanter grip to the gun. There can be but one word of advice to any one who would buy a gun—pay a good price for a good article, and take care of it when you have got it. Cheap guns and cheap cartridges are not economical in the long-run, and the work of our leading gunmakers well repays its initial cost when tested by the wear and tear of years.

It remains an open question whether

it is more difficult to be a good shot at driven partridges than it was in the days of walking and shooting over dogs. So far as actual marksmanship is concerned, there can be no comparison, for the driven bird offers far more variety of pace, angle, and curve, and can at times be as difficult a mark as is ever presented to the gun. On the other hand, things are made very easy for the shooter, the art of killing the normal driven bird with fair certainty is largely a question of practice, while any one may sometimes find the simplest bird very easy to miss after tramping over anything between ten and twenty miles of turnips on a hot day in September.

So far as the actual difficulties of realizing every chance throughout the day are in question, there is in all probability very little to choose one way or the other. Yet, while there is small satisfaction to be derived from missing an easy chance because your foot is balanced on a turnip, or weariness makes

the gun slow in coming up, there are driven birds—swinging and curling with the wind—which are quite a pleasure to miss to the ordinary performer.

There is one hint about shooting which some may find worth considering as an aid to accuracy. You cannot point anything so true on an object as the extended forefinger; if you find it difficult to bring the gun up right on the mark, try shooting with the forefinger of the left hand extended down the groove of the rib below the barrels. It feels a little awkward at first, but you will soon get used to it; and while it in no way interferes with free and quick movement, at the same time it certainly helps to point the gun true without conscious aiming.

In conclusion, some mention must be made of the practice of 'tipping.' The custom of 'vails' is of immemorial standing, and we must submit to it with a good grace. Till very lately it was the common practice to give a large

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gratuity after a pheasant shoot, and base your donation on a much smaller scale after a day with the partridges. This was doubtless connected with the old idea that partridges required little attention; but as under modern conditions it takes just as much time and trouble to look after partridge ground properly as it does to rear pheasants, it is to be hoped that sportsmen will be more impartial in their recognition of the man who provides their sport.

The practice of tipping by results is almost universal, though, personally, I can see little justice in it. I would always rather use my own judgment as to whether the keeper has done his best with the means at his disposal and give accordingly, without considering whether the bag is 100 brace or 500.

In this connection it may not be amiss to remind those who find their pleasure in shooting that there is a society¹ in

¹ The Keepers' Benefit Society, 235 Regent Street, London, W. Secretary, Mr. William Whitmore.

existence for providing for the widows and families of gamekeepers who lose their lives in the protection of game, and for pensioning keepers who are no longer fit for work on account of old age or accident. 'The Keepers' Benefit Society is under the patronage of His Majesty the King, and many prominent sportsmen figure on the committee.

Such a deserving object should surely enlist the ready sympathy of sportsmen, and if only all who took out a game licence would subscribe even half-a-crown to the funds of the Society, the scope of its beneficial work would be vastly increased.

CHAPTER VIII

DRIVING

The broad rules which govern successful driving — The difficulties which arise in their application, and how they can be overcome—Beaters, flankers, and guns, their right disposition and duties — The cost of driving.

“ . . . the ‘guns’ being stationed in more or less concealment at one end of the field, . . . which is entered from the other by men or boys who deploy into line and walk across it making a noise.”

Thus the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Ninth Edition) on the subject of partridge-driving, and the operation sounds as simple as anything well can be ; but that this ease of execution is more apparent than real let any one bear witness who has ever tried to drive partridges on virgin soil, and is hardly likely to have forgotten the difficulties and disappointments attendant on

his initial efforts. To drive partridges as they should be driven is a high art, of which there are in all probability not more than a score of masters in this country who join to natural aptitude and long experience that infinite capacity for taking pains which alone can bring performance within measurable distance of perfection.

To drive partridges well enough for all practical purposes is within the reach of any man of average intelligence and energy if he be willing to take it up in a business-like manner.

Partridge-driving seems to have begun in a very small way about the middle of last century on Suffolk manors. Here certain sportsmen, no longer on the sunny side of fifty, found toiling all day after the evasive Frenchman a doubtful pleasure, and tried resting their weary limbs under a fence while the keepers walked round and brought the birds up to them. The idea once started soon spread through Suffolk, the great stronghold of the red-

RETRIEVER ON WOUNDED BIRD.

leg, but was pooh-poohed by all the wiseacres in the neighbouring county of Norfolk, where the leading lights of the shooting world continued to walk their birds in line, long after driving was a common practice across their borders.

At first the guns used to stand under the hedge with their backs to the drive, and shoot at the birds only after they had passed; this made shooting very awkward (as any one knows who has had occasion to try it through the exigencies of the line compelling him to stand right up to a fence which he could neither see over or through), and the chief objection urged against driving was the difficulty of hitting the birds. Then some one discovered how far easier and more effective it was to face the drive, take what birds he could coming towards him and swing round after the others, and the better results thus obtained gradually led to a general adoption of the new system.

In considering partridge-driving, some

comparison with the sister sport of grouse-driving is inevitable. So far as direct benefit to the ground is concerned, the comparison is somewhat unfavourable to the partridge, for while driving on a moor is beyond all doubt wholly beneficial to the stock and is often attended by a truly marvellous increase in the annual yield, no such striking results must be expected on partridge ground as the direct outcome of the adoption of driving. In the former case driving removes from the moor numbers of old cocks and barren hens, as destructive as the worst vermin, and never even seen by the guns when walking or shooting over dogs; in the latter instance, while some good must be done by killing old birds, it is not certain to what extent this influence affects the stock. It is true that the yearly totals killed at Holkham advanced from 3000 to 8000 within ten years of the adoption of driving—true, and somewhat difficult to explain; indeed to determine with any certainty how far driving may be

regarded as a factor in improvement, it would be necessary to have access to the records of two estates, the one regularly driven and the other walked in line or shot over dogs, but both under the higher methods of preservation (which may be roughly taken to mean that the whole work is carried out on a system, the nesting operations supervised, assisted, and regulated, and change of blood constantly effected). Comparison between these records would place the matter beyond doubt, but there seems to be no estate fulfilling these conditions on which driving is not the rule. Only a word of warning in this context: some have gone so far as to say that the Holkham totals "settle for ever the question as to the effect of driving upon the totals of a partridge manor";¹ the immeasurable good that can be wrought by systematic preservation is beyond all doubt, but for any to expect the adoption of driving in itself to work

¹ *The Partridge*, Fur and Feather Series, p. 218.

wonders on their ground is to court disappointment.

There is a fallacious theory that driving brings about a change of blood among partridges. For 'partridges' read 'grouse' and the theory can be accepted as fact, for grouse have not the homing instinct so strongly developed, and doubtless to some extent stay where the end of a day's driving finds them; but the partridge, on the other hand, is peculiarly local in its habits, and the same covey, or its shattered fragments, will after many drives always be found back on their own ground. A good way to kill off the old stock and retain the young is to drive early in the season on a *hot* day. After they have been hustled about a bit the young birds will not rise, and then practically all the birds that go over the guns will be old ones that the ground is better without.

In some respects it is easier to drive grouse than partridges. On a moor, when the right way of taking a drive has once

been discovered, the problem is finally settled; permanent butts are erected, and year after year the same performance can be repeated and improved on by taking hints from what happened the time before; the keeper can burn the heather to suit the drive, leaving good holding cover where the birds are wanted to settle, till, in all favourable weather, the success of the drive is assured, only varying in degree according to how the young birds have fared in the spring.

In planning out partridge-driving, on the other hand, there are no set pieces to rely on; the drive which proved so killing one season may not admit of repetition for four or five years, and with the normal rotation of crops each autumn presents a new set of problems in driving to be dealt with. Besides demanding more careful preparation of the proceedings, this makes it far more difficult to place the guns aright, for while in a grouse butt the occupant finds himself in a position carefully selected to meet his

requirements, the guns in a partridge drive have often to make the best of indifferent cover and a limited field of view. On the other side, it may be placed to the advantage of partridge-driving that its operations are not quite so much at the mercy of the wind. On a moor, if the long sweeping drive of the morning, which is intended to collect the birds for the shorter drives of the afternoon, is adversely affected by a wind from the wrong quarter, the rest of the day may quite well be completely spoilt; but in the more limited sphere of operations in the arable country, it is very rare that the fate of the whole day can turn on the result of a single drive.

A long purse can undoubtedly simplify the problems of partridge-driving; unfortunately it is equally the exception. If you happen to be a millionaire, and can afford to farm half your ground yourself, arrange to have other land cultivated to suit the shooting, plant belts to drive the birds over, and make remises wherein

they will be certain to seek shelter whenever they are disturbed, the element of uncertainty is practically eliminated. But the narrow margin on which most estates are managed in these hard times necessitates the application of strict economic principles, and rarely admits of any consideration of shooting requirements. So most of us have to make the best of things as we find them, and we must lay our plans all the more carefully, and leave as little as possible to chance. Unfortunately it is exactly in those parts of the country where natural disadvantages and comparative scarcity of birds make the closest attention to every detail essential to any measure of success, that careless and haphazard ways of going about the business seem most to prevail. For walking in line has quite gone out of fashion in the last ten years; driving is almost universal, and though in all great partridge centres long practice has made of it a finished art, there remain hundreds of estates in remoter districts

where driving, though regularly practised, does not receive a tithe of the attention it demands.

Flat and open country, with large fields and just enough high hedges to shelter the guns, is best suited for driving. Hilly and broken ground, or small fields, make it difficult to control the flight of the birds. When partridges, on being flushed, can at once see the whole line of beaters, they are far more likely to fly in the required direction than when a fold in the ground or a thick fence bounding a small field conceals all but the nearest beaters from view. Hilly country has its own advantages too; a greater variety of sporting and difficult shots are presented to the guns, and the owner can, as it were, eat his cake and have it too, for a fair stock of birds on 1000 acres of his ground will give two or three days' sport in the season, drive he never so wisely, while a skilful driver with the same number of birds on a like acreage in an easier country would leave little

more than a breeding stock at the end of a single day's shooting, killing perhaps two-thirds of the birds on the ground.

In planning out any day's driving, the first question which arises is how many birds there are on the ground, the answer to which can only be supplied by the keeper on the beat, who presumably has been using his eyes and — if his master has ever made him a very useful present — his field-glasses.

The task of forming anything like a correct estimate of the birds on a beat is certainly no easy matter. Appearances are deceptive, and many keepers will tell you that it cannot be done without working a pointer over the ground. But the fact remains that an intelligent and observant man, taking careful notes before the disturbance of harvest, can form an opinion which is accurate enough for all practical purposes. Then the drives are considered and settled on, each being treated as part of the general scheme, which is to collect all the birds from the

surrounding country into one place where they can be broken up and 'hammered.' Unbroken coveys always try to get back to their own ground when they are being pushed far away from home, but once the covey is broken up, the single birds will go wherever they are driven, and the bag mounts apace when partridges are once fairly broken up in good holding cover. The natural instinct is to be always pushing on to fresh ground and fresh birds; this is almost always a mistake, especially late in the day. Keepers do not always realize that a drive with only two scattered coveys in it will probably be more prolific in result, if the twenty birds come singly over the guns, than the alternative of a drive off new ground where there may be half-a-dozen unbroken coveys, which will most likely all come over in a swarm and escape with the loss of two or three birds. As a general rule, unless a beat has to be spared in a bad season, it pays best to make the work of the afternoon as far as

possible a repetition of the drives of the morning.

The drives should be finally settled on the ground, and the various lines for the guns determined *in situ*. In this difficult question of placing the guns nothing should be left to chance. If it be left to an unexperienced keeper to settle where the guns are to stand, he will probably place them scattered about in 'likely spots' down the whole side of a field; while if the guns are simply asked to line down a fence from a fixed point, they are sure to divide the distance unequally, and in either case some guns will be found to be 60 or 80 yards apart. With such intervals, the number of birds which must be wounded and lost in a day is not pleasant to think of, for birds coming low between two guns are almost out of shot before they have safely cleared the line, while others coming up to an unguarded part of the fence swing down it to pass through the line at an acute and difficult angle. A little

method in arrangement easily disposes of this danger ; guns should be not much more than 45 yards apart, so that each may have a fair chance of killing every bird clean that comes to him, and of stopping any wounded bird that is carrying on from his neighbour. This is most important when birds are scarce, for then the odd covey that can be put over the line must give a chance to two or three guns, instead of sneaking through a wide gap without offering a fair shot to any one.

So in planning the drives, you have only to reckon the number of guns there will be, allow 45 yards for each, and thus determine the limits of the line. If you have six guns, you can reckon that they will cover 270 yards of fence, and it only remains to decide which 270 yards can be most profitably utilized. The placing of guns is not an easy matter ; they must have cover, and the hedge you wish to line may provide none ; they must be in a straight line, and the hedge often turns at an angle most inconvenient to your

dispositions ; or the obvious place for the guns may be out in the open without any fence at all handy. Some form of temporary butt or shelter may then be put up, preferably a little time before the shooting ; even then, if there happen to be grazing stock or horses in the same field, these erections will be demolished at once, and then some form of portable shelter must be resorted to. These improvisations are never wholly satisfactory ; they inevitably flap about in a high wind, and having no chameleon-like qualities, must, in unfavourable surroundings, appear to the birds as a somewhat novel object in the landscape ; only they are infinitely better than no cover at all, which is often the only alternative ; for nothing turns birds so quickly as the pallid countenance of man, besides which some freedom of movement, when birds are coming, is essential to good shooting. The shelter illustrated here¹ has the

¹ These screens were supplied to the writer's order by Messrs. Hellis & Sons, 119 Edgware Road, London,

merits of being comparatively inconspicuous, simple to put up and take

THE PORTABLE SCREEN IN USE

down, strong in construction yet easily

from whom they may be obtained. The writer may add that he has no interest, financial or otherwise, in their sale.

SCREEN FOLDED FOR TRANSPORT

carried about — the latter an important consideration. It measures 4 ft. 6 in. by 5 ft., and weighs about $3\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. The screen is of light canvas stained in two different shades of neutral tint, and is carried on thin lancewood shafts, supported by guy ropes of fine piano wire.

Bracken, branches, or long grass may be easily fixed to the top of the screen through loops provided for the purpose, breaking the outline and assimilating the whole more closely to its natural surroundings. Where wattled hurdles are available this difficulty may be met by fixing stakes in position the day before

THE LAST DRIVE OF THE SEASON.

the shoot, so that a keeper can put up six or seven hurdles in a few minutes, slipping iron rings over the end of the hurdle and the fixed stake as shown in the diagram.

In settling where the guns are to stand when lining a hedge, you must first decide whether it is best for the guns to stand right up to the hedge or right back from it; all the places may not be equally favoured, and if left to their own devices, there often arises difference of opinion between some who would like to stand back and others who find that considerations of cover demand that they should be close up to the fence; this generally results in an unhappy compromise; every one feels cramped and uncomfortable, which fact is duly reflected in their shooting.

A few feet—I had almost said inches—backwards or forwards makes the whole difference to the ease and execution of a gun, and so everything points to the necessity of providing beforehand

some clear indication of the exact position that each gun is supposed to occupy in the drive.

The distances between guns must often be varied to suit the exigencies of the drive. Thus the diagram shows the position of the guns for a drive over a heavily timbered fence. The small letters show the pegs as they would be were they marked out by rule at regular

intervals. But the gun at 'c' would get little or no shooting, for birds always avoid flying over the high trees; so this part of the line may be safely disregarded, and the guns placed as shown by the capital letters. Attention to such details makes all the difference to the general success of the day. However well they may see where they ought to be standing, it is impossible for individual guns to alter their position to suit their own convenience, and their proper disposition

can only be ensured by arranging things beforehand.

The guns should be numbered from right to left, changing places after each drive to give every one his turn of the shooting; for if the driving be good, the keeper will aim at putting every bird over the centre of the line, and should the three central guns not get the bulk of the shooting, there is probably somewhat amiss with the driving. It is usual for the guns to move two places each change when their numbers exceed four; then no one has to take outside numbers twice in succession. So, in marking out the drives, a cleft stick with a card bearing the number in the line serves as a ready guide to all, and prevents the confusions and misunderstandings which otherwise will be found inevitable.

The lie of the ground is often not allowed sufficient importance in determining where to place guns. There seems to be an almost universal tendency to insist on the line being marked out on

the ground by a hedge or wall. It is quite surprising to find how slight and unnoticed a depression will completely conceal a line of guns, and, in undulating country, when the fence of the field you are driving happens to be awkwardly placed for shooting from, a comparatively ineffective drive can often be turned into a very killing one by moving the line a short distance forwards or backwards and making use of a dip in the ground, or by putting up a line of butts 30 yards behind the offending fence.

A keeper is naturally inclined to devote the whole of his thoughts to his own part of the business, and is apt to think that if the birds are brought over the guns, it is not *his* fault if the pick up at the end of the drive is small, forgetting that no gun can be expected to do himself justice if he is placed where he can neither see well nor move freely. Of course if you have a tall belt of firs, a narrow valley, or a railway cutting on the ground, you should dodge the drives

about to make full use of these natural advantages; for when the birds are 'well up,' not only do they give the prettiest of shooting, but the general execution is much improved, the guns then being able to take the birds when nearest to them, without having to consider the safety of their neighbours.

After planning out the ten or twelve drives for the day, having in view a calm day or a continuance of the prevailing wind, you have then to face the possibility of one from the opposite direction. To meet this contingency some alternative plan of campaign is necessary, for the importance of wind as a factor in the day's proceedings cannot well be over-estimated, and to reckon without it is indeed flying in the face of providence. The difficulty is best overcome by having two trysts for the morning, one for normal conditions and the other to fall back on if the wind shifts to another quarter in the interim. The prearranged drives can then still be made use of, only

altered in sequence to suit the changed order of the day. Besides this, you must always be prepared to depart from your carefully elaborated schemes if the birds do not fall in with them; it is like war on a small scale, the enemy's army is your true objective, and his cities and strongholds, represented in this case by fields of turnip, mustard, or rape, lose all true value and remain only a snare and a delusion when the birds have betaken themselves elsewhere. This seemingly trivial point demands and deserves close consideration, for it is not an easy move in the game to depart boldly from the ordered sequence of events, and turn aside after a big lot of birds that have gone the wrong way. Not easy, but almost always worth while, unless you have great numbers of birds all over the ground; for the coveys have probably been broken up by going once over the guns, and scattered birds are what make a killing drive. The difficulty of this, as of every other manœuvre in driving, is

vastly increased if you are working in a country where grass-fields abound and turnips and stubbles are few and far between. Your birds are then fewer and harder to find, and you cannot well afford to pass on and leave a big lot of birds behind you ; on the other hand, the field of your operations is vastly increased when a mile is the normal distance between turnip-fields ; your lunch is at some farm-house perhaps nearer two miles than one from where the bulk of the birds have gone, and it will indeed have to be a movable feast, in more senses than one, if the shooting considerations are to come first.

The writer speaks feelingly of this not uncommon type of country, where it takes perhaps 1500 acres, containing only some half-dozen turnip-fields, to make a day's driving, for these are the conditions in his own county in the west of Scotland, where he may claim to have been the pioneer of driving. Here redoubled vigilance is necessary to keep your birds,

and as every grass-field is studded with whinny knowes and rushy hollows, the way birds get 'squandered' and lost between the drives is marvellous. To any who have to deal with similar conditions; it may be useful to point out that some success may be assured by handling the birds very carefully in the turnips. Having collected every possible bird into a large field of good holding cover—and in our damp climate the turnips grow high and thick—the beaters move very slowly down the field with the flanks pushed well in advance, almost reaching the line of guns before the centre is half-way down the field. If all goes well, when the line of beaters has come within 80 yards of the end of the field, most of the coveys are still between them and the guns; these birds, having heard the shooting in front, and the men passing them on either flank, now become aware of the beaters coming on behind them, and feeling completely hemmed in, almost invariably squat. Then the line coming

on very slowly, and working every inch of the cover, flushes each bird singly. Such a drive takes time, but we have often opened the day by killing 60 or 70 head at one stand, where we should certainly not have realized a quarter as much had we taken the drive at an ordinary pace and flushed the coveys entire. In a rough country, where you cannot make certain of seeing your birds again, this method seems almost the only way of realizing at least one lot of birds, and with due precaution will be found to answer, so long as there is enough cover left, even as late as the beginning of December.

Another constant danger is the wind. In autumn and winter the south-west wind is always with us, or within easy reach; and while this means that every bird he kills will give the moderate performer a glow of satisfaction, it does add considerably to the difficulties of handling the birds to know that when you flush a covey it will probably swing

a mile with the wind before thinking of settling again. In a country where three fields out of four are cultivated, about 800 acres of ground carrying a fair stock should make a day's driving. Two sets of beaters, if they are under good discipline, very materially increase the amount of ground you can cover, for if their movements are well timed, one drive then follows hard on the heels of the next, the second lot of beaters being already in position for the ensuing drive, while the first drive is still in progress. If the command is then still to be vested in one man's hands, he should be mounted, or time will be wasted between the drives.

With one set of beaters, it is well to make a square of the drives, four drives each at right angles to the last, the fourth bringing you back to where you originally started. The same drives can then be taken in the reverse order, giving eight drives in all, each helping the next, and all using the same birds. A detached party should always be working ahead,

helping the following drive by bringing in all the birds off the surrounding fields into the turnip-field that is to be driven. The drives cannot well be too short in the earlier part of the season; later on in the year the birds take much longer flights, and more extended drives are advisable.

Every endeavour should be made to get the beaters interested in the work; nor is this hard, if they once get to understand the game, for partridge-driving can be great fun to every one who takes part in it, even without a gun, and men and boys, if they once get keen about the business, will drop the idea of doing as little as they can to earn their half-crown or five shillings, and work with a will to bear their share in outmanœuvring the birds. The human voice is a fatal adjunct to partridge-driving, and any vocal efforts on the part of keepers or beaters must be checked at the outset. 'Clappers,' however, are sometimes very useful, especially early in the season, for they

help to keep the birds moving on in front of the beaters and not rising at their feet and turning back. The beater carries his clapper in one hand, and shakes it, and the result of the whole line using them at once is like the twittering of ten thousand sparrows. The chief difficulty with untrained beaters is to induce them to keep the crescent formation which is so necessary to successful driving; each man likes to keep in line with his neighbours on either side, and it takes time and trouble to impress on them the right way they should go. They must also understand how important it is to keep their proper intervals; gaps in the line are what birds are always seeking to find when they are averse to facing the music in front, and want to break back.

It is true economy to deal generously with your beaters; not as regards money, for in fairness to your neighbours the regular tariff obtaining in the district must always be adhered to; nor indeed would any increase of wage be half so

much appreciated as those small provisions for their comfort which bespeak a kindly consideration for their welfare. A bowl of hot broth, or a dish of steaming stew after a long and cold morning, puts fresh heart into a man, and a cup of tea and a bun when the day is over are very grateful to lads with a long trudge home in the dark before them. Besides these attentions to the inner man, stout and serviceable smocks cost little, and issued to the beaters in cold and wet weather, form a welcome supplement to clothes often thin and little suited for the business in hand. Such little provisions for their well-being, and a friendly word of thanks after a good day's work, go far to promote a general feeling of goodwill to your sport; and it is a pity that some would seem to look on their beaters only as so many machines they have hired for the day.

To flank a partridge drive properly is no easy matter; hedges or a fold in the ground often intervene to impede the

view, and as flankers must in many cases be placed close in to the drive if they are to act at all, they have to be very careful not to expose themselves, lying 'doggo' till the critical moment when one well-timed wave of the flag turns the covey which was edging out of the drive back over the guns. Unlike poets, flankers are made and not born, and it is quite useless to expect a man to flank a drive by the light of nature; for a man's natural instinct seems to be to plant himself solidly in a commanding position, where it is to be supposed every bird in the field is intended to notice him and say to itself: "Ah, I see a man on that knoll; I shall not fly that way if these clodhoppers behind disturb me again." In point of fact, if birds can see the man with the flag all the time, they treat his efforts with indifference when other danger becomes pressing and they wish to quit the scene in his direction. So the flanker must be taught that his duty for the most part is to remain completely hidden, and only to appear as a sudden

and startling bar to further progress when birds are thinking of breaking. He must refrain from over-flanking, a common and annoying practice, remembering that, in the interests of later drives, anything is better than that birds should go back. Thus it may often be too risky to attempt to flank birds which are going forward, although they may be going to pass wide of the guns. In the interests of their health, flankers should make sure that the guns realize where they are placed before the drive begins, especially if the line happens to be standing up to a low fence. It is usually best and safest for all concerned that the flankers should accompany the guns and be posted by the host. Sometimes, and especially in districts where the fields in crop are at all widely separated, a flanker, very carefully placed well behind the line, may be a useful adjunct to the drive ; besides helping the birds on the way they are wanted to go, he can make himself very useful as a marker, noting carefully where birds are

making for, and the exact spot where any cripples or towered birds fall.

It is well to avoid ever driving into turnips, or from one turnip-field into another adjacent one, for the difficulty of picking up the birds after the drive then becomes serious in any case, and well-nigh insuperable if the roots are high and the scent bad. The picking up must always be systematic; a tally kept of the total number of birds seen by the guns to fall at each drive, so that no time may be lost in looking for birds already gathered by some one else, and no little heaps of slain forgotten and left under the hedge. If the guns have not all dogs of their own, keepers must be specially told off to stay with the guns all day and be responsible for the disposition of the slain. The keepers in charge of the driving line have no time to bother their heads about picking up dead birds at all. As soon as the drive is in, they have all their work cut out to collect the beaters, and get them started at once for the next drive.

"THE VALLEY OF DEATH."

In theory the beaters should never be allowed to appear on the scene at all while picking up is going on. They are only an unmitigated nuisance, taking the wind from the dogs and interfering with their work, and casually picking up birds unknown to any one, which same birds are then diligently sought for in vain by the shooter. In practice, however, it may be as well to allow the drivers to come forward and pick up the *dead* birds. Their presence must then be tolerated on the ground that it is a distinct satisfaction to them to pick up some of the bag, without which the day's walking becomes very dull.

When the bag can be reckoned by the hundred, some attention to the question of transport is necessary, so that the birds may arrive home cool and in good condition. Some light form of game van with a cover should be employed, well ventilated, and designed so that the birds can be quickly yet neatly hung up, and not just dumped down to get all crushed and heated in transit. The simplest plan

is to put the birds straight into 'carriers,' each holding twenty or thirty birds, and fasten the carriers straight into the cart; some method of hooking them up being easy to devise. The total may then readily be reckoned at any time by checking the number of full carriers, the bag may be well displayed at lunch time by simply lifting the full carriers out and propping them up on standards, and all unnecessary handling of the birds is thus avoided.

While on still days the crescent formation is the best for the driving line to adopt, whenever the wind is blowing with any force from a flank or against the drive, the greatest care is necessary to adopt an appropriate formation. The first diagram shows the method of driving a turnip-field with a cross head-wind. The whole secret of the drive is to force the birds into the up-wind corner of the field. Once this is accomplished — and it is possibly the most difficult manœuvre in driving, demanding careful and skilful

handling of the line—all then rests with the flanker. If he plays his part well, almost every covey can be sent over the line in a slanting direction, offering a chance to each gun in turn as it swings down the line. A possible objection to this drive would be that the birds were driven away from the direction in which they were wanted to go; but with a strong side-wind they would probably swing round with the wind in any case, even if they could be brought straight over the guns.

Diagrams 2 and 3 show the same field, this time driven against a head-wind—a manœuvre only possible after the ground has been filled by several down-wind drives. The second diagram shows how fatal the normal crescent formation would prove in this case. The results of moving with the flanks thrown forward would be an ill-timed exposition of the advantages of the half-moon method for walking up-wind, and the bulk of the birds would inevitably go straight back over the

driving line. The third diagram shows the right way to carry out this drive; the flanks are hardly advanced at all, the line being practically straight; no flankers are posted. A few birds will probably turn straight back over the beaters' heads, but the bulk of the birds—homeward bound—may be relied on to go straight over the guns.

The guns should always do their share towards making the day a success, by paying a reasonable amount of attention to the work in hand. They can help matters considerably by responding readily to instructions and generally showing some interest in the proceedings. Nothing is more annoying to a host who is anxious to get on to the next drive than to find that some couple have wandered off in quite the wrong direction, deeply engaged in earnest discussion, and entirely oblivious of the flight of precious time. Between drives, guns ought to be carried unloaded; shooting at odd birds when moving to a new stand is

dangerous work and should never be allowed. Partridges have a marked dislike to the human voice, and the host's injunction to move quietly into their places should be strictly complied with by his guests.

The fourth diagram shows a successful morning's driving off some 500 acres of well-cultivated land with 600 to 700 birds on it, six guns and about thirty beaters taking part. As will be seen on the plan, the first two drives are sweeping-in manœuvres to collect the birds, and helped by the wind should result in the mass of the birds being pushed across the road during the second drive. The guns then occupy the hedge marked as 'final position.' Half the beaters bring the roots next the road over the guns, while the other half get round the far side of the farther root field. The guns then face about, now lining the other side of the fence for the fourth drive; this is the first drive with an adverse wind, but the birds are all making homewards and

should come on well. By now, however, the birds must have suffered pretty heavily, and so new birds are pressed into

the service. The first lot of beaters have crossed the main road and are bringing up all the fields from the boundary fence, the guns resuming their places of the

third drive. Finally, the second lot of beaters repeat the fourth drive, the newly broken birds of the preceding drive being again made use of. There are no features of peculiar interest in this example; only it serves as an instance of ground worked on the right lines. The long drives are the two first ones, which bring the mass of the birds down-wind, collecting them on ground where they can be 'harried.' Then in the last two drives a new lot of birds are brought in without losing 'grip' of the broken and scattered coveys of the previous drives. In a case like this the day must be divided into two parts, each complete in itself. Where possible, it is generally better to make the whole day one campaign, and end in the evening where you started in the morning, but naturally local conditions do not always admit of this. The only other point in this example which calls for remark is that it is not advisable, where it can be avoided, to drive several times over the same fence, for the birds

in time realize the danger zone and avoid it.

Having once started regular driving on a shooting, any one who would improve his methods from year to year must be prepared to admit himself in the wrong, and never rest till he has worried out for himself where the mistake lay. Nothing is more hopeless for future prospects than to find—and the case is common—that the man who has just committed errors, palpable to any one with the most superficial knowledge of the subject, is wrapped in an impenetrable fog of self-deception. The wind, the birds, the weather, or the ground must all, in varying degree, bear the blame for want of success; when all else fails, ‘bad luck’ will be called upon, like charity, to cover the multitude of sins. Only the true causes, lack of method and disregard of the few and simple rules, will never be given a second’s consideration in this complacent mind. ‘Gie us a guid conceit o’ oorsels’ is not the spirit

in which to undertake to inaugurate a novel and difficult practice; a consciousness of one's own ignorance at the outset is essential to any real progress, and if the beginner be only honest with himself, he will be surprised how often he can bring the failures home to his own door.

Of course there are times when things will go wrong in spite of the best-laid plans; how bitter the disappointment, then, to the right sort of keeper when he sees the weather taking charge, and all control passing from his hands, let one instance serve to show. It was an October day in a northern county; the estate was small, but the outlook hopeful for a grand day with the partridges, for the dispositions were beyond reproach, the beaters intelligent and skilfully handled, the guns well placed, and the very boundary fences had been carefully 'flagged' their whole length with old newspapers. But no sooner was the sport fairly begun than the wind rose

and the rain fell. Right manfully did the keeper struggle on against adversity, though all to no purpose ; every covey that rose was swept across the boundary over the beaters' heads, and no handling of the birds was possible. After lunch the host called for the keeper, to discuss whether any further shooting was worth while. But the keeper was not forthcoming, and it was only after a prolonged search that he was discovered dead drunk and peacefully slumbering in the seclusion of a ditch. Let it not be imputed to him for a sin ; he was a temperate man in the ordinary walks of life, only the trials of the morning had proved too much to bear, and obliged to own himself defeated, he had sought and found a merciful oblivion in the best part of a bottle of neat whisky. Without wishing to advocate such extreme measures, it may be said that the success of the day very largely depends on the organizer taking his duties seriously.

Another natural and insidious error

is for the native to fancy that he alone knows all about the peculiar race of partridges that live at Snoozleby, or whatever his place may be called. The victim of this delusion will read all the collected wisdom of the experts on the subject, and then, without putting their precepts into practice, will confidently assure you that—"It's all very well for those fellows in Norfolk and Cambridge, where they have—enumerating a list of supposititious advantages denied to Snoozleby—but it can't be done here; I know what our ground is, and I know what our partridges can do" (they always fly farther or run faster than any one else's birds, or else just put their foot down and decline to be driven).

There certainly are a few, very few, countries where partridges can hardly be driven to advantage, and then the reason is patent and needs no explanation. Not every type of country can be driven with the same success, but almost every stretch of arable land well handled can

show sport good enough to warrant the attempt.

This singling out of individual localities as extraordinary exceptions to the general rule is very common in districts where driving is still a novelty, so, for the benefit of any who would lay this flattering unction to their souls, let us conclude the chapter by propounding a short list of rules, which, carefully and intelligently followed, should, at least in our opinion, ensure success almost anywhere, given enough partridges to drive and scope of ground to drive them on, but the neglect of which will most assuredly mean failure on any ground, be it the best-stocked manor in Norfolk, or only some distant lairdship in the north country.

1. The keeper must have a good idea as to the numbers, distribution, and natural flight of the birds on his ground before the shooting begins ; before ground is shot over he must also arrange with the farmers that the ground is kept quiet for the day.

2. The day must be carefully planned out beforehand with due regard to questions of time and space, and there must be alternative plans to adopt in case of a contrary wind, for each drive must help to collect the birds, and therefore to start at the down-wind end of the ground can never be right.

3. Birds must be driven and not ground; having found the birds, the main object is to keep and use them; therefore where the birds go the drivers must follow, even though this means departing from the prearranged plan.

4. The beaters must be under control and know something of their work. Either all or none must carry flags; an odd flag here and there is worse than useless. They must keep their intervals, but must be ready to move in any formation. For there is no one golden rule as to the shape of the driving line; it must be continually varied to suit the wind, the lie of the ground, and the way the birds would like to go.

5. There must be a keeper in the centre of the beaters, who can easily control their movements by a distinctive flag; the beaters must understand his signals, so that he can bring on or hold back any portion of the line at will. If a working system of signals cannot be arrived at, the keeper in charge must be allowed to use his voice. This prerogative he should exercise as rarely as possible, for shouting or unnecessary noise during the progress of a drive is well calculated to spoil the whole manœuvre.

6. Some one, preferably the host, should always be with the guns, and show each one exactly where he has to take his stand; otherwise there is sure to be confusion.

7. The question of how to pick up the birds after the drive and who is to do it, must be settled beforehand. The beaters must not be relied on for this work, for, though it may be sometimes advisable to allow them to pick up for

a few minutes in order to stimulate their interest in the proceedings, yet as a rule they should be well on their way to take up their position for the next drive while picking up is still going on. Neglect of this point often means waste of many precious half-hours in an already short enough day.

8. Until the driving has been reduced to a working system, owner and keeper must hammer away at mastering the rudiments of the business together; the former will have cheerfully to leave his gun at home, resign his place in the line, and personally supervise the driving and the beaters, until it is clear that the business is started on the right lines.

If any one can honestly say that he has given driving a fair and extended trial, observing strictly these cardinal rules, and still found it a failure, there is fair reason to suppose that his ground is not 'drivable'; but a few casual essays in a new and difficult practice warrant no such off-hand conclusion.

"PARTRIDGE COUNTRY."

The cost of driving varies beyond all power of striking any average. The rent of partridge land may be sixpence or three shillings an acre, the figure being often determined by considerations quite foreign to the actual shooting it affords. Accessibility, social amenities, the popularity of a district, all help to influence the rent.

But in every case it is clear that economy and efficiency are closely allied, and the shooting accounts should be kept in business-like fashion, however generous the scale of expenditure. In a quiet district it might be reckoned that a shooting affording six days of fair driving would cost about £500 a year, but any such estimate must be an uncertain guide; nor is it possible to give any details of expenditure without laying oneself open to severe criticism from those to whom the figures did not happen to appeal.

CHAPTER IX

OLD MICHAELMAS DAY

AN hour after dawn on Old Michaelmas day; deep silence broods over all, and a dense white mist blots out each feature in the landscape, holding everything wrapped in its chill embrace.

Not a leaf stirring, till presently a careful tread becomes audible, and the stalwart form of an underkeeper looms up through the mist, muffled up in heavy cape and woollen scarf against the cold air of morning, a stout buckthorn staff in his right hand, showing that he is not unprepared to meet any possible emergency. This is his domain, and he is making a last round to satisfy himself that all is well on his beat, before the day which is even now breaking, when

he has high hopes of showing such sport as shall more than repay him for the long months of hard work, ceaseless vigil, and many anxieties which have gone before.

He feels his way up the hedgerow, till he reaches the gateway giving into the lane beyond, where he pauses to light a consoling pipe, and is just going to vault the gate, when some distant sound catches his quick ear, and he stops to listen under shelter of the tall hedge, while the sun breaks through the mist, which streams upward into the still air in fantastic wreath and swirl.

Many a glimpse of the rarer sides of wild life comes within the keeper's ken as he takes his walks abroad, such time as most honest folks are safely abed. This morning it is the silver grey form of a badger, whose stealthy approach would have escaped the hearing of any but those whose habits of life make them almost uncannily aware of each rustling leaf and its meaning, and who now passes

along the hedge with the queer distinctive rolling gait of his race, homeward bound from some midnight foray. Though no true vegetarian — and as like as not a family of young rabbits have gone to promote that well-fed appearance he presents—still with regard to game proper he has a fairly clean record, and the keeper views him with a lenient and comparatively friendly eye, checking the hostile demonstrations—low growling and rising hackles—of his dog with a muttered “Down, Nero, you fool.”

As the mist rolls slowly away, a fair countryside comes into view. In the near foreground meadows soaked and glistening with dew, each bush and briar covered with the myriad webs of gossamer spiders, delicate threads of lacework shining in all the colours of the rainbow. All around lies a wide stretch of arable country, a land of chalky fallow and broad bare stubbles, of copse and common, heavy wood and rolling down. To the west, where a wide-spreading valley, green

and peaceful, opens between the rising downs, a long line of grey willows and a glimmer of diamond-clear water bespeak the presence of the historic Test, true Mecca of the dry-fly fisherman.

Beyond again rise the ridges and heaths of the Forest, where Saxon Thanes hunted the wolf and the bear or ever Norman William came to England, now glorious in their autumn livery of russet brown and tawny gold.

The old-fashioned hedge, under which our keeper is standing—a tangled jumble of hazel and sloe, elder and hawthorn—bends over a winding green lane, where bracken and briar encroach on the dis-used roadway, which leads with many a devious turning down the hill to the hollow below, where the old-world houses of the little hamlet, with chalk-built walls, timber frames, and quaint overhanging upper stories, cluster—each askew to its neighbour—round the brick and flint tower of the ancient church.

Time's hand falls light on this quiet

backwater of life ; little change can there be, one would think, since Royalist and Roundhead camped and fought on the downs above, where a century later the youth of Hampshire did battle on the earliest of cricket grounds.

In the distance, a line of blue hills tells of a higher sweep of downland, though a fleecy pall of mist still hangs over the ancient capital of England and hides the towers and spires of Wykeham from view.

“I’ve seen worse days for the job,” is the keeper’s grudging acknowledgment to the clerk of the weather, as he takes his way down the lane, through the silent village, to where the smoke of a hidden cottage rises behind a dark patch of wood on the ridge of down beyond.

As he follows the path through the wood, he stops for a minute before a gnarled and massive oak, surveying with a grim complacency the well-filled ‘larder’ which adorns its trunk. Many a good day’s work has gone to fill those ranks of mummies, hard and dry as

specimens in a museum, for minute 'hoppers' clean up all the flesh, leaving only skins and bones. Stoats and weasels occupy the lower rows of the collection, mere shrivelled remnants to the casual observer, yet serving to recall the story of their departure from this life to their quondam pursuer. This family of young stoats met their death while feasting on the body of their lately defunct mother; that old fellow next door was surprised while engaged in deluding an unwary blackbird by turning somersaults down a bank, a well-directed shot bringing the performance to a close. Above hang lines of crows, magpies, jackdaws, and sparrow-hawks, with a single kestrel who developed an unhappy taste for young pheasants in the rearing field, and was reluctantly condemned, the 'wind-hovers,' as a rule, having earned a clean bill of health. A row of cats' heads, staring hideously down on the visitor, complete the tale of trophies. Other cats there were, but they do not figure here, nor

does any dog appear in the collection—only the observant might note that the keeper's cabbages are of a luxuriant growth.

Turning from these silent witnesses of his woodcraft, frantic demonstrations of joy from a more youthful generation of Neros greet his approach; the pink-eyed ferret looks expectantly through the narrow bars of its hutch, and as he clicks to the wicket gate behind him, and passes through the little garden, still bright with dahlias and Michaelmas daisies, to his neat cottage home, with its deep thatch and pendent eaves, a savoury smell of cooking tells him that the 'missus'—ever mindful of his wants—is already up and about and will soon have a heroic breakfast of bacon and potatoes ready where-with to comfort the inner man.

Two hours later the white-smocked beaters are tramping up the lane from the village, with many a rustic joke and cackle of laughter, to open the campaign against the partridges, who, little suspecting the

grim entertainment provided for them, have just finished their morning meal on the stubbles, and are now contemplating a period of peaceful retirement.

But with all this you have little to do ; the sun is high up in the heaven before you can make up your mind to rise, betaking yourself with much splashing and singing (why does every one, however mute a swan at other times, sing, whistle, or hum in his bath?) to the cold tub, whence you presently emerge in a glow of rude health to don your lightest shooting suit—for a glance through the open window assures you of a real day of Indian summer—hobnail shoes and spats, and descend the carved oak staircase of the old Jacobean manor-house wherein you are staying. The gong is just sounding for family prayers, but the easier manners of the present day no longer enforce universal attendance, so you slip out through a side door, and take a short but quick walk through the old-world ‘pleasaunce,’ where flaunting peacocks

and heathen gods, cunningly fashioned in yew, remain an enduring monument to some forgotten professor of the topiary art.

The second gong announcing breakfast finds you no laggard to its summons, for you are young and very keen to hold your own to-day with your elders and betters, and are feeling all the better this morning for having gone easy at dinner and early to bed last night, resisting the insidious attractions of bridge, and only staying in the smoking-room long enough to enjoy one modest pipe, while you conned the pages of the house game-book with a view of elucidating the chances of the next day. Breakfast over, you fetch your retriever from the stables, where he has been housed, and join the rest of the party on the lawn. Places are drawn, and you find that yours is an outside number—no bad thing, for it will give you a chance of finding your form before undertaking more serious business in the centre of the line.

Ten minutes in a well-appointed car

takes you to the scene of action, and soon the straggling procession of guns, loaders, and keepers are making their way across a broad meadow towards the row of pegs that marks the line for the first drive. "The drivers ain't round yet, so there's no hurry," says your host, as he points you out your place; but you are very conscious that your chances as an outside gun may well be few and far between, and that the odd bird or covey that the drivers may disturb on their way round are by no means to be despised. So you make your arrangements without further delay; your servant, an expert loader, crouching behind you, and your dog comfortably settled some ten yards off, where he may be relied on to sit like a statue till his turn for action comes. You give your guns a look over before they are loaded, slip a few cartridges into your own pocket—just in case any hitch occurs in the loading—and balanced on your shooting stick all ready for action, proceed to take your bearings.

Thirty yards in front of you rises the tall dense hedge that the guns are lining ; your place is on the left of the six guns, and between you and your neighbour the tops of a row of stunted hedgerow trees are just visible, marking the dividing line of the turnips which are going to be driven, and the stubble which you cannot see, but know to be in your immediate front.

Your vigilance is soon rewarded. The other guns are still chatting with their neighbours, when a low whistle from the front makes you jump up from your seat, shove up the safety bolt of your Purdey, and stand scanning your limited horizon, your left hand well down the barrels and the butt resting on your thigh. Five seconds later and the first covey of the day streams over the fence twenty yards to your right. The two nearest birds cross as they come into sight, and a lucky or clever shot brings them both down together—a miss with the left barrel—too far back as usual—a good recovery with

the second gun as the same bird swings round behind—and you feel that the day has begun well, for here you are, three birds to the good, and the other guns only now hurrying to their places.

Soon the faint blast of a horn announces that the drivers have started, and though nothing comes your way, the centre guns are soon hard at work, each covey—and there are many—paying due toll for its passage. Having nothing to occupy your attention, you find it a pleasure to watch the ‘professors’ at work. Their accuracy does not seem so surprising—you can hold a gun fairly straight yourself—but the pace they do it at does strike you as wonderful. No signs of fluster or flurry, yet they are shooting three birds where you couldn’t fire at more than two, and killing them cleanly withal, just a tiny puff of the neck feathers to show that the bird has it in the right place. Occasionally a single bird turns from the shooting and gives you an opportunity of wiping some one’s

eye as it skims along the top of the hedge, or turns away back into the drive—the latter always a difficult bird to stop.

A cock pheasant—first of the season—that rises some way down the cross fence is a real good bird by the time he gets to you, and two more single and simple partridges from the corner of the turnips are all that fall to your lot before the swish of the flags just the other side of the fence tells you that the first drive is over. Keepers, loaders, and guns are soon scattered about the meadow picking up the slain, so you see both your guns unloaded, pick up the half-dozen birds that are lying in the open, send the two that your neighbour nearly dropped on your head to be added to his little pile, and try your dog down the fence for that bird which may well be a runner. The scent is still bad after the heavy dew, and it is ten minutes before ‘Nelson’ runs the fugitive to ground fifty yards away. You have still a brace more in the turnips, which you collect from the keeper

who has picked them, return your modest score to the man with the card, and are ready to be off by the time your host's reminder, "This way, guns, please," is heard from the far end of the field.

The second drive is not so prolific, for which you are not altogether sorry, because the birds are being brought in from the boundary; and to make sure of their coming on, the guns are placed rather closer up to a high fence than is conducive to comfort in shooting. Half an hour later you are taking your place as No. 4 in a valley which looks as if it had been made for the express purpose of driving partridges over. With a thrill of pleasurable excitement, you realize that this is the famous 'valley of death'—the most killing drive on one of the finest partridge beats in England.

First, you choose a good level stand on the close smooth turf, see that your loader has got card and pencil handy—this may well be a big drive for you,

when it will be important to keep close account of how many birds you have down, and it is no light task to keep the score in your head when the fun is fast and furious—and then take measure of your surroundings.

The steep chalk bank rising in front of you, fragrant with thyme and gorse, is crowned by an overgrown hedge of thorn and hazel, tangled with briar and bracken, now bright with trailing wreaths of briony and ripe berries of hawthorn and elder. Birds topping the fence would be too far out to take at once—you decide to let them come well over you before shooting. Otherwise all seems plain sailing, every bird must be a real ‘archangel,’ to be taken at your favourite angle, without having to think where your neighbours are.

The lazy caw of a rook, a far-away tinkling of sheep-bells, the drowsy hum of bees about your feet, and the echo of a distant horn which tells you that the beaters are off, are the only sounds that

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break the hot stillness of this glorious autumn morning.

A flight of fieldfares and larks heralds the start of the drive, and you pace them with your gun to get some freedom into your swing. A single Frenchman follows, crossing the valley straight as a die—an easy opening of which you duly avail yourself, taking him well out in front, and giving him a good lead with the gun. A sprinkling of other birds begins to bring the other guns into play, and the crackle of musketry soon becomes general. Presently a big lot—three or four coveys packed together—which has tried vainly to force the flanks of the drive, comes swinging down the line from the right. They are well strung out, and here, if ever, is a good chance of killing your four. Unluckily your neighbour's last bird only misses your head by a foot, giving you a bad start—for your first bird is missed by yards in consequence; you grip your gun if anything a little tighter, and make no mistake about the

other three, each in turn making a little somersault as it passes overhead, to fall dead on the turf behind.

For the next ten minutes partridges stream over, and you settle down to the work; your loader is quick and handy, clever at reaching the gun well forward into your hand—there is no fumbling with cartridges or mishaps in changing guns. Your eye is well in, and though you miss a few, most of your shots are followed by a pleasant thud on the turf behind. Before the beaters are in, your barrels are burning hot, and you are glad to slip on a glove to protect your left hand.

But the best of things must have an end; the stream of birds slackens and then stops. The beaters come into sight on the top of the bank, and the drive of your life is over. Forty-five partridges and half-a-dozen pheasants form your contribution to the total, in killing which you have used just over seventy cartridges—no bad proportion, for

you took them as they came, taking no thought about your average. Luncheon and the ladies await you by the red-roofed barn, clustered round with yellow-brown ricks, sheltering in the hollow at the foot of the valley ; and thither you betake yourself, after seeing your full tally of slain safely stowed in the game van.

Good sport again in the afternoon, till the evening shadows lengthen on the autumn stubbles, and it is time to turn homewards. After immemorial custom, the bag is spread out on the lawn, and though you are no glutton for slaughter as a rule, you cannot for once help feeling well pleased when you think that the whole of one of those six rows may fairly be claimed as your share. Fifty brace to your own gun—a right good score made by close attention to business and fair shooting.

CHAPTER X

STATISTICAL

Some records in Britain—Partridges abroad—Austria, Hungary, and Belgium.

INSEPARABLY connected with any real interest in such shooting as you may be fortunate enough to possess, is a pardonable pride in the results of your labours, as figured in the columns of your game-book. Yet while the records of your shooting cannot be disregarded altogether—lies not the proof of the pudding in the eating thereof?—at the same time, their pursuit is fraught with danger, insidious danger that the *mens sana in corpore sano*—to the furtherance of which admirable balance all our field sports should tend, else they are without purpose

—may become tainted by such mania as besets the collector.

So long as your interest in figures remains subjective, so long as it is but an honest feeling of satisfaction that your science and skill have not been applied in vain, all is well; but, alas, from that happy state it is but a step, or rather a gradation of almost imperceptible steps, to the objective interest, the desire to outshine your neighbours, the longing to hold or break the record for your county or country.

To what divergent lengths these different points of view may lead from the unnoticed parting of the ways, let the sport on two great estates serve as instance. Both can show great store of partridges, both fail to make the best use of them, but after what different fashion.

On the first, the shooting is a leisurely business; it extends over many weeks, and gives pleasure to many. It is a friendly and hospitable affair; the guests

are the friends of the family, and guns are asked because they are liked, with small regard to their prowess in the field. Here the keepers have strict instructions never to reveal the bag, and no reference to figures is allowed.

On the second estate, a vast tract of country is devoted to the great driving week; the guns are semi-professional, and are there solely on business; even the ladies are banished for the week, lest their disturbing influence should put some one out of form.

The diet and drink of this artillery—for so one is inclined to speak of the guests—are strictly regulated; they are packed off to bed soon after sunset, and are in position for the first drive of the morning before the sun has risen. The score of each gun is carefully kept, and his merits tested like those of a new quick firer; the business of the week is to kill more partridges than any one else does in the same time, and to that end all else is subservient.

Somewhere between these extremes lies the right use of a shooting—*media tutissimus ibis*. For while any element of professionalism should be shunned, and the pleasure of seeing your *friends* under your roof be allowed considerable voice in the matter, at the same time it is a good thing if the guns you take out shooting are able to acquit themselves creditably in the field without too much missing, or, worse still, ‘tinkering’ of your birds. For there are some guns who seem to shoot most consistently, and always the best part of a foot too far back; the number of birds these gentlemen can contrive to wound and lose, both to the bag and to the ground, is something surprising. If you have pheasants in your woods, the problem is somewhat simplified; you can then ask those of your friends who shoot best to drive your partridges, and the indifferent performers to the covert shoot, where they will enjoy themselves quite as much, with a good gun behind them

to take the high ones they miss, and stop the low ones they hit but fail to kill.

Settle the question as you may, you can depend on one fact, that if you are never at any pains to collect a decent team of guns for partridge-driving, either individually good, or else with a flier or two in the party to do the work and 'nurse' his neighbours, you will find it very hard to keep your keepers up to the mark.

When a man has worked really hard for months, it must be a trial to see his efforts wasted, for a keeper can only measure the success of a day by the result. To see the birds he is at such trouble to bring well over the guns passing on unscathed, and guns light-heartedly chatting at critical moments, and not entering at all seriously into the business of the day, is enough to take the heart out of any man, and slackness and bad work on the part of the guns is likely enough to breed slackness and bad work on the part of the keepers.

It is a common charge against modern sportsmen that they are insatiate in slaughter, and that there is no reason why they should want to kill ten times as much as their forebears. Let it be at once admitted that there is a class who only go out to get their guns off, who would rather shoot ten hand-reared ducks let out of hampers than the same number of wild ones, if the former only gave better shots, and who are generally different in every respect from the old stamp of sportsmen. But set aside this class—chiefly men of business or fashion—and take the men who own or lease the shootings where the big totals are made: you will find them as willing as any one to take part in days of hard work for small result, only they have a marked predilection for seeing things well done. It is not killing only 30 brace in a day's driving that bores them; it is the fact, patent to their experienced eye, that with good management double and treble the number of birds should have been

brought to the guns. So when they have their organized days, they are organized to some purpose, which means another heavy total marked up against them by their critics, but when they have an off-day's marauding they will be found willing to work as hard as any one to kill a dozen head.

The practice of scientific game preservation, with its attendant increase in results, was firmly established on the Continent a hundred years before it found any foothold in England. Indeed the whole idea of organized shoots was quite misunderstood in this country; the popular idea was that the game from miles away was all collected in nets, and that the heavy totals recorded were nothing but "a wanton registry of slaughter such as no sportsman can read without regret"—a totally erroneous conclusion, for where game can by scientific methods be induced to increase, there can surely be no reasonable objection to there being plenty of it.

So long ago as the year 1753, the Emperor of Austria and twenty-two other guns, shooting in Bohemia, killed 47,950 head in twenty days, of which 19,545 were partridges, while at Lichtenstein in Saxony it is duly recorded in the sporting magazines of the day—though it is almost too much to ask any one to believe it—that in October 1797, 39,000 head of game were killed in fourteen hours' shooting, chiefly hares and partridges. History records neither the number nor the names of the guns who took part in this incredible performance.

There is an early German record of 1201 partridges killed in two days' shooting, in all 3258 head besides a variety of small game, the date 1788, and a special note to the effect that all the birds were shot on the wing. About the same time the King of Naples and Sir William Hamilton are credited with a bag of 320 brace, locality unspecified, though presumably in the royal preserves.

In France, the carefully kept game-

books of Chantilly, home of the great family of Condé, near Paris, form a wonderful record of sport. In the summary it is duly entered that between the years 1747 and 1778 S.A.R. M. le Prince de Condé killed 65,524 head; while a tragic figure in history is brought to mind by the touching little footnote which adds with scrupulous accuracy "that the nine pieces of game killed by the late Prince's grandson, the Duc D'Enghien, were all rabbits."

The best day at Chantilly seems to have been the 7th of October 1785, when the two Princes de Condé, the Prince Conti, and twelve other guns killed 2580 partridges and 1500 hares. In thirty years, 1748-79, the game-books show a total of 117,574 grey partridges and 12,426 redlegs.

Against such totals as these our best records in these islands must pale.

Not till a hundred years later can we produce any results of organized shooting which will bear comparison at all. In

1858 and 1859, 314 and 352 brace respectively were killed by eight guns walking in line at Buckenham in Norfolk, the shooters all using muzzle-loaders.

Ten years later, still walking in line, 3385 and 3308 partridges were the totals of two successive years at Holkham, which twenty years later again, in 1885 and 1887, were increased to 8100 and 7512, driving by then being firmly established.

Shooting at Elveden on September 8, 1876, the Maharajah Dhuleep Singh killed 780 partridges to his own gun, a record which seems likely to stand the test of time.

In the world of driving, Lord Ashburton with five other guns killed 1458 partridges on November 4, 1897, at the Grange in Hampshire; the Duke of Portland 1478 partridges in one day at Welbeck Abbey in Notts in 1906, his neighbour, Mr. W. Hollins, killing 1500 partridges one day the same year; while at Holkham in 1905, a total of 1671

partridges, killed off 2000 acres in twenty drives to eight guns, remains the best day on record.

Outside Great Britain there is fair partridge-shooting in Northern Europe. In Germany the usual method is to shoot over a dog—a versatile animal who, to quote Baron Schönberg,

must act as bloodhound on the trail of a wounded roe in summer, retrieve ducks in the water, and act as a spaniel for woodcock and snipe. In September he must take no notice whatever of hares, while two months later he must hunt down all wounded hares and retrieve them without noticing partridges.

Ninety brace have been shot by one gun over dogs, and at Gross Strehlitz Count Renard has killed 300 brace by driving.

In the rich cultivated plains of Flanders, Brabant and Hainault, Belgian sportsmen shoot their partridges over dogs, 50 brace to a single gun not being unknown. In Holland the partridges suffer rather an ignominious fate, their eggs—together with those of every other bird, rare and

common alike—being eagerly sought for by the economical Dutchman as a cheap form of food.

In modern France there is partridge-shooting of the best, where game is in any way preserved; in September 1898, on the vast plains of Beauce, between Orleans and Chartres, twenty guns accounted for 3000 partridges in two days' shooting over only four or five farms.

The grand hunts in Portugal, where every species of game from a wolf to a titlark figures in the bag, would possess certain novel features to any of us who are only accustomed to our own days of tamer sport. The Count D'Arnoso thus describes the procedure :

As a rule Sunday is selected, so that a greater number of people may take part in the hunt. All armed, they form a large circle, covering a great extent of ground. The circle gradually contracts. The proprietors of the land and the best shots wait at the point on which the circle will converge, and where the drive will therefore terminate. Occasionally, only after some hours' driving, is there heard an indistinct and distant noise, which gradually and slowly increasing as

the driving approaches, when close at hand becomes deafening. Any small game that may appear is shot only when the drive is near its end. Then the firing is tremendous, shots crossing in every direction, the noise of which, in conjunction with the shouting of the hunters, gives one the idea of a fierce battle.

With His Majesty I once took part in one, and it seemed as if we, instead of taking part in a simple hunt, were the victims of a tremendous attack. And yet these hundreds of men that surrounded us, while shooting, some in the direction of our feet, others almost at our heads, and trying to kill foxes, rabbits, or partridges, all shouted enthusiastically, "Long live our King!" *Viva o nosso Rei!*¹

The Count's remarks on the Portuguese dogs seem also to merit reproduction.

In unenclosed lands, partridges are shot over greyhounds, of which there is a very good breed in Portugal. More than once I have been out shooting with a priest living near the house of Pindella. He had a dog which he had taught to tell by the movement of its muzzle the exact number of partridges that it saw before it. A splendid dog!

On the fertile plains of Austria and Hungary, where vast expanses of millet

¹ *Sport in Europe*, 1901.

and maize favour abundance of game, the official returns show that close on a million and a half partridges are annually killed. Walking in line, with a drive when the occasional fence is reached, is the usual method adopted.

The late Baron Hirsch managed the shooting of his vast estates on such a lavish scale as has never been attempted elsewhere. In 1893 his picked team of guns killed close on 50,000 partridges in six weeks' shooting, Lord de Grey on one occasion having 240 birds down in one drive. On Count Karolyi's estates at Tot Megyer ten guns killed 10,000 partridges in ten days, walking in line, while in Bohemia a total of 4000 partridges killed in a single day on the estates of Prince Auersberg some years ago seems never to have been since equalled.

In the course of my inquiries about shooting in Austria, a circular came to hand, emanating from a "Bureau für Jagd - Commissionen" in Vienna, which though it offered but little information

about partridges, yet seems to provide such quaint sport in the form of "*hunts exclusively conducted by home-born expert personality,*" that I cannot refrain from giving a sample here.

Hunting Excursions B. Hunting for black-game and other beasts of prey on lordly estate in Neutra - Comitatus, Hungary. Sitting in the ambush and beating. Very good arrangement. 3-4 days.

A. Partridge shootings on a clerical estate in the plains of the Danube. Splendid fowlings, then pheasant-huntings, deer-stalking, and shooting from a hiding-place. Hunting for big roe-bucks. Also reduced shootings of geese, bustards, and hares. Stay 8-10 days.

For those who seek variety these excursions would seem to possess many novel and attractive features.

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