STALKING

in Scotland and New Zealand

LORD LATYMER

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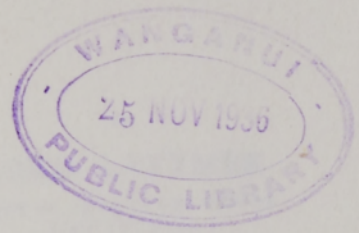

STALKING

In Scotland and New Zealand

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BY

LORD LATYMER

AUTHOR OF 'CHANCES AND CHANGES'

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

William Blackwood & Sons Ltd.
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I.

ORIGINS.

SOME forms of sport have altered but little in the last hundred years. Fox-hunting, for instance, in spite of railways, wire, tarmac roads, and crowds of hard-riding ladies, is still recognisable as the same sport; and a resurrected fox-hunter of 1835 would not take long in getting used to modern technique, however much he might deplore a good many of the changes which have taken place. But the sport of stalking has altered profoundly, and the deer-stalker of 1935 would appear at first sight to have very little in common with the slayer of the 'muckle hart' a hundred years ago.

Two principal, and a good many minor, factors have produced the change. First, the advent of the accurate, deadly small-bore rifle, firing an expanding bullet, with a point-blank range of something like two hundred yards. Secondly, the splitting up of the Scottish mountains and glens, where formerly sporting

rights were almost non-existent, into a multitude of separate 'forests,' each with its clearly defined, inviolable 'march.' It is true that a few of these forests are even now very large; no one ought to feel cramped when he has seventy or eighty thousand acres to play with; but the majority are of less than thirty thousand, and even on the biggest, the 'march,' and one's neighbours' rights (and delinquencies) must ever be borne in mind.

It must have been delightful, in the old days, to set forth with a chosen friend, a stalker, a gillie or two, twenty-four hours' food, a brace of so-called rifles firing a spherical ball, and a couple of large, shaggy deer-hounds. You could go almost anywhere you liked. Often you slept out in a shepherd's shelter, or even, if you preferred it, in the open air. The two sportsmen were obliged to get as close to the stag as possible, for their weapons were inaccurate at a hundred yards, and uncertain in effect at any save the closest range. They fired together, I suppose agreeing beforehand as to the giver of the word of command. Their stalker, who lay well away from them so that his view might not be impaired by the cloud of black-powder smoke, had to make up his

mind quickly if the beast was hit or not; if he thought either bullet had reached its mark he would signal to the gillie in rear to slip the hounds.

Thereupon would begin a time of incredible exertion. The hounds would try to stop the stag, but he, if unscathed or only lightly wounded, was able to run for many a mile before they could bay or even turn him; and the stalking party had to do their best to keep up, on foot, across the Highland hills.

There were giants in those days, and stags were occasionally finished off many miles from where they had first been attacked. But we read, also, that only too often the party saw and heard no more of their quarry that day, or any other day; the hounds would return home in the end, no doubt, of their own accord.

We have changed all that. Anyone with fair eyesight, man or woman, can learn to shoot accurately on the hill, up to a range of two hundred yards, with a small-bore rifle; and an expanding bullet almost anywhere in the fore-part of him spells Finis for the stag. Wounded stags ought to be, and indeed usually are, such rare phenomena that even on the largest forests hounds or dogs of any kind are seldom used

nowadays; though I believe there are one or two places where a collie is still occasionally used for tracking a wounded beast. On the smaller forests the use of a dog is impossible on account of one's neighbours. A wounded stag, with a dog in pursuit, would clear corrie after corrie of deer, and might even run through more than one forest, stampeding every beast within many miles. No, all that can be done now, if a wounded beast gets away over the march and is going fairly strong, is to notify your neighbour (that evening, if possible), in the hope that he or his friends will fall in with the poor creature before very long.

It is evident, moreover, that there are far more red deer in Scotland than there were in St. John's day. It is no longer necessary to travel huge distances before discovering a full-grown stag—"one that would shoot," as my friend and stalker D. has it. No deerstalker thinks of sleeping in the open nowadays, or of taking anything but his lunch in haversack or pocket. Everything is different except the glory of the mountains and the watchful eyes and noses of the deer. They are ever the same; so perhaps, after all, I am wrong in thinking that the sport has altered out of all knowledge.

It is changed as to its externals unquestionably. But in matters touching the spirit—in the peace which descends on those who lift up their eyes to the hills, and in the deep thrill which stirs many men when they match their brains against the keen senses of a wild animal—it is likely that our own reactions are not, after all, so very different from those experienced by our forefathers.

II.

ECONOMICS.

THE deer-forests and grouse moors of Scotland are composed of peat, swamp, and rock. Heather, certain grasses, and a few hardy shrubs and berries are all that will grow to any advantage on nineteen-twentieths of their total area. Here and there it may be profitable to plant trees, if the planter is content to wait twenty or thirty years for his profit.

From time to time Radical and Socialist politicians, with other nit-wits, have conducted ill-informed, ill-tempered crusades against the owners of moors and forests. Publicists of the baser sort have drawn a harrowing picture of the greedy landlord, and of the land which by his selfish machinations is prevented from becoming the home of a prosperous and thriving peasantry.

The falsehood of the legend has been exposed many, many times, but it is one of those odd absurdities which for some reason persist in

ignorant minds, and even now is trotted out occasionally at the hustings by unscrupulous speakers.

A variation which has appeared since the War is in effect a plea that all, or most, of the waste hills of Scotland might be afforested; by this, it is urged, employment can be found for those who need it, and a State asset of great eventual value may be built up.

How many millions of public money have already been wasted over planting trees which died immediately, only the Government Departments concerned could tell, and they never will.

An ambitious scheme was launched soon after the War—I think it had Mr Lloyd George's especial blessing—with a fanfare of trumpets from the Press, and the approval of the more foolish members of a Coalition Government. Several lovely deer-forests were purchased at market price, which was then, I believe, about forty shillings an acre, and the tree planters got to work. At that time there were very few British experts in large-scale forestry, and they were not consulted; therefore the wrong varieties of trees were planted, in spots where no tree of any kind was likely to grow, by

workmen who had no previous experience of the very delicate business of planting little trees.

As a result, in most places—Achnashellach is a case in point—ninety per cent of the trees died, and much valuable deer-forest was ruined. The lower ground was planted, the deer, of course, being wired out. (Incidentally, wiring against deer in the Highlands is a most costly process.) Their winter haunts being denied to them, a great many very naturally took themselves off, and although in certain cases the high ground is still let for stalking, the rent obtainable is much less than it was before the so-called afforestation began.

It must not be thought that I am attacking the Forestry people of the present day. They have by now learnt their job, and are a body of capable experts who know what, where, and when to plant, and do not waste the taxpayers' paper pounds in a greater degree than any other Government department. They would, I am sure, agree that the methods of 1919, *consule* L.G., were frequently stupid and wasteful. They would also, I believe, agree that on many forests no planting for profit ought ever to be attempted ; that on many more, it should be undertaken with great caution in selected

areas, and that only a small percentage of the land now used as deer-forest is at all suitable for large-scale forestry operations. And this being so, how much less are the wilds of Scotland suitable for growing corn, or turnips, or even subsidised beetroots?

No, the only things which the deer-forests can grow largely, besides deer, are sheep.

You can get very good mutton off the Sutherland and Ross-shire hills—but who wants mutton from Scotland now? To judge from the prices which have obtained of late years the answer is Nobody. The owner of what is now, I think, the largest forest left in Scotland told me only last year that he did not make enough out of his sheep (of which he has a considerable number) to pay the wages of his shepherds; and, goodness knows, Scottish shepherds are not overpaid.

Deer and sheep do not agree, and if there are too many sheep on the ground the deer will vanish. In any case, they are a great nuisance to the stalker, and the letting value of a deer-forest is much diminished if the landlord insists on running a big head of sheep thereon.

I can get 6d. or 7d. a pound for my venison—at times a little more; so that, if I chose to sell all the deer killed, the amount received

would be a considerable one, and, I think, at present prices, it is actually more profitable to grow venison than mutton. However, prices fluctuate so much that it is impossible to say what the position will be in two or three years' time. The point I wish to emphasise is that the more a Scottish landowner makes out of his sheep the less rent he will have to accept for his stalking; and just now, at any rate, the stalking rental is a more valuable and tangible asset than the grazing rental.

It is quite clear that in the eighteenth century the Highland glens supported a far larger population than they do now. But the Highland men and women of those days lived for the most part under conditions which would now be considered quite intolerable, and there is evidence that only too often they were half-starved, ill-clad, and diseased. When Prince Charlie's most gallant little army marched to Derby in 1745 the English country folk were "struck all of a heap" at the squalid, dirty appearance of the invaders. The clansmen behaved well enough, and there was hardly any pillaging, but they looked like extremely disreputable scarecrows, and their appearance (Lee's ragged rebels in Maryland produced much

the same effect) was undoubtedly the worst possible advertisement for their cause.

For long after the '45 the hand of England lay heavy on the Highland glens, and the process of depopulation by emigration and enlistment began. It was completed by the stress of the Napoleonic wars, when landlords discovered that sheep did well on the hills, that the nation was short of food, and that much money could be made out of the high prices obtainable for wool and mutton. It seemed expedient to clear certain western glens of all human beings but shepherds, so that the sheep might find winter feeding on the cattle pastures by the villages. It was a process which, however sound economically, involved much hardship and suffering. Little trouble was taken on one or two estates to provide a living for the dispossessed clansmen, some of whom slowly starved to death, so it is said.

That was dreadful; but it is certain that if they had not gone then the people would have vanished gradually as the nineteenth century grew older, and the standard of well-being advanced. The small patches of arable and grass in the valleys of the Highlands are incapable of upholding a twentieth century standard of living for folk who have no other

resources. If anyone doubts this, let him go and study the crofter question at first-hand, in Skye, or wherever the 'croft' still is populated. The trend of legislation for many years has been in favour of the crofter, and all against the owner of the land; 'the croft' is under the special protection of Parliament, County Council, and (in some places) philanthropic millionaire. Yet, even so, the crofters are barely able to make both ends meet. Left to themselves, they have a choice between migration and slow extinction. No one with any knowledge of the facts will pretend that the Highland glens can be repopulated.

So the sportsman may rest assured that he is not making a wilderness and a solitary place out of land which could of itself afford a livelihood to modern men and women. His keepers and stalkers live a fairly well-paid, contented, healthy existence, and in time of war can be trusted to become the best snipers in the world. If for any reason, such as confiscatory taxation or some other kind of Socialistic lunacy, it should ever prove impossible for the owners any longer to employ these fine men, the Highlands will indeed become an uninhabited desolation. The hiker, the camper, the tripper, and the inn-keeper will

have everything to themselves for two months in the year, and the poachers will make merry during the other ten—so long as a few deer and grouse survive, which will not be for many years. Pelt, fur, and feather depend on private ownership for their existence.

III.

ON RENTING.

If you are thinking of renting a deer-forest, the amount and quality of your sport will of course depend to some extent on the length of your purse. But there are a few 'Don'ts' which may be of use.

Don't take a forest near any place where holiday-makers swarm in August and September. There is nothing more hopeless than trying to stalk deer in the middle of a crowd of male and female hikers. It is not much good putting up notices or telling them they will be shot; they will take no heed either of your boards or of your winged words. Indeed, the hikers' shorts are nowadays a detested and not uncommon sight on many forests which are fairly remote; but one can deal with single spies. It is only when they arrive in whole battalions that it is best to 'cry capevi' and relinquish your once lovely

glen to their dirty paper and empty beer bottles.

Don't, other things being equal, rent a forest which has been let year by year, for many years, to a variety of different tenants. Such a one will contain neither heavy stags nor good heads. It is not in human nature that a tenant should make up his limit of stags by shooting a lot of rubbish, if he does not intend to return. Rather will he try to get the best heads and the biggest stags, and leave the weeds to the next comer, muttering, "after me the deluge!" It is obvious that, since like begets like, and a stag takes at least ten years to come to his best, you are not likely to kill a worth-while beast on such a forest.

A glance through the game-book, if it has been properly kept, will show you what average weight you may expect. I have yet to meet the sportsman or the keeper who is so depraved that he would deliberately fudge a game-book. A man who would do that would murder his mother.

Don't take a forest without looking at the Lodge. It rains hard and often in the Highlands (1933 was very exceptional) and a weatherproof roof and windows are a great comfort. If there

are tell-tale signs of damp under the windows and down the walls, and the paper is peeling off in patches, look elsewhere. You may think, perhaps, on a fine day in May or June, with the sun shining, that a little damp does not matter ; but it will matter quite a lot in October, when all the high tops are in snow, and a driving sleet is forcing its way under a defective window-sill. Also you should make sure that the kitchen range will cook, and the boiler heat the bath water.

Don't clinch the bargain if you have any reason to think the stalker drinks, or is past his work. Neither contingency is likely, but has happened. A stalker whose eyesight is gone will blunder into stray deer which see him before he sees them, and will lose you stag after stag ; it is perhaps unnecessary to expatiate on the evils of alcohol !

Don't forget to make sure that ponies and deer saddles are available, and that the ponies know their job. A pony on the hill that has not learnt what is expected of it can be a great nuisance and even a danger—to itself, at any rate, for it will certainly get bogged at the first opportunity.

Don't be shy about asking if a sample of the

water supply may be tested. Many lodges are supplied from a spring through lead pipes, and soft water acts as a solvent on lead. I have heard of cases of lead-poisoning in the Highlands—the symptoms are like acute rheumatism—which puzzled the doctors for a long time. The remedy, a simple one, is to introduce a fair quantity of lime into the pipes, from the top of their run. This coats their insides, and saves yours—though your household may grumble for a while at the water being harder than usual.

Don't accept a faulty game larder. You will never produce first-class venison either for cooking, selling, or giving away unless your larder is well ventilated, cool, and fly-proof. Many lodge larders are none of these things, yet amendment is not an expensive affair. As good a larder as any is one made of wood (with fly-proof windows and door) and four outside walls. The very elaborate indoor larder, even if kept like a dairy, is seldom properly ventilated.

Don't be obliged to fish for trout in a leaky boat. It is annoying to have to bail all the time, and quite easy to have a clause in your

Lease that the boats in the lochs are painted, tarred, and seaworthy before you want them.

Whatever you do, don't go to law with your landlord! Some landlords are contrary folk; but an arbitration clause in the Lease will generally save any serious trouble.

IV.

ON BUYING A FOREST.

If you are thinking of buying a forest—I fear that very few people are, nowadays—it is best to rent it for a year or two first, and discover its weak points. Such an engagement need not lead to matrimony; at the end of two seasons you will either be so deeply in love with the place that possession becomes an imperious necessity, or you will have discovered all kinds of horrid and hidden drawbacks, and will look for your ideal elsewhere.

Geographical position is important. The extreme west coast is very, very lovely, and one fine day makes up for many wet ones, but the west wind is ever ready to call up its armies of rain-clouds from the Atlantic, and in some seasons fine days will be few in number. If possible, find out what the yearly average rainfall amounts to.

A good forest ought to have a mixture of high tops, which will hold stags at the beginning

of the season, and sheltered corries and glens where the hinds will congregate. A few grassy river flats which will provide some feeding in the winter-time can be most useful. Variety of ground should be sought for, as deer are always on the move, according to the weather and the temperature, and if you wish to find stags inside your marches from the middle of August to the middle of October, you must have ground which will appeal to them under every condition of wind and weather.

A forest which is almost all high ground will be capital fun until you get a first touch of winter—and I have seen the tops deep in snow long before the end of September. Then you will spy your ground in vain ; for a stag, though hardy enough, and well protected by nature, dislikes a really cold wind, and to escape it goes to the nearest shelter, perhaps a thousand or fifteen hundred feet lower down. Fifteen hundred feet make a wonderful difference to the thermometer.

Or if your forest is nearly all ' hind ground '—*i.e.*, low ground which the stags do not frequent till the rut begins—your season will be a short one, and you may not get a shot till the parties of bachelor stags begin to grow quarrelsome

and break up, usually about the 20th of September. It is not long from then to the 12th of October, by which time most of your shootable stags will be too badly ' run ' for a good sportsman to kill. It is astonishing how rapidly the fattest of stags loses condition, once he has begun to chase the hinds about.

No, you must have all sorts of ground—tops three thousand feet high where the stags can go for coolth on a hot day in August, escaping from the vile swarms of clegs and biting flies which torment them lower down the hill ; long slopes of heather and mountain grasses, leading away from the ptarmigan country to sheltered nooks and deep corries, where the fiercest gale is tempered, and there is water and good feeding all spring, summer, and autumn ; flats, lowest of all, where the long grasses are turned into a natural hay by the fierce summer's sun, and fat hinds may be shot at Christmas-time ; and last, but certainly not the least in importance, woods in which shelter and a little food can be found in a mid-winter blizzard, when everything is covered in snow, and the drifts are ten feet deep.

If you can find all that in fifteen or twenty thousand acres you will have a nice little forest.

The more remote from human habitation your forest is, the less trouble you are likely to have from hikers or crofters—I would never buy a forest which had any of the latter on or near it, as the Law (perhaps rightly) puts their interests before yours.

Yet extreme remoteness may have its drawbacks. Thirty, forty, or fifty miles of road between you and railhead add greatly to the cost of everything, from coals to candles; though there is a rare charm about some of the lonely lodges in the north-west, and their owners are never heard to grumble at the lack of society.

If for any reason—because of nearness to a doctor, or a friend, or a salmon river—you covet a forest which abuts on cultivated land, there is, I think, only one thing to be done—put up miles of fencing in order to keep your deer out of the crops and holdings. If you do not do so (and it will cost you a pretty penny) you will have endless trouble.

For my part, I would not buy a forest unless it also had some fairly good stretches of 'dogging' moor. Dearly do I love shooting grouse over dogs, and a fortnight of walking six or seven hours a day after a Gordon setter will make

you thoroughly fit by the time the stalking begins.

Fishing, too, is very important. If you want salmon or sea-trout you will have to pay for them; good fishing is the one form of sport which always seems to be equally sought after in good times and bad, and one or both banks of a salmon river may nearly double your purchase money.

However, a great deal of fun can be got from the right kind of hill loch, in which the trout average perhaps a little under half a pound, and such fishing will be more or less 'thrown in.' Some of the bigger lochs north of Loch Ness were completely spoiled many years ago by doubly-distilled lunatics who put pike into them; and I know of one water-system, ideal for brown trout, where fat and loathsome perch are about the only fish you can catch nowadays. They were put into a hill loch forty or fifty years ago, egress being prevented by a dam. In the course of time the dam became ruinous, and the perch went down-stream. Now they swarm in every bit of water, up and down the Strath, to which they can penetrate, and have ruined a vast deal of good trout fishing. They will take a

fly, and are not bad to eat, but are poor fighters, and have a most prickly dorsal fin, which makes them a nuisance to handle. I would not give one good brown trout for the lot of them.

Perhaps the greatest argument in favour of buying instead of renting is the pleasure and contentment the average man and woman get out of improving something which is 'really and truly' their own. But that applies to many other forms of property besides deer-forests, and is a subject which needs no enlargement here.

V.

MANAGEMENT.

THE first thing is the sanctuary—or sanctuaries, if you have a really big forest. There may be one or more already, to which your stags are quite accustomed. If not, consult with your stalker and start one at once. By no other means can you keep your promising young stags at home. They will stay in a quiet sanctuary, safe from your neighbours, at any rate till the rut begins, when, let us hope, they will rut on your own ground. So you may keep them for a number of years; until at last they come to their full glory of head and body, and sentence of death is passed. Then to be sure you will almost certainly find that the condemned beast, which in the preceding season positively asked to be shot half a dozen times, now never leaves the sanctuary, or if he does, is always found in some place where it is hardly possible to stalk him. He seems to know in some mysterious way that his doom has been

pronounced, and makes his plans accordingly. And when you finally crawl in to a hundred yards or so, and draw trigger, you will be very apt to miss him altogether.

If you have no sanctuary, and do not feed, you will be just a pirate forest, preying on your neighbours, with no stags which you have watched year after year as they gradually develop—a great joy to me, at any rate—and no beasts which you know are your own.

Some people will argue about winter feeding, but there is really little or nothing of consequence to urge against it, on nine forests out of ten. The benefits you reap from it are, first, heavier stags and better heads; secondly, a considerably longer season, as a stag which has not starved all winter loses his velvet very much earlier than a poor beast which has barely come through alive. Many a time I have seen a 'clean' stag, in a forest where feeding is the rule, on the 1st August, and by the 10th more will be 'clean' than in velvet. If you do not feed, you will be lucky to get your telescope on to a 'clean' stag before the 1st September, and may have to look over a good many even then before you find one.

From a humane point of view, moreover,

A bare living.

it is better to feed. A stag faces the winter in the poorest condition, with all the fat gone from him by reason of his sexual activities. If the winter is exceptionally severe, and the deer have to depend on the hill for their food, many of the stags will slowly starve to death. The hinds are in better case, as they begin the winter with a good deal of fat on them.

Some people say that where there are big woods feeding is unnecessary, and no doubt, if you have a considerable acreage of woodland, it is a great help to the deer in winter-time; but mainly, I think, because of the shelter. The food they find in a wood of Scotch firs and other soft-wood conifers does not amount to much, and few owners of forests have any hard-wood trees in their plantations. The deer may occasionally, if they are very hungry, nibble at the bark of a fir tree, but I cannot believe that there is any real nutriment therein.

A few years ago I asked the owner of quite a well-known forest why he did not feed in the winter. I knew that good heads and heavy bodies were rare with him, and becoming ever rarer. "Why should I?" was the answer, "I have all those woods."

I did not argue the point, for it was no affair

of mine, and his manner seemed to indicate that he considered my question a foolish one. But I knew, and he did not, that his big wood was full of skeletons of poor staggies which had died of starvation there the winter before.

The real reasons why he did not feed were first, ignorance, and secondly, a lazy, inefficient old keeper, who did not want to be bothered with carrying a heavy sack on his shoulders in bad weather, preferring his own comfort to the wellbeing of the beasts in his charge. He tells his master that feeding is a waste of money ; his master, like too many of us, believes what he wants to believe, and things go from bad to worse.

It is astonishing what a difference a little feeding makes, both to body and head. On a forest I know well the average weight has gone up nearly two stone since feeding was first started some years ago, and the general run of heads is very much improved. Switches and 'cow-horns,' once common, now are rarely seen, and each year there is a further improvement.

On many forests sugar-beet pulp and locust beans are fed to the stags. Both are cheap, but I do not believe there is much feeding

value in either, and consider maize to be far better in every way. About a single handful a day for each stag is enough. English beans are a good variation, and there is an idea (though no proof) that beans are good for horn growing, after the stags have shed their old horns in the early spring.

It is best to feed first thing in the morning, as after being fed the stags will scatter and try to find a bite for themselves. If fed late in the day they will hang about for hours till the man with the sack appears at the usual spot, and will make no attempt to forage while waiting for him.

I think some stalkers make a mistake in stopping the feed too early in the spring. They should go on with it until the stags' new antlers are well on the way to completion. Otherwise the lower points may be well developed, but there will be a tendency to stumpiness and poor 'tops.' Three weeks' extra feeding does not cost a lot, and it is a pity to spoil the head for a ha'porth of food.

In my opinion feeding should be continued until the spring cotton-grass is well above ground. This grass, or sedge (eriophorum), is very nutritious, and will soon put fat on sheep

or deer. But it does not always appear at the same time, and its appearance and growth ought to be carefully observed by the feeding stalker. It may be late, if the weather is unusually cold or dry, and feeding should be continued until there is plenty of it about.

If grouse are not a consideration it is difficult to burn too hard. Deer love the young grass and tender heather which springs up after the flames have consumed the old dry stuff, and you cannot keep them away from the burnt patches. But if you want grouse as well as deer you will need some old heather for the sake of its seed, the principal winter food of the grouse, and for the shelter it gives to nesting birds. A good keeper will know how to strike a balance between the needs of the birds and the beasts, and there is no reason in the world why you should not have plenty of both on the same ground.

Some people give their stags hay, potatoes, and dredge-corn—all good feeding value; but hay blows about terribly, the beasts will eat it only when absolutely starving, and corn of any kind is unlikely to be picked up to the last grain. With maize and English beans there is practically no waste; almost every grain is

picked up by those long, delicate tongues, and goes where it does most good.

Potatoes, when, as sometimes occurs, there is a glut in the market, should make a cheap and excellent food, though I have never tried them. I know one forest where they are used with success.

If you are a millionaire you could give them some kind of cattle cake. No doubt, they would do admirably on it, but it is expensive stuff, and some kinds crumble quickly, which would entail waste.

It is essential that the feed, whatever it is, should be spread out in a very long line, or large circle, and spread thin. If it is put down in large heaps, close together, the big stags will get it all and the smaller ones will go wanting. A heavy stag has been known to eat from a large heap of maize till he could eat no more ; then he lay down by the heap and kept every other stag from it till he felt ready for another meal.

I have been asked if it is possible to use feeding troughs of any kind ; and I daresay it is possible. But you would want an enormous length of trough to feed a couple of hundred stags, if the weaker stags are to get their share ;

and I think a good many troughs would get knocked over, and their contents spilt. If you feed with maize and English beans, and choose as dry and firm a bit of ground as possible for the feeding place, there will be little or no waste.

At the beginning of the winter, when the rut is just over, and the stags are only beginning to drift in to their old feeding ground, feed very lightly, and give them plenty of rock-salt to lick. Their digestive arrangements are all to pieces —many of them have gone practically without food for several weeks, and too much food will kill them. The salt seems to restore tone to their insides, and is greatly appreciated by the poor beasts, who will at first lick it by the hour.

If you wish to begin feeding where you have never fed before, you should scatter a few blocks of rock-salt in places where some stags are sure to find them, and gradually move the salt down the hill to your selected feeding-place, strewing the ground near-by each day with a little feed. The stags will soon collect from all over the forest. Like vultures in the desert, they keep a watchful eye over each other's movements.

What can be urged against winter feeding? First, I suppose, that it is expensive. It runs to

a little money, certainly. Each stag you feed through the winter on maize and English beans will cost you about ten shillings, on the 1933-34 prices. How many you will feed depends on the size of your forest, but there are unlikely to be fewer than a hundred to a hundred and fifty, of all ages and sizes, coming to the feed on a forest of fifteen to twenty thousand acres.

The stags themselves will generally make things difficult for any hind which tries to come to the feed, even if they do not succeed in driving her away altogether. If, however, as may happen, an old hind becomes too pertinacious she should be shot. Except, perhaps, on a very few forests which have no low ground at all, it is a waste of money to feed the hinds; all but the old and infirm come through the winter well enough on what they can pick up for themselves, and are indeed quite fat at Christmas time. If any are too feeble to survive they are better dead.

Another objection sometimes urged is that a stag, by being fed in this way, ceases to be a wild animal. To which I reply that he is never really a wild animal, even if there is less artificiality about the sport of stalking than there is about most of the sports practised in these

islands. He is not wild in the sense in which the great sheep of the Himalayas, ovis Ammon, and ovis Poli, are wild. He is sometimes fenced in by wire, and is the private property of any person on whose land he may happen to be. Moreover he is, very probably, well known by sight to the stalker on whose beat he usually dwells.

But, most emphatically, winter feeding does not make him any tamer or easier to kill in September—quite the reverse. A stag that has seen a man or men daily, for months on end, recognises a bit of the human frame for what it is, with speed and certainty ; whereas a beast which has hardly set eyes on a human being for half a year is not quite sure what he is looking at if the stalker's head (or the 'gentleman's' behind !) suddenly sticks up out of a peat-hag.

The winter-fed stag in an instant recognises the phenomenon for what it is, and stays not on the order of his going ; the 'wild' stag, not being quite sure in his mind, stands still and has another look, very likely with results fatal to himself. It is definitely harder to stalk a stag that has been fed than a 'wild' one. The easiest stags of all to stalk are those

which from their birth have never set eyes on a human being—but you have to go to New Zealand to find them.

If your purse and your prudence will allow you to feed, be sure to go up to your forest in the winter-time and have a look at the beasts as they skirmish round in the wake of the man with the sack. A prettier sight I do not know.

At his whistle, they come scampering down the hill, materialising out of total invisibility, as their way is, tossing their heads and sparring lightly with one another. There is no serious fighting, now that the madness of the rut is over.

You must not stand and stare at them—that alarms them. Look at them out of the corner of your eye, moving on slowly, and some of them will come up quite unconcernedly to within twenty or thirty yards of you. Take photographs of them if you can, but it is not easy to get the beasts to do themselves justice, as they move about like pieces in a kaleidoscope, and usually are lost against a dark background. If the ground is covered with snow it is much easier to get satisfactory results. They vary greatly in their behaviour. Some are bold enough, while others hang about on the hillside

afar off, evidently finding the greatest difficulty in getting over their fears.

Cases have been known of stags which got altogether too familiar, and I have been told a story of a certain keeper who stooped down to untie the mouth of his sack; he fumbled over it, and a moment later found himself turning somersaults. One of the staggies, hungry and impatient, had stuck his horns under the man's behind and heaved vigorously. The fellow was not damaged, but that stag was watched pretty carefully all winter and particular pains were taken to put him in the larder before the end of the next season.

To see perhaps a couple of hundred Scottish stags quite close, and taking little notice of man, is a lovely and an unforgettable thing, especially if there is snow on the ground to complete the picture.

If you have any old deer-fences still standing, take them down, unless of course they were put up to save the croft, or cultivated ground. They do no good to anybody, and your most promising stag will probably go and spoil his head in the wire when his horns are growing.

Forty or fifty years ago people apparently had a mania for putting up deer-fences—entirely

A promising youngster, and "one that needs killing."

enclosing their forests in many cases. It was a form of selfishness, I suppose; owners could not bear to think that they might lose a good head to their neighbour. They did not realise that they were doing themselves far more harm than good, by making in-breeding inevitable.

On one forest that I know, the owner, having fenced himself completely in, proceeded to make one-way entrances where deer could get over his wire from the outside, but once inside could not get out again! This he did by running the fence under any convenient bank (the bank being outside the wire), and making a ramp by filling in the space between the top of the bank and the top of the wire. It was then an easy matter for a stag to take the six-foot drop; but he could not get back again.

This sportsman's neighbours very naturally fenced themselves in too, so that his evil intentions were soon brought to nought. The fences and the ramps still stand, in a dilapidated state, memorials to the selfishness and stupidity of their builder. Fortunately Time, which cures all ills, has made many holes in the wire, and stags can roam far and freely again, as nature intended.

There cannot be many forests which are not

traversed by one or more derelict, half-decayed sheep fences. On high ground a sheep fence will not last many years unless it is repaired regularly, as in exposed places the weight of snow drifted and driven by a winter's gale overturns the standards and breaks the wires. Then you get a mess of cluttered wire, very horrible to look at, likely to trip you up, and dangerous to the stags, who may get their heads caught and damaged as they spar at it in play. I have known both stags and hinds crippled hopelessly by getting strands of the foul stuff wrapped round their limbs.

It is easy to take down an unwanted sheep fence if it is in fair repair, but it is next to impossible to clear up the mess once the standards are laid flat or broken.

It is curious how a wire sheep fence, the height of a hurdle, keeps back the deer. They hate jumping it in cold blood, and I have seen hinds, which apparently wanted to cross, run up to it half a dozen times, 'refusing' exactly like a horse at a jump, and finally giving it up as a bad job. When frightened they jump it readily enough, and stags pop over without any todo in the rutting season. Perhaps it is that they are afraid of catching a leg in it (as

will happen occasionally) unless their fears are subdued by some special stimulus.

The less wire you have on your forest the better.

It takes about ten years for a stag to come to his best. After that he will stand still for a year or two, and will then deteriorate, first in head and then in weight. It is obvious therefore that he should be left alone until he is at his best. But how few stags ever live to be ten years old! Even where there is winter feeding and a sanctuary, beasts of over ten years are few and far between. Promising youngsters wander, and are killed by 'pirates,' who kill anything with horns. Or they are killed because they are suspected of wandering, and it is feared they will be killed by someone else. On many a forest anything which may be expected to turn the scale at fourteen stone is shot at sight.

How many 'rifles,' even if their intentions are excellent, can judge the approximate age of a stag, or say whether he has a young and improving, or a going-back head, on looking at him through a telescope?

The stalker in many cases, no doubt, will know, but will he always give an honest opinion?

Some years ago a friend of mine was asked

to admire a head over a neighbour's mantelpiece—a niceish young Royal, which would have become first-class with four or five years' additional growth. He knew the stag well, as his keeper had fed him for several winters, and he had seen him at the feed.

Of course he said nothing at the time, but the next time he saw his neighbour's stalker he said, "Well, Rob, that's a nice little head in the diningroom, and Mr —— seems pleased, but it's a pity yon staggie didn't get a chance to grow for another year or two." The man answered, rather sheepishly, that if Mr —— hadn't killed him, someone else would. "Now look here, Rob," said my friend, "you can come over and see our stags at the feed next winter, whenever you like, and we will show you just which ones we are not killing yet awhile." But he never came.

My counsel—admittedly one of perfection—is to kill off all the bad heads before you begin on the good ones. But, of course, no one ever does—not thoroughly and determinedly. It is possible, however, to spare the young and promising heads, and even (if he ruts at home) to allow a year or two of extra life to a stag whose progeny you would like to see on the hill.

Personally I get far more satisfaction out of killing a real bad stag—a big switch, say, or one with a very narrow, ugly head—than I get from the death of the ordinary 'shootable' beast. That is part of the satisfaction of ownership. Like begets like, and it is a real joy to think that the ugly brute lying dead on the heather before you will no longer propagate his kind. And there is no limit to the number of real bad ones which should be killed, so that even if you think you have slain enough 'good' stags, you can go on looking for bad ones right up to the end of the season. Only this year we killed a stray switch and a hummel on the very last day of the season, and who more pleased than the two members of my family concerned?

Some hinds must be killed in the winter—not, however (as is sometimes done), immediately after the rut is over.

The forest should be allowed to rest until the end of November, in my opinion, as otherwise the stags get disturbed unduly at a time when they need peace. By the 20th of November a good many will be back in the sanctuary, licking the salt, or coming to the feed, and the rest will be thinking of doing so soon. Kill your quota of hinds between then and the

New Year. They are fat in December, and their hides are not ruined by the warble fly (a terrible pest to the herd), as they are later on. In January they go back a little in condition and some will be carrying well-advanced embryos.

If you do not kill hinds regularly every year, as time goes on your herd will get too big, and there will not be enough food to go round. Your stock will deteriorate, and some of the hinds will very probably take to eating grouse eggs, which is distinctly vexing if you like a little 'dogging' before the stalking begins.

Some forests have a lot of natural feed—after the cotton-grass comes the deer-hair, and other summer grasses and sedges in great abundance—but on others the feed is not so plentiful, and they will not carry the same head of deer to the acre. It is quite impossible to lay down any rule on the subject, but a good stalker by collecting many 'imponderabilia' and scraps of evidence will be able to form a reliable opinion as to whether the forest is in danger of becoming overstocked.

You should try to shoot either the very old, grey grandmothers, or the plump yeld hinds.

I admit this advice is open to criticism, as hinds which for one reason or another have not calved for a twelvemonth, and have thus become 'yèld,' technically, will almost always, when gotten in calf again, be found to be carrying a stag embryo. Why this is so, goodness knows, but any experienced stalker will confirm my statement, and I have seen too many embryo stag-calves taken out of dead 'yeld' hinds to have any doubt on the subject. And, of course, it is the stag calves that one wants.

But one must kill some yeld hinds, as well as 'rubbish,' in order to keep numbers within bounds. A calf dropped in the spring requires its mother's care to bring it through the following winter in good condition. If it should be orphaned in December it will become a weakling —not the sort to breed from. Moreover, it is quite likely that a stray, unprotected calf will be killed by an eagle.

Furthermore, a hind in milk, or whose milk is not long dry, does not make good eating, and her venison will not sell, and if given away is probably buried. I detest waste, especially of any form of life, and like to think that my plump yeld hinds are a pleasant form of food for human beings. You cannot kill too much

'rubbish'—very old grey hinds, long past bearing; or thin and sickly ones.

If you should decide to kill some of the hinds with calves at foot you may be wise, but for pity's sake you should kill the calf too—a thing not always so easy to do.

It may be noticed that I write as if 'you' were going to stalk hinds, though as a matter of fact 'you' will probably be snugly in England all November and December months, and small blame to you. It can be dreadful weather up north just then, and I daresay the job is better left to your keepers and stalkers.

I have already written that, on the 1934 prices, it does not pay to run sheep on the hill. It did once, and may again, when the next war comes along, or some Government realises that a subsidy on home grown beef and mutton (which is the best in the world) is preferable by far to one on wheat, which is never, and can never be, so good as that grown in Canada and America.

But if sheep do not pay, and no one wants your grazing, it would seem useless to have any wool about. Sheep are a dreadful nuisance to the stalker; usually they become rather wild, and if one of them begins to run from a man,

every deer within eyeshot will see the light coloured creature and will run too. And, of course, they are most industrious feeders, and rob the deer of much provender. Deer hate them—or perhaps it is that they hate the dogs and men who sometimes come after them. For one reason or another deer will not stay on land which is heavily stocked with sheep, if they have anywhere else to go to. So if you must stock with sheep at all, stock lightly, and on such parts of your forest as are of least use for stalking. But it will not be long before they wander all over it.

You must keep your rabbits down, and that is not so easy as it sounds, especially near the stormy West coast.

If deer hate sheep I think they hate rabbits more—as indeed do all other birds and beasts, which will none of them willingly remain on ground badly fouled by conies. It has been computed—though I do not know how truly—that six rabbits eat as much as a sheep. Anyhow they destroy an enormous amount of good herbage, and should be suppressed as far as possible. The most satisfactory way is to sell the trapping rights; but on many forests these are now unsaleable. A rabbit trapper has a hard fight

against the weather and his enemies, cats, foxes, and badgers, who take the rabbits out of his traps. Also he has to struggle with higher-than-pre-War railway rates and lower-than-pre-War prices. It is generally supposed that the big buyers of game and rabbits form an unbreakable ring which keeps the prices down.

So it has come to pass that many landlords, who used to get anything from ten to forty or fifty pounds for their trapping right, now have to pay someone to kill the rabbits for them. And a bleak, unpleasant job it can be, with perpetual gales and rain and snow to worry and confound the trapper.

On some forests he will be obliged to do all his work with steel traps, as the rabbits will refuse to enter his snares. The Scottish bunny does not seem to share the propensity of his Southern brother for using the same runways and beaten tracks ; or it may be, possibly, that in the keener struggle for life up North his senses have become more highly developed. I am pretty sure that a Ross-shire rabbit has more intelligence (or, maybe, just keener senses of smell, sight, and hearing) than his Hampshire relation, and is harder to catch.

If you do not want to shoot any grouse you can keep down your rabbits by encouraging wild cats and other killers. But if you prefer to kill your vermin for the sake of the grouse, you must kill the rabbits too.

VI.

A LITTLE LAW.

Most of us are extremely ignorant about the laws of trespass and poaching, but the owner or lessee of a forest ought to know how he stands *vis-á-vis* the trespasser and the poacher. He cannot do a great deal with either of these enemies to sport, but should be acquainted with whatever small powers are conferred on him by the Laws of Scotland.

The temporary intrusion by one person upon the property of another is Trespass, but trespass only becomes an offence, in the eyes of the law, when destruction of property or pursuit of game can be proved against the trespasser.

If you catch a hiker in the middle of your sanctuary, and can prove that the deer were disturbed to such an extent that the pursuit of them—which is in itself a valuable sporting right—has become impossible, or has been so seriously interfered with that loss to the proprietor has been occasioned, you can then obtain

an interdict against the trespasser—and much good may it do you!

Until you have got your interdict against an individual trespasser you cannot touch him in any way. If an interdicted person continues to trespass on your property, things can be made warm for him because of his 'breach of interdict'; but the ordinary hiker is allowed one bite, so to say, and obviously it is very little use obtaining an interdict—an expensive legal process—against someone who will probably never want to walk twice over the same hill.

No interdict can be granted against the general public, and the only practical use which can be made of this unsatisfactory weapon is to stop the prowlings of a crofter, or other citizen, who for some reason or other persists in wandering on the hill. As a defence against the real enemy, the casual hiker, it is quite valueless.

The Law of Scotland has not as yet made up its mind if deer are 'game' or not. They are definitely excluded from the provisions of the Night Poaching Acts of 1828 and 1844, and the Day Trespass Act of 1832, which are the legal sheet-anchors of a grouse-moor owner. But under the Common Law they are held to be 'game,' and any person who is convicted of

pursuing deer without the landowner's consent is liable to a fine not exceeding £2. It is not a very adequate penalty.

However, if the deer poacher is disguised, or is one of a gang of five or more persons, the penalties on conviction are appreciably higher.

A landowner, or a person acting under his authority, has the right to arrest a man who is poaching his grouse, if the culprit refuses to give his name and address; but there is no such right of apprehension in the case of a deer poacher. In this instance deer are not 'game.' It may be said without any fear of contradiction that the Law of Scotland, generally speaking, is nebulous and unsatisfactory with regard to trespass and poaching in deer-forests; but in these days of unbridled democracy it is not at all likely that any change will be made in the landowner's favour. He must just do the best he can, and there is a tip I can give him, which once was useful to me. The usual 'mean white' who opens fire on deer from the road with a rifle is very unlikely to have a licence for his weapon. The penalty for that offence is very much higher than for shooting at the deer, and the police will press for a conviction. Verb sap.

VII.

STALKING FOR BEGINNERS.

THIS should be skipped, obviously, by experienced stalkers; but if it is some help to one single novice it will not have been written in vain.

I may say here that in all the books on stalking which I possess, and they are a considerable number, I have never discovered a chapter with the above title. Much may, no doubt, be learnt from them *passim*, but the elementary instruction which the tyro ought to have instilled into him is nowhere, so far as I know, clearly presented on the printed page. This is very odd, for quite a lot of stalking literature exists.

I write with a little feeling in this matter, as I know well that I might have been saved from mistakes more than once if I had had some kind of handbook to turn to. The wisdom that comes from experience is abiding indeed, but you can pay too highly for it.

Imprimis, if you have a stalking friend or relation, consult him. There is no better way of learning than from the living voice. But if you cannot get the ear of such an one, your first step must be towards your gunmaker. He will probably sell you a magazine rifle (for which you will need a Licence) with a bore somewhere between .220 and .300. Personally, I have always used a .256 Mannlicher, and am quite satisfied with it, but I think the English rifles are better finished, and now that there is a duty on foreign rifles there is not so much difference in the price. The tendency to-day is to go in for a very small bore, .220 or .240, with a very high muzzle velocity, and I believe the results are quite satisfactory. A terrific punch from a small bullet is, I imagine, as lethal as a lighter blow from a larger one. All the same, I would not buy anything less than a .250 bore for my own use.

Not long ago a friend gave me a day's stalking in Skye, loveliest of islands. Towards evening I got a shot at a good stag, which was lying down almost immediately below the shelf on the mountain to which my stalker and I were clinging. The beast was an easy shot, except for the extreme steepness of the ground, and

I was able to plant a bullet in the middle of his spine, from as nearly straight above him as made no difference. You never saw such a mess as my .256 bullet made. Heart, liver, every internal organ seemed to have been raked and tattered to shreds. The gralloch (a more than usually gory one) over, the old stalker turned to me and asked me solemnly if I was using explosive bullets!

It was the only time in my life when I wished I had been using a smaller bore, though I think the result would have been much the same whatever the bore. From the peculiar angle of the shot, bits of backbone as well as bits of lead—the soft-nosed bullet was completely broken up—were sent flying in every direction. At any rate death was instantaneous, and the haunches were not spoilt; though the weight was, for he came into the larder without heart or liver.

It is just possible, even now, that you may find a second-hand double-barrelled .303 Express, by a good English gunmaker, in fair condition. If you do, I am not sure you ought not to buy it. Such a rifle is made only to order; in fact it hardly ever is made now, I should say, though the larger Expresses, for dangerous game, .410's,

.500's, and so forth, are common enough. Yet it possesses one great advantage: you can fire your second shot much more quickly than is possible from a magazine, and more accurately too, in all probability (if you are hurried), as you do not have to move your trigger hand. A stag, when a bullet has struck the ground somewhere beyond him, will often stand long enough for you to get in a second shot, if you are quick. By the time you have worked the bolt of a magazine rifle and settled down to a fresh aim he may be on the move.

Moreover, an Express by a good maker is a pleasure to look at and to handle, on account of the pains and skill which went to the making of it; but, perhaps, this will not appeal much to a utilitarian generation. Compared with the modern magazine rifle it has two disadvantages —first, it will not have quite such a flat trajectory at two hundred yards (the extreme range at which anyone ought ever to shoot at a stag); secondly, it is considerably heavier.

There is not much in the first objection, as the difference will only be a matter of perhaps two inches at two hundred, and next to nothing at one hundred yards. A drop of two inches, however, *might* make the difference between

killing and wounding. The extra weight will not affect you personally, unless you insist on carrying the rifle yourself—not half a bad plan, by the way, if you are young and strong! But the chances are that your stalker or your gillie will almost always carry it for you.

Having armed yourself with what will probably be a single-barrel, small-calibre magazine rifle, you will next have to consider the question of sights. The foreign-made rifles that I have seen are provided with rather coarse, clumsy sights, and you may find it expedient to change them for a finer foresight and a different backsight. Or you may decide to use a 'peep' sight, which is very effective in many hands. In any case you will have to go to the range and fire off as many rounds as may be necessary. Perhaps you are a good shot already with an Army rifle, in which case you have less to learn; but, in any case, you must establish intimate terms with your new weapon.

I believe a bull's-eye target (except perhaps for the first few shots) to be of less value for practice than a figure target. There is at least one range close to London where you can fire at a very realistic stag. When you have made a respectable 'group' of half a dozen shots,

a little behind the shoulder, at 150 yards, you have learned all that the range can teach you. I strongly recommend the beginner, when practising, to fire from the unrested hand only. At times on the hill you will get a nice convenient rest for the left hand. So much the better—always take the easiest firing position you can find. But more often you will discover that you cannot get the sights on to your beast's shoulder save by lifting the barrel of your rifle above the stones, or heather, or grass, in which you are lying. This means an elbow rest only, unless you have time to roll up your raincoat for a hand rest. Or your stalker may crawl in front of you and present his back as a platform ; a manœuvre which I deprecate as definitely unsafe and usually ineffective. Anyhow you cannot count on a rest for your hand, and should learn to shoot straight without it.

If you have good or normal sight either 'open' or 'peep' sights should serve you well enough. But if you are definitely myopic from any cause you will have to use that expensive and delicate gadget, a telescope sight.

If a telescope sight gets a knock it may require readjustment, so get your gunmaker to explain

how the adjusting gear works. There is usually an adjusting screw, which may slack back. If you find it is loose, try the sight at a target immediately. It is no use going out stalking with a sight which may give an error of a couple of feet at two hundred yards.

Get a rifle-cover made big enough to take rifle and fixed telescope sight as well. It is not good practice to put on the telescope in a desperate hurry at the last moment. Also provide your sight with a leather cap at each end, connected with a strap. The caps will keep moisture off the glass till you are actually about to fire, and are effective enough in light rain or drizzle. In heavy rain a telescope sight makes shooting a chancy, almost impossible business. No one can see much through a dripping wet glass.

It is sometimes said that a stalker will not bother to get you close to your stag if you are using a telescope sight. I have not found that this is true, but in any case the remedy is entirely in your own hands, provided you have learned a little about judging distance on the hill. You can always, and should always, refuse to take a shot at any range appreciably over a hundred and eighty yards (some would say

a hundred and fifty), telescope sight or not. I think that there may be a certain amount of temptation to a stalker to avoid the risks of the last and most difficult fifty yards, if he knows that his gentleman is a good shot. But the temptation, if any, is there just the same, whatever the sights on the rifle.

You can soon learn to judge distance with enough accuracy by going a little way up the hill on off-days, and pacing out the required distances (one to two hundred yards) in the heather. Yet another drawback (besides delicacy, and ineffectiveness in rain) inherent in this type of sight is the difficulty the user will find in shooting from the hand. A hand rest of some kind is almost essential, as the weight of the sight disturbs the balance of the rifle, and makes it very difficult to keep quite steady if the hand is unsupported. It is not bad practice to carry a little wooden block, like a brick, done up in leather, with a strap handle. It makes a dry seat in a wet place, and is a better hand rest than a folded raincoat, which usually loses all shape and coherence at the critical moment. Besides, you may want to wear a raincoat. It does rain sometimes, north of the Forth.

It is a good thing to practise shooting from a sitting position, elbows on thighs. Sometimes a shot is possible from this position and no other, with any type of sight, but especially often with a telescope sight, which must be raised well clear of all impediments with particular care. Remember that although no obstacle is visible to the eye, peering into the telescope, yet the muzzle of the rifle may be pointing straight at a stone, or a tuft of heather, only a few yards away. The line of sight through the telescope, and the path of the bullet, converge exactly at a hundred and fifty yards (or whatever range the sight is set for), but the line of sight may pass clean over an obstacle within a few feet of the muzzle of the rifle, which will catch the bullet. Heather is tough, and will deflect a small-bore bullet. Fragments of stone struck at close quarters by a high velocity projectile may fly straight back into your eyes.

Because of these disadvantages I look upon a telescope sight as a considerable handicap, which can only be evened up by a good deal of care and forethought. No one who can shoot reasonably well with open or 'peep' sights ought to use one—not because it is an 'unsporting gadget,' but simply because it gives

you so much more to worry about, and definitely (in my opinion) increases the odds in favour of the stag. Anyone who considers it unsporting had better go back to spears, or bows and arrows.

Some men always carry their own rifle on the hill, and there is something to be said for the habit, though I confess that I never do it! But then I have reached an age when the grasshopper begins to be a burden. I well remember one evening when my stalker and I were homeward bound after a blank day. We stumbled almost on top of a good enough stag who was lying hidden in a heathery hollow. He bolted like a frightened rabbit for a hundred yards, then stopped and had a good long stare at us. If I had been carrying the rifle I should have had a useful chance of killing him, but by the time my stalker had pulled it out of its cover, loaded it, and handed it over, it was too late, as the stag was running again.

It is just as well never to do up the strap and buckle of the cover if there is any possibility of a shot; and you can carry five rounds in the magazine, with the spring eased and no round in the breech, just as safely as if they were in your pocket.

I remember very well one morning, early in September, when my daughter and I were riding the two pack ponies up a pony track, quite low down on the forest. The weather was fine, and as it seemed more than likely that all the deer would be high up we were advancing without any particular precaution—first, ourselves on the ponies, followed at a distance of perhaps a hundred yards by our stalker, carrying the rifle, and two gillies. We meant to ride up to the end of the track—a trek of an hour or thereabouts—and then have a good spy all round. Suddenly my daughter hurled herself off her pony and made signs to me to do likewise. She had seen two stags running down the hill towards us, not three hundred yards away.

The men behind us had seen them too, but were unable to move, as they happened to be in full view of the two beasts. By almost incredible good luck the ponies, and ourselves when dismounted, were hidden by a fair-sized hummock.

So there we all were, while the two stags, which we made out to be a big fellow and a smaller one, stopped running and began to feed towards us. They had not seen anything suspicious.

D., our stalker, started up the hill in our direction, on his stomach, and very slowly. Till he got within twenty yards of us, he was in full view of the beasts.

All went well, however; he reached us unseen, and handed my daughter the rifle. Five minutes later the big stag lay dead. He was very unlucky, poor beast, as it was 'a monkey to a mousetrap' that he saw the ponies before we saw him. How much simpler it would have been, however, if one of us had carried the rifle all the time!

As a general rule, try to plant your bullet a little behind the stag's shoulder. A neck shot is satisfactory, if it comes off, as the stag drops dead in his tracks; but the target is a much smaller one. A stag shot through the heart may run for a considerable distance, and it is not always possible to tell from the smack of the bullet if you have hit or missed. One of my sons last season (1934) fired at a stag standing on the edge of a very steep and deep gully, much broken by holes, and half-covered in old, long heather. It was a wild, windy day, and neither he nor his stalker were sure that they had heard the bullet hit. At the shot the stag bounded out of sight, apparently going down

the gully. They searched in a downward direction for some time, but could not find him, and concluded it was a miss. A month later, when the season was over, that stag was found dead in a heathery hole not a hundred yards away from where he stood when the bullet split his heart in two; but he had run *up* the ravine, not down it, and had fallen in such a way as to be invisible unless you walked right on to him.

But that of course was an exceptional case.

In one of his books ('The Three Hostages') Colonel John Buchan makes his hero shoot a stag through the neck at two hundred yards, adding the information that it was the only part of the beast visible. Such a shot is very, very difficult, and few indeed are the riflemen who could bring it off. A stag lying down two hundred yards away with only his head and neck showing is almost invisible. At the same time it is to be noted that it is a perfectly legitimate chance to take, if for any reason it is impossible or undesirable to wait for him to get up, as your bullet will either kill him or miss him clean.

When you have killed, or think you have killed, a stag, re-load at once. He may get up

again. And even when there is no reason to doubt that he is dead, walk up to him with your rifle at the ready (but not pointing into the small of anyone's back). Before now stags have been stunned by a graze, and then have jumped into sudden life again and escaped. If you have to finish off a wounded stag at close quarters shoot him through the neck.

One emphatic Don't, and I have finished with the rifle. Never fire with any part of the barrel touching or resting on a rock. Should you do so the jump from the hard surface will send your bullet anywhere. There is no harm, I think, in resting your left hand on a stone, though I have heard it argued that a certain amount of 'jump' can be communicated even through your hand. Perhaps it depends on the thickness or the horniness of your palm!

You will want a good telescope, unless you are prepared to let your stalker do all the spying —an uninterested attitude which is to be deplored. At first you will be astonished to find how much more is visible to him than to you, even if your 'glass' is a more modern one. But you will begin to learn gradually what to look for, where to look for it, and how to interpret what you find. Some day you may even

have the satisfaction of being the first to get the glass on to a ' good ' stag.

I believe that years ago the best telescopes were made in Germany, but now there is not the least need to buy any but a home-made one. The Ross telescope, for example, gives an appreciably better definition of a distant object (to my eye, at least) than anything made by Zeiss or the other famous German firms, even if the ' field,' or visible area, is not quite so large. A telescope of about 22 or 24 magnifying power is quite big enough.

A problem I have never solved to my satisfaction is how to prevent a telescope flashing in the sun. A brass telescope makes a brighter flash, I think, than a shiny black one, but you can see the sun glint on a black japanned surface a very long way off, and so can the deer. As a rule it does not alarm them greatly, but they put their heads up and have a good look, very often just when you want them to go on feeding quietly.

Perhaps a waterproof cover for the telescope is the best solution—but you will generally forget to put it into your pocket on a fine day. It seems that a ' glass,' if not made of brass, must be made of some other metal (such as

aluminium) which needs a shiny, enamel-like coating to preserve it satisfactorily.

It is commonly supposed that the colour of your clothes is an important matter, but I am inclined to believe that it is not nearly so important as people think. For one thing, a coat that is almost invisible against the green of early September will be quite conspicuous later on, when the trees are all scarlet and gold, marching up the burn-side like an army bright with banners. And a colour which is hard to pick out among the grey rocks of ptarmigan land will be very distinct among the heather. However cunningly you clothe yourself you will be easy enough to pick out from your background in some places and at certain seasons.

It is movement that a deer sees, rather than colour, and provided that your cap, coat, and 'plus fours' are not very light or very dark you may rest content. If your clothes are too dark you will be more 'kenspeckle' than if they are a shade too light—though you need not emulate the garb of a cavalry subaltern, of whom I once heard, who appeared arrayed for the hill in a pair of white polo breeches!

Do not choose your latest Savile Row creations to go stalking in, as a suit of clothes which has

taken its proper share of a long, flat crawl among the peat-hags is not of much use thereafter for anything except more stalking.

It is better not to wear a white flannel shirt. On a hot day you will very likely unbutton your coat, and an expanse of white flannel shows up quite a long way off.

I always take a 'woolly' or an extra waistcoat in my pocket to slip on if a long wait is necessary, as it so often is; and a substantial rainproof coat is a great comfort. On very cold or wet days it is a necessity to most Sassenachs. Also (as I have already remarked) it can be used as a rifle rest when rolled up, or better still, strapped up. But remember that you cannot wear it and use it for a rest at one and the same time!

Boots or shoes? It does not matter very much, so long as you do not get blisters from a badly fitting new pair. Have a long walk in new boots before wearing them on the hill. If you use nailed shoes they will soon get full of water, and will remain full. Some men do not seem to mind, and certainly the saving in weight must be a help towards the end of a long day. Personally I prefer water-tight boots, properly nailed, with anklets on top. Except

in very heavy rain you should then come home with your feet pretty dry.

I hope you are fairly fit, as the hill is not really the place for the soft and flabby—especially for middle-aged softness and flabbiness. Stalking can be very hard, rough work, and even when you are young it is inadvisable to rush at it straight from an office stool; as I did once, many years ago.

I accepted an invitation from an old friend, with much joy, obtained a fortnight's holiday, hired a rifle from a gunmaker, and left Euston for Inverness in a sleeping-car and a state of excited anticipation.

It was about the third week in September, and the weather was very cold, with snow on all the high tops. The lodge was small and old, there was never enough hot water, and my friend's kitchen was by no means the abode of culinary skill. That would have mattered little if things had gone well with me; but my first day on the hill was very cold and very wet, I had a long and tiring walk home in soaking clothes, and on the morrow developed a chill which threatened pneumonia. Incidentally, because I did not know my rifle, I missed two good stags. All of which is

extremely unimportant except as an awful warning.

It is true that you may get a succession of fine days and easy stalks, but such luck is not very probable, even early in the season, and certainly cannot be counted upon.

I maintain that no one ought to attempt a long day on the hill unless he (or she) is in some sort of training. It is not only the hard exercise involved in walking, climbing, crawling, for hour after hour, though that is bad enough for flabby heart and untuned muscles. You have also to get used to being very hot, and then becoming very cold, and to being and remaining wet (at any rate about the knees and elbows) with the thermometer in the lower forties or upper thirties. You are not at all unlikely to have to lie as flat as nature will let you, with a stream of cold water running through your waistcoat buttons, and heavy squalls of rain or sleet beating upon your back, waiting for a stag to get up. The time you may stay in such a position will be unbounded save by your own powers of endurance and the stag's desire for another meal. (Of all maddening objects commend me to the small portion of a stag visible—the tips of his horns perhaps—when he

is lying down in a nicely sheltered place, comfortably chewing the cud, while you are waiting in a cold wind, during an eternity, for the moment when he will get up and begin to feed.)

Assuredly, unless you are naturally made of cast-iron, some preliminary hardening is necessary. Shooting grouse over dogs is as good a form of training as I know. If you can pursue your Gordon or Irish setter all day, and still be able to shoot respectably at five o'clock, you are fit to go stalking.

A word about crawling—it is not nearly so easy as you might think! There are two kinds of crawling, which should merge imperceptibly into each other—hands and knees, and flat on your stomach.

Most inexperienced persons when crawling on hands and knees keep their head well down certainly, but their rump well up. Flat crawling for any distance is most exhausting, and by no means easy. If you doubt me, persuade another novice to crawl over a bit of rough ground, in both styles, and then ask your stalker to give a demonstration. You will be surprised at the difference. Your friend will make slow progress, and even so will project strange humps and outlines above the immediate sky-line, but the

professional will slide swiftly along, showing nothing of himself, in the scanty cover of heather and peat-hag.

After all this good advice you should now be nearly ready for the hill, complete with rifle, ammunition, telescope, suitable clothes, and a toughened physique! There is still something missing however, isn't there? "Bless my soul, I have forgotten my lunch."

Never forget to have a bite in your pocket. Or, if it is in a haversack, never part company with the gillie who carries it. There is a story in that most charming book, 'An Old Stalker's Reminiscences,' about the dreadful fate which nearly overtook a gentleman who had no lunch. It was in a bag on the gillie's back; and its owner and his stalker parted company from the gillie at mid-day, as they started on what should have been a short and easy stalk. But what with this and with that they found themselves at dusk many miles from the gillie and from home, in snow squalls and a biting wind, without food. The Scot was not much the worse, in the end, but the Sassenach nearly died of cold and exhaustion.

Skipping all preliminaries for the present (which, by a novice, must be left entirely to

the stalker) we will now suppose that you have crawled within about a hundred yards of your stag. If he is on his legs, your rifle will be put into your hand by the stalker, and you may put your head up gingerly and have a look. Unless you are expressly told to take him at once do not be in a hurry. It is no use telling you not to be excited. Of course you are excited. That you cannot help. But you can make yourself act rationally just the same. You can take time to get into the best possible firing position, to recover your wind, or to get a midge out of your eye. Your excitement need not lead you to shoot in a hurry when there is no need for hurry, or carelessly, when there is need for care.

If the stag is lying down, wait for him to get up, unless it is very cold and wet, and you feel that a long wait is impossible. A stag lying down is not nearly such an easy target as one on his feet, but if you can see his neck and some of his back he is killable, and no doubt it is better to miss him and go home than to get pneumonia after shooting him.

If he is feeding, wait till he turns broadside on to you. If it is late in the season, and he is chasing the hinds about, wait till he comes

your way. He almost always does, sooner or later.

Before you pull the trigger, make quite sure that you are aiming at the right beast. If several stags are together it is quite easy to pick the wrong one in the excitement of the moment. Your stalker will make no mistake as to the best one there, but if you are in too much of a hurry you may make a bad mistake. I am sure that more stags are missed from fluster and hurry than from any other cause; but some are missed from dilatoriness. Now and again there will be a stag which gives you a fleeting chance, and no more. If you are too slow in firing you will go home abusing yourself for not having taken that chance; but all the same, I am sure it is best for the beginner to practise a certain amount of deliberation.

Nothing but experience can teach you immediately and certainly to recognise the occasions when you should shoot at once; but, if you hear a hind bark, shoot, if you can, for it is odds that they will all be away in another second or two. It is a note of alarm to which every deer within earshot will pay attention, except perhaps at the very end of the season when stags and hinds alike sometimes seem

to become almost indifferent to the usual danger signals.

Again, if, as may happen, you and your stalker have got too close before putting your heads up, and are seen when you do so, the deer will make off; but *may* stand and turn round for a last look before they get out of range. If they do, a quick shot will perhaps snatch success out of the jaws of defeat.

Generally speaking, you must shoot as soon as possible if the deer are restive or alarmed, even if your heart is nearly bursting and your breath coming in 'fast thick pants' after a hurried, distressful climb.

I advise no beginner to shoot at a moving stag unless he is very close—well within fifty yards. Get in a second shot, if you can, by all means, if he stands still after the first one; but do not pump lead after a rapidly disappearing beast at a range of a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty yards. It is true that you will probably not hit him; but you may quite possibly break a leg or wound him in the stomach. Then if you are a humane sportsman, as I imagine, your misery will be great, but the stag's will be even greater. Also, remember that the noise of a rifle shot carries a long way.

You do not want your friends over the march to go home smiling sardonically with the glad news that young Blank of Glen So-and-So must have bought a new machine-gun !

If you miss a stag just thank your stars that you did not wound him, and try to make out where the bullet went. Your stalker will very likely be able to tell you.

Yet it must be that the time will come, sooner or later, to everyone who stalks, when by some mischance he wounds instead of killing. It is the inevitable ' worm i' the bud ' which has its counterpart in every sport, and indeed in every form of human activity.

But with due care this misfortune should happen very seldom, and one useful precaution is always to aim rather high. It is the low shots which wound, and a high shot, even if it is rather far back, will paralyse. The common forms of wound, broken legs and punctured stomachs, come from a dropped shot.

If a stag does go away wounded remember that even on three legs he can go much faster than you can on two. It is far better to lie still, waiting to see where he is making for, than to pursue him wildly. If left alone, he may lie down soon, and you can stalk him

again ; but you must remember that a wounded stag is usually the most difficult beast of all to approach. If he knows he is being pursued he will vanish away into ' der ewigkeit ' as completely as Hans Breitmann's ' barty,' and you will be most unhappy.

Even then, however, when you get back to the Lodge your black mood should be kept to yourself as much as possible. I have heard a charming lady, whose husband is the enviable possessor of one of the loveliest forests in Scotland, hold forth with some bitterness on this subject. " One guest," she said, " who has wounded a stag, can spoil the evening for everyone, and very often does. Some men are bad enough even if they have only missed one." It is unfair, to use no stronger term, thus to inflict your sorrows on your friends.

You will naturally and properly wish to commend yourself to your stalker. You should therefore be entirely candid with him. As a counsel of perfection I would advise you not to make many excuses if you miss an easy shot —though it requires almost superhuman fortitude to refrain from doing so ! He will be very ready to make excuses for you, if there are any which can be made legitimately. It does not

pay to make excuses in any form of sport, really and truly—though most of us do it. There is perhaps something a little inhuman about the man who never makes excuses, yet if you miss half a dozen pheasants coming over high with the wind my earnest advice is, Say nothing. If you crumple them up, one after the other, say less! If you are lucky enough to get a good start when hounds find, and keep a front place over the big fences in the Vale until 'they' run into 'him' at the end of a wonderful fifty minutes, don't 'buk' about it over half a county. If you cut a voluntary when your horse pecks over the first fence, don't abuse the horse; warmly thank the man who catches him (it is not always done, as I know from experience) and offer up a silent prayer that no one saw exactly what happened.

You will not acquire merit by telling your stalker of the number of stags killed by you on another forest last year, or by giving him more whisky to drink than is seemly. But if he finds out that you are reasonably fit, desperately keen, disinclined to grumble, and above all, entirely straightforward in your dealings with him, he will presently admit you to his friendship and confidence. They are very well worth having.

VIII.

A LITTLE LORE.

My paragon, my ideal stalker, is a fairly tall man of great intelligence, with perfect eyesight, hearing, and temper! A short man is handicapped if he has to stalk for a tall one, as the latter's head, being six or eight inches higher up, will be seen over a ridge by deer which are invisible to the stalker. A tall 'rifle' ought to be a deal more careful than usual if his stalker is much shorter than himself; and if his eyes are not too good he should not follow the stalker at all closely. If he keeps ten or fifteen yards behind he is less likely to be seen by deer which are out of the stalker's sight. However, size does not really matter. Eyesight is essential.

One of the most important, difficult, and perpetual problems in stalking is for a man, as he walks along, to see all deer within eyeshot before they see him. Even the best stalker will very occasionally miss something within a few hundred yards of him—the head of a hind, or

a stag's horns—just a little bit of some part of the cervine anatomy, a mere nothing, but of great importance to all concerned.

I do not think that a deer's eyesight is any better than a man's ; and there is the advantage on the stalker's side that he is looking out for deer, while the deer, unless already disturbed, are not looking out for him. On the other hand the stalking party is moving ; the deer are generally standing, or lying still, or moving quite slowly.

It must always be borne in mind that motionless objects on the hill are very difficult to see. Following up this proposition a little, it is evident that objects moving very slowly are harder to see than objects moving fast. For this reason your stalker, if he has to cross a piece of ground in full view of distant deer, will move with the greatest deliberation.

Another self-evident proposition is that a large target is easier to pick up than a small one. Therefore, if the deer in the distance are on the flank of the stalking party, it is wise to reduce your visible area by walking in line abreast. Three or four persons moving very slowly, elbow to elbow, are infinitely less likely to be seen by deer away to a flank than the

same party in line ahead, walking quickly. If you move quite slowly it is possible to keep a fairly good line abreast even over very broken ground.

If the distant deer are in front of you, and you are moving in line ahead (your normal formation), at critical places the persons in rear should stoop down and hide themselves as much as possible behind their leader, conforming closely to his movements. The absent-minded or uninterested person of either sex who will not keep in line, but goes wandering about on his or her own, should be called smartly to attention!

In bright sunlight, movement is very easily seen, and you will have to be much more circumspect during your 'approach march' than you need to be on a dull day. On a day of alternate cloud and sunshine, wait till the sun is covered before moving, if you are in sight of deer. In heavy rain a stalking party will probably be quite invisible five hundred yards away.

Nothing can be more vexatious than to follow a stalker who is always blundering into deer which he should have seen. An old man whose eyes are dim may make good to some extent

with small glasses; but they are a very poor substitute for good eyes, and if a stalker has to use binoculars much it is time he acknowledged the victory of advancing years.

However good the stalker's eyes are, and they will probably be very good indeed, it is just as well to remember that he cannot look in every direction at once. You, as well as the gillie behind you (if there is one), can at all times render good service by keeping a keen look-out on your flank and rear. Deer have a way of suddenly appearing in the most unexpected places, and the whole party never have an eye too many between them, if they wish to do the job properly.

It is to me always a thrilling moment when the stalker suddenly stiffens, almost like a dog pointing, and you know he has seen something of note. It may be, in fact usually it will be, only a hind and calf, or a party of hinds with no stag; but it always *may* be the head of the season, and anyhow provides a problem, great or small, requiring immediate solution.

You will notice that he does not duck down quickly. Having had a look he will slowly lower his head. Then, in all probability, he will pull out his glass and investigate. After that

he will tell you what he has seen. Or he may say just nothing! Personally I prefer a communicative stalker, but some of the dour ones are good men, too, and are willing enough to answer questions, though bad at providing information unasked.

Had he ducked down hurriedly the deer might have seen the jerk of his head. If he has any reason to think that they may have 'got' him he will stand stock-still and stare at them without moving an eyelid, until such time as their heads go down and they begin to feed again, or turn away. If they are not sure, but merely a little suspicious, it is a trick which almost always comes off. There is, no doubt, a certain amount of movement on the hill at all times, from grouse, pipits, and other birds, wild cats, foxes, rabbits, and other beasts. A small, half-seen movement is worth watching, an old hind says to herself, for several minutes, certainly; but after that, if she sees nothing more, she will want to get on with her dinner. She has a cunning trick, however, to show you first. She stands at ease, rather obviously, or begins to feed, and then suddenly springs to attention again. This must always be remembered and guarded against. Also, when deer

move off slowly across a skyline one of the older hinds is certain to reappear, half a minute later, for just one more look down wind, before she makes up her mind to follow the others. Sometimes you could almost swear that certain hinds are told off as sentries, but I suppose the grandmothers of the herd are the natural and self-appointed guardians; probably the old ladies realise that the stags often are too lazy and the calves and young hinds too inexperienced to keep what they consider a proper look-out.

As an example of good eye-work at close range I shall always remember an incident which happened to me not long ago. I had, alas, wounded a stag by dropping the bullet some inches too low. (I think I may fairly add that he was the only stag that season which got more than a hundred yards from where my bullet hit him.) The poor beast limped slowly up the hill with a badly broken shoulder, bleeding a good deal. After going half a mile he lay down, but not for long; went on a few yards, and lay down again for some time; and repeated this process a good many times, with longer and longer halts, until he disappeared over the skyline.

It should be noted that a stag with a broken foreleg will always make off uphill, if possible; with a broken hindleg, downhill, in order to give his damaged propelling power the best chance of working effectively.

We did not move till he was out of sight, as he kept on looking back, but lay quietly watching him for an hour or more.

As he vanished we jumped up and began to climb the steep hillside after him as quickly as we could, feeling fairly confident that we should find him not far away from where we had last seen him. We left the gillie behind, to signal to us if the stag should reappear by any chance.

But to our consternation, before we reached the top of the brae, the wind suddenly swung round through nearly half a circle, from north-east to south, or thereby. It was not a mere local current, such as we might have known and guarded against; it was a definite change of wind.

The result was that the wounded stag got our wind, and when we reached the crest was nowhere to be seen.

Things looked pretty hopeless, but we considered that whatever his previous 'point' had been he would now probably make for Ben

Faisig, a lump of a mountain some twenty-five hundred feet high, lying a couple of miles to the west. Our guess was a good one, for before we had climbed and walked half a mile in the new direction D., my stalker, suddenly stiffened, and thrust the rifle into my hands. "I see the top of his horns," he whispered.

Now a wounded stag, as I have already remarked, is the deuce and all to approach, and I expected to see him close at hand perhaps, but up and moving off before I was ready to shoot. As a matter of fact he was at least a hundred yards away, and had not 'got' us. He was lying down in some peat-hags, in the middle of a very broken bit of country, and for my part I could not make out his horns at all without a glass.

We even managed to crawl a little nearer to a better firing position; after a wait of perhaps five minutes he got up, quite unaware of us, and I killed him. But, of course, it was D. who killed him really. Try to pick up the tips of a stag's horns a hundred yards away in dark, broken ground, and you will realise what I mean. If your eyesight is really good, you would probably be able to see them *when told where to look*—but would you have picked them

up as you stumbled along over rough ground, breathing hard after a stiff bit of uphill going ?

To see without being seen is not the whole of the art of stalking indeed, but is a great part of it.

A stalker's hearing should be perfect too. He can sometimes hear the calves bleating a long way off, and get warning from the sound, if his hearing is acute. And when the stags are roaring, he must listen carefully and register in his mind the probable direction of each roaring stag.

As to control of temper, I have never met a stalker who was easily put out, and imagine that few such exist. I have heard a story, however, of a young gentleman who emptied his magazine at a stag in vain, and was told, " That is quite enough noise for one day. Now we will go home."

One sympathises with the speaker, but I think the man was quite wrong to say what he did. Or he might have put it a little differently !

One stalker I know well has a most equable, cheerful temperament—except in one respect. If he sees a fox on the hill a quite unexpected flow of biting bad language leaves his lips—

he does hate foxes! It is a harmless foible, to be sure, and an understandable one, for foxes in Scotland are not of much use to anyone, and he has some grouse to protect.

Not long ago, on a Ross-shire forest, the sudden apparition of a youthful hiker put away a very good stag which was on the point of falling, a wholly legitimate victim, to the rifle of the owner of the forest. Wholly legitimate, because the stag had been fed in winter and spared on various occasions for several seasons until he should attain his prime. Now the time had come.

However, frightened by the hiker, he fled over the march (the forest is a large one, but this stag did not hug the sanctuary, like so many) and had to be abandoned for the day. They went to look for him next morning, but saw nothing of him, though they heard a shot from over the march, and said they hoped it was not their stag.

But it was; and thanks to that abominable youth the best or one of the best heads of the year fell to a very lucky rifle on a very small forest.

That is the sort of luck a stalker has to bear as best he may.

We will suppose then that our man has passed his examination with high honours, so far as eyesight (and the use he makes of his eyes), hearing, and temper are concerned. What further qualities are demanded ?

A good judgment and a good memory of ground are very important. If he does not know his ground he should have the faculty of interpreting truly what he sees with eye or telescope, and of guessing correctly what lies over the next ridge. I have heard it said that it must take a stalker several years to learn his ground when he comes to a new forest ; but it depends very much on his memory, and individuals no doubt vary.

Changes are usually made in the autumn, and a young man who is really keen will have a working knowledge of his ground before the next season begins. He will be out on the hill at all times and in all weathers learning his lesson, and though he cannot have the precise knowledge possessed by his old predecessor, who may have been on the same forest for twenty or thirty years, the season's bag for his beat should not show any decline.

Very often it happens, during a stalk, that you have to lose sight of your stag for a long time

while you climb above him, perhaps, or make a long detour to avoid other beasts. The hall-mark of a ' class ' stalker is his ability to bring you up to your stag, with the accuracy of a train going into a station, even though he has not set eyes on him for an hour or more.

Knowledge of the ground is of course very helpful, but I have seen a man work this seeming miracle with unswerving accuracy on ground which was not at all familiar to him. That is real hillcraft, a sort of sixth sense, and very few possess it. Thorough knowledge of his own bit of hill will, of course, serve a stalker equally well.

There is a dodge which may be used quite legitimately by amateur stalkers, if the ground permits. Suppose that you spy a party of stags high up on the mountain, among the rocks and boulders of ptarmigan land. You know very well how difficult it will be to tell, from above, just where the deer are lying, for all the landmarks you made out from below will look exactly alike when you are in the midst of that stony confusion, and the deer will probably be out of sight till you get within eighty or ninety yards of them. Obviously it is vitally important that you should know where they

are when you are still two or three hundred yards away.

Under such conditions an amateur, or anyone who does not know every inch of the ground, may leave the gillie at the spying-place while he himself fetches the necessary compass round the top of the hill. Then, if the wind serves, and he does not move the deer in the wrong direction, an hour or two later he will find himself sitting down on a rock looking through his glass for signals from the gillie on the flats, perhaps two thousand feet below and two miles away !

The gillie, who can see the stalkers and the stalked, and has been keeping an eye on both, will wave a handkerchief on the end of a stick to right or left as the case may be, till the stalkers are more or less above the deer. He will then give some pre-arranged signal as an O.K., and may sit down and watch the rest of the stalk !

Although it is not always quite so simple as it sounds, a gillie who can see both stalkers and stalked, and has his wits and a good telescope about him, can often be of the greatest use.

Besides knowing the ground a stalker must

know the winds that blow above it. All forests have their peculiar wind currents, which have to be studied. It is highly important, for instance, to know that a west wind with any north in it becomes almost due north along the shoulder of a particular hill, or that when a south wind blows it is impossible to approach the Black Corrie from the north, as it whirls round and blows straight into the mouth thereof.

He must be able accurately to judge, moreover, how far the human scent will carry; for it happens sometimes that you wish to pass deer which are to leeward of you without disturbing them. I hesitate to lay down any law on the subject (we all know what Mr Jorrocks thought about scent), but I believe that deer seldom or never wind you if you are over two miles away, but will almost always do so at a mile, with a true and steady breeze. The safety point appears to be at some distance in between.

A stalker should always remember, moreover, that he and his party lay down a strong scent on the ground, as they move, which is noticeable to a deer's nose for a long time—twenty-four hours I think, more or less, if there is no rain.

I have seen deer walk up to a line of human scent, sniff, and turn tail. I have also seen them, after sniffing, take a big bound forward, as if they were jumping an obstacle, over the line of scent. It looked as if they thought the distressing aroma was in itself a danger, and were afraid it might give their legs a tweak. No, believe me, I am not pulling yours!

There are local conditions of wind and scent which must be marked and learned on every forest. I can think of one favourite corrie for deer which lies over against the eastern march of the forest; with the wind in any quarter it has to be stalked from above. A west wind —the prevalent one—makes a long detour necessary in order to avoid giving beasts in the corrie your wind as you toil up the hill, and it has become an established fact that if you keep to the west side of a certain burn you are safe; but if you go up the east bank of the burn you will empty the corrie of deer. Very curious and inexplicable, but so it is. In this case a matter of two or three hundred yards seems to make all the difference.

Why is it that deer are more alarmed at the smell of a man than at the sight of him? They will run much faster and much farther if

they wind you than if they see you, and will take longer to settle down afterwards. In New Zealand, in country where deer had never seen a man, and were in consequence extremely unsuspicious, they made off in the greatest hurry if they got your wind. If they saw you only, they were as likely as not to walk towards you for a closer look.

I remember once stopping two people, a man and his wife, who had just left the track with the intention of climbing a nice-looking hill in the middle of my sanctuary. I told them politely that they would do me much mischief if they went on, and added that I felt sure they did not want to spoil my sport. The man agreed to that, but said that he could not see any deer. As a matter of fact there were plenty in sight, but I let that pass. "It's not the deer that see you which will be most frightened," I explained. "Your tracks will remain fresh for twenty-four hours, and no deer will cross them, unless it rains. And all those which get your wind — your scent, that is — will run as if the devil was after them. You will frighten every beast that is within two miles of you downwind, whether they see you or no." He looked incredulous and answered, "I

don't believe it. We both had baths this morning!"

In some steep, rocky corries the wind swirls round and round like water in a tidal pot-hole, and is constantly altering in force and direction. I have watched the curtains of mist moving backwards and forwards across the mouth of such a place, exactly as if someone were pulling them to and fro on an invisible cord. If there is a stag behind them, as there often is, for deer love such spots, he is fairly safe (and, I think, knows it). Yet if you can stalk from above you have a chance, as the vortex of air appears usually to rise. But the corrie I am thinking of is most precipitous—by no means a place for anyone with a poor head, and if you get a shot at all it is sure to be from a really dreadful position. Also there is the danger that the stag, if you hit him, will fall violently down a steep place, and smash himself and his horns to bits before he stops rolling. But I always feel that one stag in that corrie is worth half a dozen almost anywhere else.

It is of course a commonplace of stalking that deer are more easily approached from above than from below, for the simple reason that whether feeding, or resting, their eyes are turned

down, not up, the hill. They seldom give a glance in an upward direction.

I do not care for a stalker who seems unable to make up his mind. The irresolute man will sit and watch deer for hour after hour, if they are in a difficult place, until in the end he has to turn away defeated. The average 'rifle' is quite ready to wait if it is obviously the only thing to do—for instance, if feeding deer are drawing slowly out of a bad place into a better one. But emphatically he does not like a long, cold wait which leads to nothing. "The deer are in a very bad place, and look like staying there," says the stalker. "All right," you say, "what shall we do about it? Is it any use waiting?"

If he is a sensible man he will realise that his 'rifle' would much rather try a stalk, however wet and difficult, than sit and shiver for a couple of hours on the off-chance of something turning up.

It is wonderful what can be done with flat crawling and a slice of luck; many times a good stalker has got me a shot after declaring that although it would be very difficult, yet if I did not care to wait there was just a chance. And of course at many other times it does not come

off, and you move the deer. But even if you do that, very possibly they may not be much alarmed, and will settle down again into a better place where you can stalk them again, if the day is still young enough.

How quickly, for me at least, time on the hill races by ; the light begins to fade, and the sky puts on its evening colours before I have had time to realise that yet another stalking day is nearly done.

Give me a bold, sanguine stalker every time. You will kill more stags, and have much more fun with him, than with the man who is inclined to haver and drag upon the skirts of Fortune.

Unless you are very near home you should never be tempted to begin a stalk late in the day. Nothing can be more unsatisfactory than missing or wounding a stag in fading light, and venison left out on the hill all night is useless for human food. Venison, properly handled, is the best meat there is, take it all round ; but it needs careful treatment from the very beginning, and is easily spoiled. I know of one forest where—probably from over-keenness—it often happens that too many stags are killed in the day, with the result that a good few stay out on the hill till the following morn-

ing. The venison is given away up and down the glen, and is buried with great speed by the recipients. That kind of thing does not make anyone an acceptable neighbour to the poorer brethren. A small quantity of good venison is worth any amount of fly-blown stuff.

It is definitely dangerous, moreover, to use ponies on the hill when the light has gone. If you can get a loaded pony to the path before dark, well and good, but you ought never to allow one with a stag on his back to tackle a rough or boggy bit of hill in the twilight. Hill ponies are delightful characters, and well worth looking after.

When the stag is in the larder the sooner it is skinned the better. Yet I have actually seen stags' carcases hanging up outside a butcher's shop in Edinburgh with their skins on! No better way of spoiling good venison could be conceived.

A controversy breaks out at regular intervals as to whether stags should or should not be weighed 'clean'—*i.e.*, without heart and liver. I own to a prejudice in favour of keeping these organs in their place till the beast has been weighed. After all, both are succulent and edible—stag's liver is a particularly excellent

dish—and I know not why they should be excluded. If a forest's average weight is given as 'clean,' you should add about a stone to bring the figure up to the 'heart and liver' average.

But we seem to have got ourselves locked into the larder, and there is still something to be said about the hill.

In the course of a season a lot of stags must save their lives by their keen hearing. The clink of metal, from boot or stick, against rock; the rattle of a displaced stone or slab on the high tops; a sneeze, or a voice raised too loudly; the distant bark of some confounded hind; the flapping of an unfastened raincoat in a stiff wind—these and many other sounds are quite enough to make deer put their heads up, or to frighten them away altogether.

At all times one should walk as quietly as possible, avoiding loose stones and speaking with bated breath, even if one thinks no deer are close at hand. It is useful to form a good habit, and a reasonable degree of noiselessness is not very hard to acquire. Some gillies, by the way, excellent in other respects, are dreadfully noisy and clumsy in their walk; if you have such an one, leave him behind when

things are getting critical. On still days a piece of broken slab falling back into place (after a man's weight has tilted it up) sounds almost as loud as a rifle-shot.

A difficult problem to which there is not, I believe, any really satisfactory solution, is how to make a stag which is lying down get up and stand still long enough for you to shoot him.

For my part, except on those few fine days when the sun shines and the wind blows softly, I hate waiting a long time for a stag to get up. It so often happens that you wait, perhaps a couple of hours, for a stag you very much want to kill. Then up he gets, turns his behind towards you, and slowly walks off without ever giving you a chance. Or something alarms him, and he jumps up, strides out, and vanishes like a ghost. Yet one's advice to the novice can only be—wait for him to get up. It is not the only chance, but it is the best chance, by a long way.

An alternative, which I have often tried and have known to come off, is to put him up by making a small noise, such as a click with your boot-heels. About one stag in six will wait an instant after getting up ; perhaps two in seven will stand still for a look, a hundred and fifty yards away, before running off out of

shot. The odds are against you, but it may come off.

A slightly better method (but only practicable after the rut has begun) is to roar him up. If he has hinds with him, and you can give a fairly realistic imitation of a stag's roar, he may answer you back without getting up. Many stags roar when they are lying down. If he does that, wait a little and try again. He may get up at your second or third attempt, or he may not. It is possible, of course, that your very first roar has already frightened him away.

I remember one stag that my stalker roared at for twenty minutes or so. The brute would not get up, but every time D. roared he answered him. They both made such extraordinary noises that after a while I choked with laughter, and that made D. laugh too in the middle of a roar, whereupon the stag got up and fled.

If I may put it in this way, I should say that it is a slight shade of odds on your getting a shot if you wait for a lying stag to get up of his own accord ; perhaps four to one against a shot if you or your stalker is a capable roarer (the art needs practice !) ; and quite long odds, five or six to one, against a shot, if you frighten

him up with a sudden noise. In very cold weather, at the end of a long wait the odds are altered a good deal in the stag's favour. Icy fingers and chattering teeth are not aids to accurate shooting.

There is yet another noise, a whistle, which has its uses. Some men put a stag up with it; but in my experience the boot-heel click is better. It is worth while giving a shrill whistle, however, if deer have more than half 'got' you, and are already on the move. The sudden strange noise will now and again make a moving stag pause for a fatal half-second. Under such circumstances it can at least do no harm, and there is a bare possibility that it may get you a shot.

It will happen occasionally, early in the season before the big parties of old stags have broken up, that you get within range of several stags, some of them feeding, others lying down.

If you only want to kill one beast, kill him, and so home. But if you want a couple, be sure to shoot one of the recumbent animals first. If you kill him stone dead, or paralyse him so that he cannot get up, the others will stand and stare at him, as if saying to each other, "Hullo! Whatever has happened to

Bill "—and you will be able to pick another. But if you take a standing beast first they will all make off together at the shot.

When you have killed a stag the immediate problem is how to get him home to the larder with the greatest speed and convenience. The pony gillie may be many miles away, and if you have to send or go back to him there is a great waste of time.

Nothing shows up so well on the hill, if the light is fairly good, as a smudge of smoke, and you should start a fire within sight of the ponies as soon as possible. If you have two ponies out, and want them both—you may have killed two stags—make two fires. Only in that case the gillie must have had warning not to move till he is sure about the number of fires. Otherwise when he sees the smoke he may shut up his telescope with a snap and start off with one pony only, ignoring the second fire.

If the heather is very wet, or if you are above the heather line, it is almost impossible to get a fire to burn. For such a case my stalker or I carry a smoke-rocket of the kind which Messrs Brock make up for drain testing. They give off a good deal of black smoke, and can be seen from afar under most conditions of light

and weather. Also they are not bulky, or heavy, and go well in the lunch bag or in your pocket.

For a very dark afternoon, with mist and rain about, I believe something after the nature of a Roman candle, throwing up a shower of sparks, might be effective—though I confess I have never tried it! I can answer personally for the smoke-rocket, however, as a great saver of valuable time.

A good pony gillie is a great comfort—one who knows the ground well, is always on the look-out for signals, and gets to a dead stag in the shortest possible time. It is very easy to get a pony bogged, even on forests which are well provided with pony tracks; but the sort of pony boy I have in mind knows by instinct and memory what a boggy bit looks like, and hardly ever gets into trouble.

If he has to lead one pony, and let the other follow loose, he should lead the youngest and least wise of the two. I have known an impetuous youngster, running loose at the heels of an old led pony, plunge into his leader at a burn crossing and knock him over, with fatal results—a horrid tragedy.

One has to be ready to play every part on

the hill—for instance, everyone who stalks regularly should carry a knife and learn by personal experience how to gralloch a stag. The day is sure to come when the accomplishment will be valuable.

Another thing that may happen to almost anyone is to get lost on a strange forest, from one cause or another. If you have a pony with you, the pony of course will take you home, if given his head, by the safest and shortest way ; but if you are all alone, in thick mist, you may easily go very far wrong. The wind, if steady, is your best guide ; or you may follow a burn, or a decayed sheep fence. Both will probably take you off the hill in the end. But it is best not to risk getting lost on unknown ground. That sounds a little sententious perhaps, but is profoundly true !

A day's stalking, when stalker, rifle, rifle gillie, and pony gillie are all keen and active, have worked together for some time, and know the ground and each other's idiosyncracies, should run like a well rehearsed play, with all the cues taken, and the curtain falling at exactly the right moment.

IX.

ONE OR TWO STALKS.

EVERYONE, I suppose, remembers his first stag without much of an effort. I know that I remember mine as vividly as if I had killed him yesterday, though more than thirty years have passed since then. He was not much of a stag—an old, back-going beast, better dead—but he lives on in my memory, where I am afraid many a much better animal has long since vanished without trace. There was nothing very remarkable about the stalk, though certainly he was an unlucky stag. He was lying down, and we got a bit too close in to him; he jumped up when we were about fifty yards away, and bolted, but forgetting all about my sights I swung on to him as if I was using a shot-gun, and killed him stone dead! A very lucky shot for a beginner.

Of the three best heads in the hall of our Lodge one was killed by my son, at the top of a steep place. He was a very big stag with a

really good though irregular ten-point head, and had been known to us for a season or two as 4s. 6d., as he had six points on one side and only four on the other. When shot he fell head over heels down the slope, and it was a great piece of luck that he did not damage his horns.

The other two differ in character a good deal. One is a well-shaped eleven-pointer, long and wide, quite perfect as to his lower points, but not so good above, and with only two atop on one side. This stag had a diseased liver, and was in poor condition, which makes it odd that he should have had so good a head. He was an oldish beast, and probably a little past his best. There was nothing very memorable about his death except that he gave me a particularly long wait—close on three hours—before he would get up. Probably he was feeding less than usual.

The third—the best in my opinion, though tastes differ—is an irregular ten-pointer, five on each side, missing a top on one side and a bay on the other. What points he has, however, are good, and the measurements are unusual—a length of 35 inches and a span of 36 inches. Though a little light in horn the great span

and shapeliness make it a most attractive head. And into the bargain he gave me no end of trouble before I got him.

It was the very last day of the season, windy, cold, and dull, with some snow on the high tops. We spied him first from the little tin hut up the glen, where the ponies sometimes wait. There were several other stags in sight, all with bunches of hinds, and it so happened that I got my glass on to him while D. was examining another.

I thought he was something out of the common, and said to D., "I see a good stag under the shoulder of Cairngorm, in line with the Meinn Cairn. Have a look at him. I can't quite make out his head, but I believe it's a big one."

D. looked, and replied, "Ay, yon's a good stag. The light is not too good, and I cannot just make out what points he has, but he's long and wide. There's another good stag and some more hinds lower down, but the top one is our stag. I'm thinking it's the one Mr T. missed three days ago."

T. had had a difficult shot, in very bad light, at a beast which he himself had never seen properly, so he told me, but which D. had described as being unusually good.

We told the pony gillie to stay where he was, and taking Alick, the rifle gillie, with us, set off up the left bank of a big burn which flows north out of two hill lochs under Moruisg. This mountain, over three thousand feet high, together with Cairngorm and the Peat Hill forms a huge amphitheatre, two or three miles across, with steep and in places precipitous sides, which are hollowed out into smaller corries. It looks like the crater of an old volcano, but I am told that the rocks are not igneous, so I suppose its looks belie it.

Our idea was to reach a certain small corrie under Cairngorm, climb that, and emerge on to the mountain well above our stag. To stalk him from below, though apparently much easier, was in reality impossible, as the lower party of deer would be sure to see us crossing the flats before we could get ' into ' the hillside.

The wind was westerly, and would serve. True, for a little we should be up-wind of our stag, but would be well over two miles away from him and his party at the critical moment —far enough away to be safe. The objection to this plan lay in the long detour which it involved. It would take us at least two hours to get near our beast, and for the last hour and a half he

would be out of sight. What if he moved off in the meantime? However, we had proved often and conclusively that a stalk from below up the north shoulder of Cairngorm was almost an impossibility, and a stag well settled in with his hinds does not move far, as a rule, unless chased away by a bigger one.

We went along at a good pace, and I was not sorry when D. stopped, half an hour later, pulled out his telescope, sat down on the heather, and found his beasts with the great speed and adroitness which comes from years of use.

"We shall be losing them now in a little," he said. "They're quite contented at present."

For the next half-hour we made our way up through the gap in the crater, over some extremely broken ground, with the foaming burn on our left. When we were well under the mountain D. said, "We are past their wind now, and should cross the burn if we can find a place."

Crossing was not very easy, as the burn was in spate and stepping stones hard to find. However, we got over somehow, and began to climb the steep hillside. There were deer in the small corrie on our right, but we did not bother about them or stop to spy, as time was

precious. Whichever way they ran they would do us no harm.

Fifty minutes climbing took us beyond the heather, almost into the ptarmigan country, and up here the wind was bitter cold. I was very hot, and stopped to put on my waistcoat —D. and Alick had not turned a hair.

It was now about twenty to twelve, and we should know, I thought, in another twenty minutes if the stag was still where we had last seen him.

We turned northwards, and for the hundredth time I beheld with grateful eyes one of the loveliest and wildest landscapes in all Scotland. The mountains of Ross and distant Sutherland rose up beyond the nearer hills to greet us. Far below, the glint of water in many lochs smiled up at us. The sun came out for an instant, between two showers of sleet, bringing to life all the vivid hues of autumn, like the colours on a bird's breast. That hill beyond the main glen, Ben Faisig, the pheasant hill, is well named, so I thought, though never a pheasant has strutted within forty miles of it. But someone who once saw a cock pheasant in his autumn glory has named it well and truly.

D. led on, down the slope now, very cautiously.

Where the heather begins, the ground on the shoulder allows you to see for perhaps a couple of hundred yards, but lower down again, where our stag was, the ground becomes more convex, and in some places the near skyline is very near indeed.

We halted for a moment. D. took the rifle from Alick and loaded it, licking the tip of the first cartridge in the clip and murmuring "Blood."

It is a piece of ritual which I have witnessed many times, but it never fails to thrill.

We knew we were fairly close to our deer now, provided that they had not moved, and I trusted to D.'s great skill to bring us down on top of them. We went on slowly and carefully, and it so happened, from the shape of the ground, that we caught sight of the lower party first, a quarter of a mile away, to the west.

After a look with his glass D. whispered, "It is the lower stag of the two, a good bittie away, and a lot of hinds—not him we're wanting."

He told us to stay where we were, and putting down the rifle went thirty or forty yards down the hill on hands and knees, which took him out of sight. When he came back he whispered,

" I cannot see him, but there's hinds feeding quite near hand, within a hundred yards. He may be with them."

He crawled away again, in a more easterly direction, and ten minutes later returned, his whole face gleaming, to whisper, " He's there, in a hollow, not much over a hundred yards away. But there's hinds quite close. It will no' be easy."

For a minute we discussed alternatives. It might be better to wait, in hope that the nearer hinds would feed down the hill. Yet if they moved downwards probably the whole party would do the same, and the hillside three hundred yards below us was very bare of cover. Immediately round about and beneath us were little hollows and gullies which a man crawling could make use of. Also the wind was bitter, and D. and I were in complete agreement as to the usual effect of a long, cold wait on rifle shooting—on my shooting, anyhow. Some lucky men never seem to notice the cold. So we decided to try our luck, though D. whispered, " You may have to shoot very quick if we get in over near."

I left my stick and telescope with Alick—they are a nuisance in flat crawling—but kept

my Zeiss glasses, and rolling my raincoat into a bundle followed D. on hands and knees. But this comparatively pleasant method of advance soon gave way to a flat wriggle. We squirmed down a shallow grassy trough, full of sphagnum moss, which holds water like a sponge. The cold water invaded my legs and arms, and I prayed fervently that if we had to wait at all it might not be there.

The trough came to an end, and we crawled on our bellies under a ridge of grass and short heather. D. stopped, and I wormed my way alongside him, in case I had to shoot, and shoot quick. But for the moment our luck was out.

D. stiffened, and whispered, "Don't move; there's a hind within thirty yards of us, looking this way." We lay stock-still for five minutes, then D. said, "She's gone down the hill. We must try to get to yon tummock." The tummock was a little knoll of short heather sticking out above the rank grass, some fifteen yards from us.

We crawled slowly towards it, quite flat. When still a couple of yards away D. raised his head ever so little for a look, then whispered, "The stag is lying down. There are some hinds very near us."

Now, a rutting stag seldom lies down for

long, but I was already shivering with cold, wet, and excitement, and could have done without that wait.

For a quarter of an hour, which seemed at least four times as long, we lay there. Suddenly D. whispered, "He's up," and I grasped the rifle, which was out of its cover and lying in front of me. Then I raised my head very slowly, till my eyes were clear of the grass, and peered about a little.

An agonised whisper came from D.—"Can you no' see him from here? If we move at all they'll get us."

Yes, I could see the stag, but only his head and the top of his back. He was moving about restlessly among the hinds, as a stag will in October, only sixty or seventy yards away. I put the rifle to my shoulder, but could not get my sights above the grass. "I'll have to chance the tummock," I muttered, "I can't shoot from here for the grass."

As carefully as possible I squirmed over the small interval between us and the tummock, found a good elbow rest, and put up the rifle clear of all impediments. As I raised my head a hind barked.

Where the devil has the stag got to? Ah,

there he is, or enough of him to shoot at; but he's covered by a hind or two. Oh, d—n it all, they're away—running fast.

There was a rush and scurry of near-by hooves, a flicker of long legs and red-brown backs. Yet just for an instant I had a clear glimpse of the stag through an avenue of galloping hinds, and squeezed the trigger. As I did so I thought, "I've not allowed enough for the pace he's going." At my elbow came D.'s quiet, "Load up, he may stand yet." He evidently thought it was a miss.

We raised ourselves to a sitting position, and could see the hinds streaming away up-wind. The stag was not with them. Then he appeared, going straight down the hill. "He has a broken hind-leg," said D.

He was too far away by now for a shot, and moving on. Nothing to be done, alas! but to keep still and watch him.

My spirits sank immediately into those gloomy depths which wait for all deer-stalkers who have wounded a stag, and must perforce lie still and watch the poor brute limping painfully away on three legs, at a pace which seems slow indeed, but is very much faster than it looks. Fatal to get up and run after him.

Watch him—he may lie down. D. provided a grain of comfort, after studying him through the glass.

"He'll be hit high up in the haunch—the hip is broken. That's a wound will stiffen, if once he will lie down. We may get him yet."

We lay still for a quarter of an hour. The stag went out of our sight, but presently we saw him again on the flats a long way below us. He did not stop, but turned down-wind, and before long was joined by some hinds, either his own or others which the shot had disturbed.

"Whatever made them do that?" grumbled D. "They will take him away with them and keep him going. We must move."

We called up Alick, who was not far off, and told him to stay where he was and keep his telescope on the stag. Then we set off at a good pace to the east, along the steep slope, edging downwards from time to time. The stag was so far away by now that it was very unlikely he would see us. Without using my 'binocles' I could not pick him up at all.

Half a mile from where the shot had been fired we decided to get down to the flats beneath. The stag by now was making for a conical

hill with a green top to it, which we call the Green Hill. It rises steeply out of the heather and the peat-hags of the flats below Cairngorm.

The hinds, frightened by the smell of blood perhaps, had deserted him, and were well away over a burn which winds in and out round the eastern slopes of the Green Hill. Why they made off down-wind like that was puzzling. Probably they came from over the march and were 'wanting home.'

We slid down the steep brae as fast as we could, and took a careful spy from behind a peat-hag when we reached the bottom. "He's stopped—he's going to lie down. He's down," said D. I dared not even begin to hope yet awhile, but this was better.

We picked our way through the hags till we gained the scanty shelter of the burn, which has only small banks to begin with. They give more cover, however, as you go downstream. If we could get some way down before the stag left the Green Hill we should be able to cut him off if he tried to follow the hinds. We were not so very far away from the march, and although our neighbour is the kindest of good sportsmen there are limits to what one

may do in the matter of following a wounded beast.

I should have no hesitation in following one for a mile or two into another man's ground; but it is perhaps unfair to disturb a whole tract of someone else's country. Better get home and telephone about the catastrophe to your neighbour's stalker, who, you may be sure, will have a good look for the poor beast as soon as possible.

Wet already, we were both very much wetter after ten minutes crawling on our hands and knees, more or less in the water, under the burn bank, which here was not more than two or three feet high. But we had to keep out of sight. Even if our stag did not pick us up (as he well might, for we were getting nearer to him again), the chances were that there were other deer about.

For a time we got along pretty well, then D. pulled up short. "There's a hind lying by the bank at the next bend," he said, peering. "Ay, and there's more beyond. It will be a stag and some hinds, likely."

We had reached rather more broken ground by now, as the burn began to leave the flats, running more swiftly between deeper banks.

"We can't get out of the burn yet," I said. "We shall have to move them." "And then our stag will see them running and make off again. But it cannot be helped, we must move them," answered D.

We crawled on, till we could see a good many hinds, with a stag in the middle of them, an ugly brute of a narrow six-pointer. The deer got on their feet and stood staring, a bare hundred yards away, the stag broadside on and motionless.

"If we had been after yon beast they would never have stood so," muttered D. "He's well-run, and they may not go fast or far."

So we looked at them and they at us for a couple of minutes; but when they did move they went off at the run, much to our vexation. Up-wind they fled, along the lower slopes of the Green Hill, in full view of our wounded stag. He got up, of course, and hobbled on again.

However, he did not go very far, but seemed uncertain what to do, standing still for five minutes and looking about him. Then he, too, turned up-wind, as if making for the very top of the hill. I said, "He'll be over the skyline in a minute," but as I spoke, down he went

again, in a very bare place. "The cunning devil," said D.; "he can see the whole country from up there, and I doubt we cannot get in at him. He knows we're somewhere about from seeing those deer running."

With the idea of 'losing' him we continued our wet journey down-stream, able to walk upright in the water now, as the banks became steeper. More than once we tried to leave the burn and get 'into' the hill, but we could not lose him. He had chosen his resting-place with great skill, poor beast. Perhaps he suspected we were in the burn. At last, when we had worked round almost to the north of the Green Hill we found that we had 'lost' him, and left the burn. But at once a new complication arose.

Two young stags appeared feeding up the hill straight above us.

"We must go back a bit to where we can see him, and wait," said D. "The longer we wait the stiffer he'll get, but if those staggies take him away now he may go for miles yet."

I remember thinking that if we had to wait very long I was likely to get more stiff than the stag was, being completely soaked up to the waist and incompletely above it. However,

it was not nearly so cold down in the burn as it had been on the shoulder of the mountain, and I knew that D. was right. We just had to wait.

So we splashed back up the stream for a little way and squatted under a heathery bank, from which we could see our stag.

We had not been there long before the two staggies appeared over the skyline, walking fast up the hill. A minute or two later the reason for their haste appeared, in the shape of a big stag, who was running them out. No doubt he had hinds out of sight not far away.

The wounded stag caught sight of the little fellows and got up again. Very slowly and stiffly he hobbled down the hill towards them, and disappeared into an unsuspected hollow.

Without a word we left our cover and set off up the slope almost at a run. How long it was before we dropped at full length in the heather I do not know, but I could not have kept up that pace much longer. Middle-aged men cannot run uphill like youngsters.

" Look at him, there he is," said D. Peering, I saw the stag on our left, still on his feet and slowly going down the hill. " Where are the

staggies?" I whispered. "They're out of sight," D. returned. "Can you take him now?"

I did not like the shot. He was at least two hundred yards away and moving. I shook my head; it was no good risking it at that range.

We turned back for a bit on hands and knees, and then found we could get to our feet and keep out of sight of our beast by stooping down. "If he'll stop a little we'll get him," D. said.

We worked our way along, on a line parallel to our stag's course, till D., peering, said, "I think he's stopped."

We took to our hands and knees again, and crawled quickly for a hundred yards or more. D. checked, and gave me the rifle, whispering, "We cannot go any closer or he'll get us. He's terrible wary, an old stag and wounded. He's well under the two hundred."

I found a good place to shoot from and put up my head.

There was the stag—rather far away, it's true, but broadside on and standing stock-still.

I held my breath, did not dwell long on my aim, and pressed the trigger.

An exclamation came from D. "Good shot!

That's him." I worked the bolt, and stared at the place where the stag had been. All I could see was a leg waving in the air. "He'll no' move again," said D.

We got up and cautiously advanced towards the stag. I kept the rifle ready for another shot if necessary, but he was dead.

"There's a lovely head," said D., and indeed it was, and is, though a head never looks quite so well, I think, as when the owner is alive and wearing it.

While D. gralloched him I emptied the water out of my boots and wrung out my stockings—don't you detest the squelchy feeling of a boot full of water?

Then I suddenly remembered that I had had no lunch, and looked at my watch. It was a quarter-past three, and I had fired my first shot at about twelve. All had ended well, but I felt shaken and exhausted after cramming so many poignant emotions into the last three hours.

We lit a smoky fire near the top of the Green Hill, and as soon as it was burning well, D., using his telescope, announced that the pony-boy had seen it and had started; and that Alick too, with the lunch-bag, was coming

down from the Meinn Cairn. "I should have remembered to take it," said D., "when we left Alick, but I was so set on the stag. It will be the widest head in Scotland this year, surely." I think he was right.

There is a day which stands out in my memory as that on which I thrice stalked the same stag, each time crawling within a hundred yards of him, yet never getting a shot. He was a big switch, and we wanted him killed especially, as to D.'s certain knowledge he had been missed twice in the last two seasons.

We found him one morning not far from the sanctuary; a light westerly wind was blowing, which meant that if he shifted he would be more likely to go farther away from the sanctuary than to return to it. He was holding a lot of hinds, although it was not late in the season and he did not appear to be at all run.

We had a fairly easy stalk, and I nearly pulled trigger once or twice, but he would not turn broadside on. He stood facing us for some time—not that he was suspicious at all—and I wished afterwards I had tried him then, for it was the only chance I got.

All of a sudden the hinds put their heads up, stared back towards the sanctuary (not

looking in our direction), and then made off, up-wind.

"Whatever made them do that?" I said to D., but before he could answer we saw two eagles hovering near the edge of the sanctuary, flying unusually low and coming our way. On seeing them the hinds had become alarmed and made off.

We cursed the eagles, of which we have far too many. It is not likely they were hunting for calves or small hinds; but deer—our deer at any rate—are definitely frightened by eagles, and uneasy when any are about.

The switch and his party did not go very far, and we found them only half a mile away, but in much more difficult ground. We had a longish wait and a flat crawl, but everything went nicely, and I found myself again within easy range of most of the hinds. The stag, however, was invisible.

We lay waiting for him to appear—he was roaring, and was probably running out a small stag, or chasing a truant hind, we thought. Sure enough in a very few minutes we saw his horns coming up the brae towards us. His head appeared, and I felt sure I should get a shot, when the wind, which had been light

and puffy all the morning, backed from west to south without any warning.

Owing to the lie of the ground we had been stalking him more or less on a side wind—that is to say, a line drawn from us to him would have run from south to north, so of course the whole party got our wind and bolted!

After that we had lunch, and then walked a mile or so to one of our usual spying-places, not expecting to find him again that day. But as soon as we put up our telescopes, there he was, and not so far away either. He seemed to have lost most of his hinds, as only two or three were anywhere near him.

So we stalked him yet again, and though he was evidently rather restless and uneasy we managed to get pretty close to where he was lying. He was moving his head about and roaring as he lay, and we thought he would soon be up. He was up even sooner than we expected, for a miserable hind took it into her head to feed down-wind—a most unaccountable thing—and walked right on top of us as we lay in the coarse grass. She gave a snort and barked loudly; the stag bolted, of course, and we saw no more of him that season. His escapes

seemed so supernatural that we nicknamed him the Bogey.

The following season we saw him once or twice, early on, but I think he hugged the sanctuary pretty closely; anyhow, it was October before I was able to stalk him again—not far from where I had stalked him for the first time the season before.

We had a little bother in getting near him, but D. took even more pains than usual, and about mid-day I had him over my sights at a hundred and twenty yards. I squeezed the trigger—and the rifle misfired! I confess that I was completely flabbergasted for a moment, but D. was equal to the occasion, and told me to bring up another round. I pulled myself together and did so; the Bogey stood still, this time the rifle went off, and that was the end of the Bogey. It was very lucky I did not miss him, or we should have felt sure he was uncanny, and goodness knows what legends might not have gathered round him! He was a fine big stag and weighed well over eighteen stone. I was very glad to see him in the larder.

There is one day in the season when I always feel a conviction, founded on experience, that I shall kill one stag and possibly two. It is

the day of the Inverness Games, and on that day the younger stalker and the gillies go off to the Games, leaving D. and me to our own unaided devices.

The date is usually in the third week of September, when the rut is just beginning—about the best week of the whole season—and D. and I are much too happy on the hill just then to wish to drive or train fifty miles in order to see people dancing and tossing the caber. Not that I wish to run down either form of activity; both are beautiful in their own way.

On one Games day that I well remember we took a long time discovering a 'shootable' stag. From our first spying-place by the pony shelter we could see nothing but hinds, so as the wind was easterly we made for the march, on the west side of the Peat Hill.

We climbed up to Loch Cnoc, the little hill loch under Moruisg, and from there carefully spied the stony screes and corries of Cairngorm. It was a fine, sunny day, and we thought we might find stags fairly high up.

I could find nothing at all, and had shut up my telescope with a snap of exasperation, when D. remarked, "I see a good stag. He's lying

down in the rocks a little left-handed from the Cairn."

Even when I knew where to look, more or less, it was some time before I could pick him up. However, I found him presently, and then said, "I have him now. There's a hind with him." "Yes, just the two beasts," said D. "I am pretty sure he's all right, but they're far off, and bad to make out in those grey stones."

"We'd better try him," I said, "as there's nothing else in sight, but it's bad stalking in those stones." "Ay, it is that," D. answered.

It is bad for two reasons—first, on that boulder-strewn, steep hillside it is very difficult to know exactly where your deer are, and very easy to get too close to them. Also there are so many loose slabs about that it is hardly possible to walk noiselessly.

We climbed out of Corrie na Mang on to the west shoulder of Cairngorm. Things went well, and by dint of extreme care among the rocks we eventually got within seventy or eighty yards of our stag.

He was lying down, chewing the cud quite peacefully, on a ledge forty or fifty feet below

where we lay. He was not a difficult target, and there was no point in waiting.

He never moved after the shot, which took him fairly between the shoulders, just dropping his head on the ground in a natural sort of way. The other animal, which had been standing half-hidden by a boulder, came forward a pace or two and stood staring at its dead companion.

I watched it, after reloading, thinking vaguely that it was an extraordinary-looking hind. By the powers, was it a hind at all? "What is the other beast?" I whispered to D., "I never saw such . . ." There came a quick answer from D., who had got his glass out and was gazing at the second animal. "It's a big Hummel," he said; "I can see his ba's. Take him where he stands." I choked, but pulled the trigger, and the Hummel plunged down the hill, shot through the heart, to fall dead two hundred yards away.

The first stag was a good one, with a wide nine-point head, but the Hummel turned the scale at over seventeen stone. He had a mat of reddish hair on his forehead, and two tiny lumps under the skin, where the horns ought to have grown.

D. was pleased. "The old devil! The trouble

is that you may put your glass on a Hummel many times and not know him from a hind, unless you are fairly close. Some of them live to a great age." And he went on to tell me of a Hummel he had once known which had been the curse and terror of the hill, driving all other stags off the ground and avoiding death with supercervine cunning. For these strange deformities are ever the masters, and no horned stag will stand up to them in open fight.

We got both stags off the hill in fair time, that day of the Games, as we had enlisted the services of a friendly shepherd from the neighbouring forest to act as pony-boy.

'Herself' comes stalking with me sometimes, and D. is always glad to see her out, as he says she brings us luck. Indeed, I think she does. Incidentally she often seems to bring a very hard day's walking.

There was a day in September, not so long ago, when we stalked the same stag from half-past ten in the morning till half-past four in the afternoon. Twice during that period did we have to climb nearly two thousand feet of hill, up and down again, and were on the move practically the whole time.

It was a squally morning, with showers of

rain and a strong south wind. We found him first, with some hinds, near the mouth of the Black Corrie, an evil place for a stalk, as the wind there is bewitched and blows all ways at once.

However, we liked the look of him, and thought there was a bare chance of getting in. We stalked him carefully, and were doing pretty well, when all of a sudden they all came out of the corrie at a run and made off to the west. Probably they had got our wind in some mysterious way, though it was hard to believe, as we were stalking them from the north, and when they moved we were not really in the corrie at all. Inside, anything might happen, we knew well—but we were still outside when they bolted.

However, it was no use arguing about it. We followed them up, and found they had gone on past Loch na Mang and its corrie, and had settled down right under the steepest part of the great amphitheatre I have already mentioned. D. shook his head. "We cannot get near them from below," he said. "If we go back nearly to the Black Corrie, and climb up there, we may get in at them from above, though I do not trust the wind."

So back we went, and soon after twelve o'clock emerged on to one of the little grassy plateaus on the main ridge, far above the heather line, after a gruelling climb up a very steep face.

It was cold up there, and we did not tarry long, but set off again after swallowing a little lunch.

The rim of the crater is broken by deep gullies, and it took us another half-hour to work round and down towards the west till we were more or less above our deer ; perhaps eight hundred feet above them.

They were out of sight, and we slid and scrambled down the rocks till we could see where they were, taking care to keep well to the east. We thought that with luck they might not wind us, and after some trouble we got within about two hundred and fifty yards from where the stag was lying. We could get no closer, as there were stray hinds and calves much nearer our way.

I put up the rifle and looked along the sights. Too far, I thought, and an awkward shot from where I lay. D. urged that if I went on by myself I might get a bit closer, and I was just beginning to wriggle a little farther down the

hill when a hind barked quite close by, and for the second time off went our party of deer, stag and all.

The creature that barked must have caught a puff of our wind—the main body of hinds with the stag certainly did not do so, as they were quite happy till the barking began. However, that was that, and all we could do was to sit on the bleak hillside and watch them go. It came on to rain pretty hard just then, and I think if I had been by myself I should have turned for home. But the other sex is very pertinacious, and its representative would not hear of such a thing.

When the shower was over we were able to make out that our stag was still the right side of the march, in the far corner of the ground, almost under the flank of Moruisg. We came down on to the heathery flats and peat-hags between Loch Cnoc and Loch na Mang, and walked in a big circle till we reached the west march and the end of Loch Cnoc—a trek of perhaps a couple of miles.

We were now committed to a stalk from the west, with a south wind, and I must confess I did not see any particular reason why it should be successful. However, D. thought we

had a chance, and said that in the corrie the stag was now in, a south wind became easterly, instead of blowing straight down the hill.

So once more we set our weary bodies to climb up the mountain, which fortunately was not so steep as the ground we had tackled in the morning. Nor did we have to climb quite so high, although we had to climb higher than we expected, and were obliged to go a long way towards the east and away from our deer before we could ' lose ' them.

At last we were out of their sight, and could make our traverse along the face of the hill. What with this and with that it was half-past four before we got within range, and then I had to take an extremely hurried shot, for the hinds had all got their heads up and were obviously on the *qui vive*. I think that some other beasts out of our sight and above us must have heard or winded us, and that the deer we were after had seem them running. With a cold south wind this amphitheatre is always full of deer which have come in for shelter.

I was lucky, for the stag stood still just long enough for a shot, and my bullet broke his back. He had a nice eleven-point head.

' Our labours were not over even then. It was impossible to get a pony within half a mile of where he lay, which meant a long drag for D. and Alick. We were miles out of sight of the ponies, and the job for ' herself ' and me was to go as fast as possible to the nearest point from which they would be in sight, and there put up a smoke, subsequently meeting the pony-boy on his way up in order to give him D.'s directions.

The smoke rocket was used, and seen. It was just one of those days, with the heather all wet, when it would not have been easy to light a fire, and anyhow would have wasted time. The pony-boy knew the ground well, followed D.'s instructions, and stag and pony were safely down on the path before it got too dark.

X.

SOME QUEER THINGS.

You would hardly believe that a frightened hind could give such a violent start that she would split her own backbone. Yet I have seen it happen.

We were shooting grouse over dogs, and the Gordon ran right on top of two hinds which were lying with their calves under a peat-hag.

Both jumped up in a great hurry, of course, and one made off; but the other one, after a frantic leap, collapsed in the soft peat, though she continued to move her head and forelegs. Her calf ran off with the first hind. The dog took no notice whatever of the deer, but went on with his job of looking for grouse.

We walked up, and as it was quite obvious the poor thing was badly hurt D. took out his knife and dispatched her. I saw her carcase in the larder that evening; the spine was split in two near the tail, longitudinally. What a frantic wrench, to injure herself so terribly!

Deer are very frightened of hurting themselves, I think. At least there seems to be no other explanation of the way in which they will run up and down a sheep fence, some three feet high, evidently wanting to jump it but not liking the risk. Under the stimulus of fear they will easily clear a wire fence at least double that height, and in the rutting season stags make nothing of the tall wire fences beside a railway line.

Deer seem to be subject to unaccountable panics at times. I remember once sitting eating my lunch opposite the sanctuary, but perhaps a couple of miles away from it. D. came up and turned my attention to a considerable movement of deer which was taking place on the other side of the glen.

"I cannot make out what is wrong with them," he said. "Something has frightened them badly, but I can see nothing to account for it."

We watched carefully through our telescopes, and I have never seen Scottish deer run so fast or so far, before or since. There was a large party of stags and at least fifty hinds. It was a warm day early in September, and some of the fat stags became quite exhausted

and lagged behind, stopping now and then to duck down and cool their heated skins in a burn, or in one of the boggy places among the peat-hags. The hinds kept on and on and did not stop till they were near the march, a good four miles from where they had started.

I thought of dogs and foxes, of evilly disposed persons and of foolish hikers, but D. was sure the deer would not run like that for man or woman. We talked over all the possibilities as we watched, till in the end he said that if it was not a dog or a fox—and we could see neither—there was only one thing it could be, and that was flighting geese. He had known deer to be frightened terribly more than once by the cry of geese.

This interested me very much, as once, many years ago, long before the War, I was taken in by their cry on Exmoor. I was riding back to Exford, across the moor, after a day with the Devon and Somerset, when I thought I heard hounds running—the rather peculiar continuous cry of staghounds on a good scent. I knew that hounds had killed their stag and were on the way home. A farmer was with me who knew the moor well.

" Hounds must have broken away on a stag

again," I said to him, but he laughed and told me to look up. It was a hazy afternoon, but I could plainly see a large 'gaggle' of geese not very far off, winging their way to the sea and talking hard. The noise they made was so like hounds (especially staghounds) running, that if I had been alone I do not think I should have found out what it really was.

Four or five years ago a letter was reproduced in a very well-known sporting weekly which Captain King King had written to Colonel Seymour Dubourg, Master for many years of the S. Berks Foxhounds. It dealt with a strange happening on the 22nd January 1901, the day of Queen Victoria's death.

" On Jan. 22nd the Harriers met at Hawthorn Hill, . . . I, being in a field close to Mr Hulbert's house, was addressed by a stableman who was standing by on foot, thus. 'Hark, Sir. Here come the Staghounds.' I replied, 'Nonsense. They're not hunting to-day.' But I distinctly heard the Queen's *Dog*-pack (and if I don't know their tongues, who should ?) running hard. They seemed to pass along and go over the steeplechase course, and the cry died away pointing straight north—in fact running a line which would bisect their country.

Barthropp's second whip came by and stopped, hearing them plainly, and we were much puzzled." The writer goes on to tell how he made careful inquiries and found that no pack of hounds of any kind had been anywhere near Hawthorn Hill that day.

" I heard this (cry) a little after 2 p.m., and when I got home my wife told me that a wire had reached Windsor about that time saying that the Queen was sinking rapidly," and he " takes leave to say that this was a most uncanny experience."

When I read this letter I had very little doubt that the phantom hounds were geese—or possibly swans, which I have heard make much the same 'cry'; and I wrote to the periodical in question and described my Exmoor experience.

My suggestion was confirmed from several sources. One gentleman wrote, " Looking out of the house I saw a fox running across the park as if pursued by a pack of hounds. Twice he stopped and listened, and hastened on. Thinking this very peculiar, as it was a hard frost and there were no hounds hunting, I went out . . . to ascertain if there was any reason for the haste. While I was about this I heard

a noise . . . seeing an enormous flight of wild geese. I have no doubt that the fox took the incessant cackle of the geese for the cry of a pack of hounds."

A lady Master of Harriers wrote from Ireland: "I remember once on our way to a meet . . . not far from a bog we suddenly heard a noise exactly like hounds in full cry . . . and immediately afterwards realised that it was the cackling of wild geese. The hounds also heard . . . but did not stop to realise that no pack of hounds except ours hunted that country, only instinctively following the 'get to cry' order. Half the pack streamed across the intervening fields, the rest being with difficulty restrained."

I must apologise for this digression, which has, I fear, but little to do with deer-stalking. It does appear, however, from what D. told me, that deer must be added to the list of men and beasts which have been deceived by this queer mimicry; though I confess that on the particular occasion I have mentioned, when deer panicked for some cause unknown, no geese were heard or seen.

I was lying on the hill watching the deer one day when four aeroplanes from the fleet at

Invergordon, many miles away, passed overhead. The beasts I was looking at were very frightened, and ran round and round in circles, till the heavy drone of the powerful engines died away. They quieted down again quite soon, however, and did not shift their quarters.

I saw a hind do a queer thing once. We were stalking a 'good' stag, with a party of hinds near him, when suddenly one of the hinds began to cut the most extraordinary capers, rolling over and over with legs in the air, standing first on her head and then on her heels, and so alarming her friends and companions that they all ran off, taking the stag with them. It is possible she had been bitten by an adder, though there are not many on the forest; or she may have had some kind of a fit. After going on like a mad thing for a few minutes she recovered herself and ran off to rejoin her vanished sisters, and we never knew for certain what ailed her.

It has long been illegal to kill golden eagles or to take their eggs, with the result that there are now far too many in some parts of Scotland. They seem to me to be getting bolder. They have always been ready enough to attack a very young calf, but the mother hind will

drive one away, if she is anywhere handy, by standing up on her hind-legs and using her forefeet as weapons ; while the calf keeps as close to its mother as it can.

But last autumn D. and I saw a fierce attack by an eagle on a ' six quarters ' calf, that is a young beast a year and a half old, which had no mother to protect it. The poor thing came galloping down the brae as fast as it could lay legs to ground. So terrified was it that it passed *down*-wind of where we were sitting spying, not two hundred yards away, without noticing us.

" That's a funny thing," I remarked. " She can have no eyes or nose." But as I spoke I caught sight of the eagle.

He saw us all right, too, and sheered off, but took up the pursuit again lower down the hill. Just before both attacker and attacked were lost to view, half a mile away, the calf was running frantically backwards and forwards, and the eagle was striking at it furiously with wings and talons.

I am afraid if I had had that ferocious assassin at the end of a shot-gun I should have forgotten all about the law.

Ten years ago we had quantities of blue hares on the high tops, but now there are hardly any. The eagles have had the lot.

Other birds hate eagles, and I have seen two buzzard-hawks mobbing one. The eagle was soaring fairly high, but the buzzards kept on swooping down on it from above, one by one, and gradually forced it downwards. Just when you thought they were about to strike, the eagle rolled over in the air and struck back with its talons, upside down ; then completed the roll and sailed on again. Again and again the buzzards swooped and tried to strike, regaining altitude very quickly after each dive. This went on for some minutes, till the buzzards got tired of it and went off ; or perhaps the eagle had by then reached the end of their private ' beat,' for it is likely that the fight was over a matter of trespass.

After the departure of the two hawks the eagle continued its stately patrol, apparently quite unruffled.

I have seen an eagle take a hare within fifty yards of where I lay motionless in the heather. It did not see me, of course. The noise of the bird's feathers, cleaving the air in

its downward rush, was very like the shrill rustle, as of splitting silk, made by a shell going over one's head.

Coming round the corner of a rock I once walked within thirty yards of an eagle, which was making a meal off another bird. The eagle flew off, leaving its dinner on the ground. It was a dead kestrel—so the old saw about birds of prey not 'piking out each other's een' would seem to be untrue.

There are a great many wild cats in Ross-shire and other parts of Scotland still. They hunt and move about almost entirely by night, though I have seen them in the daytime several times, and once heard one making an extraordinary noise, the cause or object of which was a mystery.

She—from the cat's size I think it was a she—got up out of some peat-hags thirty or forty yards away from D. and myself, and ran away howling and wailing like a soul in torment.

The others I have surprised all departed quietly, and why this one chose to serenade us in such an odd fashion I cannot tell.

They have their kittens in holes in the peat, and are prolific animals. Their numbers are

easily kept down, however, as they are not hard to trap. Like tame cats they dislike getting wet, and if you throw a convenient pole across a burn, with a trap at one end of it, you will catch one before very long. Their skins make a handsome coat for a lady.

XI.

A HIND OR TWO.

I HAVE been north to shoot hinds more than once, usually with enjoyment, but I must confess it is rather a wild gamble with the weather. About the tenth of December is not a bad time to go, as on the whole the weather is better then than later, the stags have left the hinds, and the hinds are less affected by warble fly and are consequently in better condition than they are in January. According to recent investigations the larvæ of this fly are taken in at the mouth; they sojourn awhile in certain parts of the intestines, and then proceed under the skin to points of vantage on the back and ribs. There, when grown into a fly, they bore their way out into the open through the skin, leaving the hole of exit, and a small abscess, open behind them.

Apart from the damage to the pelt, the general health of the affected animal suffers, and it loses condition. No doubt the flies

cause much irritation and pain, robbing their unwilling hosts of sleep and making them restless and miserable. For deer there is no possible cure or antidote, so far as I know.

Last December, after a night and half a day in the train, I got me on to the hill by about half-past one. This was late enough, as it is dark up there by half-past three in December—too dark to shoot, anyhow ; but the hill called.

We found a large party of hinds not a mile from the lodge, and stalked them carefully, but could not get near them till the light was beginning to fail. It was a lovely evening, milder far than when we left in October, though the high tops had some snow on them. The hill was dressed in dark winter livery, a rich but sober garb, quite different from its autumn raiment of russet and gold or its summer finery of green and purple. The air was very clear, and there was a little wind from the west ; just enough for our purpose, but no more. And how good it all smelt, after London and the train. Each breath one drew refreshed one like a sip of nectar, if nectar is a heady brew of salt sea, and old heather, and wet peat, and slanting sunshine.

At about three o'clock I had a shot at a

straggler, and killed her—a fat yeld hind. On D.'s advice we did not stir till all the rest had moved off out of sight. "It's beginning to get dark," he said, "and they will not go far. We will wait ten minutes and try them again."

I asked him how he could pick out a yeld hind from the rest, confessing that to me they all looked much alike, except of course for calves and very old ladies. He mused for a while before answering, and then told me it was one of those things which he supposed came from long practice, and was hard to put into words; but he thought it was mainly the difference in the neck. "Yes," he said, "a good yeld hind has a thicker, hairier neck than a milker. It is quite easy to make a mistake," he added, though he has never made one when I have been with him.

The light was going fast when we moved, but we found the herd not a quarter of a mile away. A short crawl took us within easy range of a party silhouetted against the evening sky, feeding up-wind. The first one I killed was an old grey creature whose day was done—a good riddance. The rest ran a little, then stopped to look, and I fired twice more at what D. told me he believed to be a yeld hind and a

' six quarters ' (*i.e.*, a last year's) calf ; as indeed they proved to be.

I was not quite sure if I had hit either of the last two, as they did not drop to the shot. They were all right, however, stone dead not two hundred yards away.

Four hinds in a couple of hours, and me straight off the train !

That was a bit of luck, and it does not often work out quite like that. There is no doubt, however, that the time to make a bag of hinds is in the ' dimpsey,' as the Exmoor people call it. Deer are very disinclined to move far from where they are feeding, when it is getting dark of a winter's evening.

The drawback, of course, to a ' killing ' at this time of day is the difficulty of getting the dead beasts off the hill. In this case we were able so to do, as Geordie, the underkeeper, was with us, and it was a plain bit of downhill dragging to the road. Even so the last part of the drag was entirely in the dark. It would never have done with a heavy stag ; but a good fat yeld hind after gralloch only weighs about ten stone —a very different proposition to the sixteen or seventeen stone, and the sharp antlers, of a ' hart of grease.'

The next day the wind was in the east, but the sun shone and it was so warm that many deer were quite high up. We stalked a large herd in the rocks of ptarmigan land, and got two beautiful yeld hinds before one o'clock. The breeze was keen enough up there, but the sun was definitely hot, and as I sat in the shelter of a big boulder and ate my lunch, while we waited for Geordie and the ponies, it came into my mind that whoever wrote 'Benedicite Omnia Opera' must also have been sitting under a mountain top on a day of east wind and winter sunshine.

Such days, however, are the exception and not the rule. A few years ago, just after Christmas, we were stormbound in the lodge for a whole week—day after day of gales, rain, wind, sleet, and snow. In the end I did get two days on the hill before it was time to go south again, and very wet, cold days they were. That week of winter stalking produced only two hinds.

XII.

SOME NATURAL HISTORY.

Most calves are dropped in May or June, after their mothers have carried them for eight months. (It is possible to tell the sex of an embryo calf about ten weeks after conception.) A newly born calf is dappled, and flecked with white splashes; presumably Nature's protective colour scheme when deer were woodland beasts. It is little use nowadays against an eagle!

Twins are rare, but if there is a certain amount of herbage available in the winter the herd will increase at a great pace, as many well-nourished hinds produce a calf every spring.

It is quite common to see a mother with two calves following her, one of a few months only, the other a year older. I think that a good many hind calves stay with their mother till they in turn are old enough to begin breeding —that is to say, until they are rather under two and a half years old. Stag calves, too,

often stay with their mother a long time after she has given birth to the next member of the family.

Except in the rutting time, which we may put down as the 20th September to the beginning of November, the adult stags and hinds keep entirely separate. The hinds and larger calves wander about in big parties, for the most part, though many hinds prefer to remove themselves and their last-born calf to some quiet spot where there is no other lady to worry them. These stray hinds and calves are often a great nuisance to the stalker, as they have a vile habit of popping up just where they are least wanted. To them many a stag owes his life.

The stags form companies according to their size and age. First you get a gathering of the real old warriors, the heaviest beasts in the forest. Then you will find other platoons of lesser stags, all nicely graded according to size, till you come down to the kindergarten class of little 'knobbers' (*i.e.*, with horns which are but small knobs) who have not long left their mother's side.

Sometimes the old stags have special friends of their own, and I can think of two who were always to be seen close together, whether they

Please get off my feed-bag!

were feeding or lying down. Maybe they were brothers, and had left, or lost, their dam at the same time; but animals are undoubtedly capable of affection for each other, and this friendship may have arisen out of similarity of tastes and habits for all I know.

I have seen over a hundred large stags in one herd at the end of August, and a magnificent sight they made. As the September days shorten the bachelor bands begin to get restless, and there is a good deal of sparring, though no serious fighting as yet. Small bodies break away from the main party and leave their usual haunts.

On the threshold of the rut you may see stags going through all the motions of roaring, stretching out their necks and opening their mouths, but all in dumb show. As they do not use their voices for ten months of the year, it is possible that their vocal chords have become atrophied from disuse, and that they cannot produce the desired 'roar' until they have got the stiffness out of their throats. Or is there some definite physiological change in their vocal organs when sex begins to drive them? The voices of a man and of a eunuch are different, and the mechanism of a stag's throat

may be altered during his short period of sexual activity. Some special glandular secretion is necessary, perhaps, before they can give tongue.

The 20th September is the date known as The Day of Roaring, in Gaelic, but a very great deal depends on the weather. A hard frost will bring things to a head many days sooner, and a spell of mild weather will delay matters for weeks. Indeed in a very mild autumn, such as occurs only two or three times in a century, there can hardly be said to be a rut at all, and very few calves will be dropped in the following spring.

I have never been able to determine whether the condition of the stags excites the hinds, or *vice versa*. To begin with, the stags appear to go through a period of vain chasings and harryings, and at first the hinds seem to be utterly bored and uninterested. But the actual love-making is practically all done under the decent cloak of darkness. Take yonder demure-looking hind, whose one idea seems to be to escape the attentions of the big ten-pointer who has just rounded her up into his harem. It is impossible to say for certain that she does not become a wanton under cover of the night.

Twice only have I seen a stag in the act of

covering a hind ; once near at hand, within a couple of hundred yards, and once through a telescope, a long way off. You may go on the hill for many years and not see such a thing at all.

Once a stag is fairly on the rut he is hardly ever still. If he lies down it is only for a few minutes ; if he takes a bite of grass it is but a pretence at feeding. He runs wildly about, rounding up his hinds, pursuing them with his apparently unwanted attentions (which are always frustrated), chasing away younger stags which hang about on the watch, ready to snap up any hind which may wish to elude her rightful lord and master. He is the nearest approach to perpetual motion that the animal kingdom affords.

Occasionally he will be challenged by a stag of his own standing, and must do battle for his harem. A prolonged fight is uncommon. Usually, after a push and a heave one or other decides that he has no chance, disengages himself and makes off. But every now and then, if you are lucky, you may see a real set-to between big stags of equal weight.

They walk along side by side for a minute or two, eyeing one another. Then, as if by

mutual consent they turn and meet with a clash of horns, head on. A point or two is often broken off by the shock. Locked together they heave and strain, each trying to force the other backwards. If neither gains the advantage they will break away after a while, and once more walk side by side, till they are ready for the next round.

One will begin to weaken after ten minutes or so, perhaps. The other gives a mighty lunge and heave; his enemy is swung half round, with his hind-legs gone from under him. That is the dangerous moment, for the flank of the worsted beast is uncovered, and the long horns of the conqueror disengage and plunge fiercely for the vulnerable spot. In this way a severe, but seldom fatal wound may be inflicted. A stag's hide is pretty tough, and turns a glancing blow.

It is rarely indeed that one stag will kill another in fair fight. I have watched many struggles, but have never seen such a thing happen; though it has happened.

Very occasionally stags get their horns so interlocked that they cannot free them, and perish miserably. A case has been known moreover of a third stag approaching a pair

of fighters and killing one of them with a vicious prod in the side.

I have never heard of an unhurt wild stag attacking a man; but men have been killed in park or paddock by tame stags which had lost their natural fear of man. There is some evidence, too, that a badly wounded stag may try to give a man a poke with his horns; and it is just as well to be careful when you go up to a stag on the ground, even if you think he is dead. Never get right in front of him.

At the end of a few weeks of fighting and love-making a stag is completely exhausted, and incapable of raising a trot. Then is the turn of the younger stags, who proceed to enjoy such hinds as may still be willing to respond.

Quite a lot of scrapping goes on among the hinds just now—jealousy, I suppose. They stand up on their tall hind-legs and use their forelegs like flails; but I think it is seldom that they seriously injure each other. Stags, too, after shedding their horns, will fight in this ladylike manner!

It is difficult to tell from hearing a roar what manner of beast is roaring. Big stags have little roars sometimes, and little stags can make a big din. There is a kind of Ha, ha, ha!

noise which you rarely hear in Scotland; the larger New Zealand stag is readier with it. It is like the laugh of a full-throated giant, and when you hear it you may be sure there is a big stag not far away.

A stag will bark like a hind occasionally, but very seldom, I think, when he is fully grown. A barking stag is almost always a young stag.

When a stag has been beaten in a stand-up fight he leaves the hinds alone for a time, and goes off by himself to think it over and recuperate. He is exhausted, and falls very soundly asleep. I remember once suddenly coming upon such a beast, curled up like a dog, under a sheltering peat-hag. We did not see him till we were within fifty yards of him, but were able to sit down, load the rifle, and discuss audibly whether he should be killed or not, without waking him up.

As he was a switch, or nearly so, the decision was against him, and he died in his sleep.

The rut goes on 'diminuendo' till the beginning of November, by which time the big stags have left the hinds and have nothing more to do with them for the next eleven months. They are all as thin as church mice —some of them can hardly stagger along—

and if December should bring very severe weather, and they are not fed, many will die.

Some deer are abnormal. I have heard a small stag roar in December, and through my glass could see that a hind was making up to him. I have heard of a hind that was still allowing stags to take the last liberty with her at Christmas time. She was undoubtedly either abnormal or diseased.

The stags carry their old horns till April, when they are pushed off by the new ones growing up underneath. One cannot help wondering what is Nature's object in making stags undergo the painful and extraordinary process of growing brand-new horns every spring and summer. Painful, because the soft, growing horn is tender and sensitive to the least touch. What survival value can it have? The antelopes, cousins of the deer, do not shed their horns; nor do any sheep, cattle, or other horned beasts. Only the deer tribes, elk, wapiti, reindeer, red deer, fallow deer, roe deer, and the numerous other species found in India, Asia, China, South America, and elsewhere, have this amazing peculiarity.

I used to think that the effort of growing new horns might serve as a safety valve against

over-eating. While the horns are growing, all the herbage on the hill is growing too, and a stag with a winter's starvation behind him is a greedy feeder. Is it possible that the extra effort his body has to make in producing his head adornments saves him from killing himself by over-eating? We can all eat more and digest more when our bodies have plenty to do.

Unfortunately for this theory, deer shed their horns in hot countries, where the winter is not a time of dearth, in exactly the same way as in cold Scotland. It is a mystery, and a most interesting and beautiful one. I think we must leave it at that.

Those who wish to read an exact description and explanation of the physiological processes involved in growing new horns should read Lydekker's 'Deer of All Lands,' a very excellent book.

The shed horns are gnawed and eaten by the hinds, no doubt for the sake of the salts which they contain.

For that reason it is difficult to pick up the shed antlers in an undamaged state, although some stags will lose them at or near the same spot year by year. It is very interesting to compare the shed horns of one stag over a

term of years, and to see how he has gradually improved, or the reverse.

This can only be done with certainty where deer are kept in a park; but a stalker who is watchful can very often manage to pick up the horn or horns of a particular stag over a period of years.

I am inclined to think, after seeing a number of such 'pick-ups,' that heads vary from one year to another more than is usually supposed. I can think of a big stag which had six points on one side and four on the other. D. found the four-point side (he never could find the other, oddly enough) three or four years in succession; and I was surprised to see that one year the beast had put out five points, only to revert to four the following season. He was not a back-going stag, as his head continued to increase in length and weight, and when we finally shot him he weighed well over twenty stone.

Another stag I remember was a switch, which had been a switch for years. He surprised us very much by suddenly putting out about eight points, when he was eight or nine years old. They were not particularly good points, however, and did not save his life;

but it would have been interesting to see if he would have reverted to a plain switch again, or continued in the path of progress. I may add that D. was quite certain it was the same stag, as he knew him by other marks beside his head.

Much argued questions are the age to which a stag lives, and the year of his life when he reaches his best. I believe a stag in a park has reached the age of thirty; but am quite sure that no stag on the hill would live so long, even if he spent all his days in sanctuary. One authority I have consulted states that a stag reaches his prime at twelve, begins to lose his teeth at fourteen, and then gradually goes down the hill, till he ends up, '*sans* everything,' at twenty to twenty-five.

I should say that he is not far wrong, save that perhaps he puts the attainment of prime a little too late. I think a stag improves hardly at all after he is ten years old, but no doubt there are great variations in different individuals, and certainly at twelve years old a stag will show no signs of deterioration.

Heads are a fascinating subject. Round the camp-fire in New Zealand we talked of little else!

I have never seen the perfect head yet, and I do not suppose I ever shall—though I have seen the New Zealand record head, 49 in. long, in Mr Jack Forbes' splendid little collection in Christchurch, New Zealand. The collection is small, simply because Mr Forbes, who has killed more good heads than anyone else in that country, keeps on weeding out the less perfect. So the dozen or thereabouts which he has kept are all winners.

I think the nearest approach to perfection I have ever seen was a head shot by Captain Haggas in South Westland in 1933. It is an almost perfect Royal, each horn being equal, and of great length—I think 47 in.—noble width, perfect shape, heavy, and with long, well-developed tines. I did not like the angle at which one of the upper points was set on; in every other respect it is perfection, to my mind—though Mr Forbes has a fourteen-pointer which runs it close. Perfection is, after all, only a matter of opinion; in mine (a very humble one) any points in addition to the twelve of a Royal are superfluities. A Royal has something of the grand simplicity of perfect Gothic, neither ornate nor primitive. Your eight or ten pointer is all very well; so is your

little Saxon chapel or your Romanesque church. You may fall into ecstasies over a fourteen or sixteen pointer; or you may stare open-mouthed at the decorated wonders of Spanish Gothic or French Flamboyance. All these things are excellent in their way, and I would not cry them down. But the pure beauty of a Sainte Chapelle, or a great Royal head, appears to me to be as close to absolute perfection as you are likely to get in an imperfect world.

XIII.

NEW ZEALAND, 1930.

NEW Zealand is, so far as I know, the only other country besides Great Britain where you can stalk red deer in the open. A good many stags fall to the rifle every year in Germany and Austria, and some of them have good heads, of a kind; but it is, I am told, 'Bush' stalking, and usually means either waiting in a ride, or clearing, for your stag to be driven to you, or stalking the 'roar' during the rutting season in thick cover.

But on the high alps of Westland you can spy your beast from afar, and work your way to him over a big and difficult country.

I may say that the first time we went out, in 1930, we were very ignorant as to the conditions we should have to face. We knew that one could stalk in the open, that the deer of Westland were the descendants of Scottish deer which had been turned down in Otago about 1880, and that big heads were to be obtained.

Not very extensive information on which to undertake an expedition to the other side of the globe!

It is true that we tried to find out rather more about it; but at New Zealand House the pleasant people we talked to knew very little more about deer-stalking in New Zealand than we did ourselves; and the suave, delightful gentleman at the Travel Agency, though quite ready to run anything for us, anywhere, at a moment's notice, quite obviously had little or no precise knowledge. However, *faute de mieux*, we put ourselves into his hands.

We arrived at Wellington on the 24th of February. We had a very good ten days' fishing in Lake Taupo and the Tongariro River, leaving for the South Island on the 8th of March.

We motored across the island from Christchurch to Pembroke, on Lake Wanaka, arriving at that lovely spot on the 10th. Next day, leaving our luggage and respectable clothes in charge of the Pembroke Hotel, we took motor launch to Makarora, forty miles away at the north end of the Lake. There we found a comfortable little wooden hostel, admirably managed by Mrs E., a widow lady, and her charming daughter.

Here, we were still in Otago, but within a few miles of wild Westland. A long wire was waiting for us from our chief guide and stalker, George H., which had been sent from a place called Okuru, three days away on the west coast; he reported that he and his fellow-guide, Jack D., were coming back to Makarora, as all the arrangements which had been made for us by the Travel Agency were hopelessly impossible.

Our spirits went down to zero.

He turned up that same evening, the night of the 11th, and we had to decide whether he or another fellow, by whose advice most of our stores and tents had been sent to Okuru (and thence up the Okuru River), was most to be believed.

This other man, be it said, was a professional 'packer,' or letter-out of pack-horses.

Without hesitation we put our faith in dear old George—not that he was old. I should think in 1930 he was thirty-six or thirty-seven. But some men you put down at sight as 'dear old So-and-So,' and everyone speaks of them with affection. So it is with George. One had only to look at him to like and trust him.

However, here we were at Makarora, and by

far the greater part of our gear and our food lay four days' march away, and was likely to be about as much use to us for some time to come as if it was at the South Pole. Apparently the Okuru River country was almost impracticable for pack-horses, and when you got there you would find no deer in it. At anyrate George and Jack D. had seen no signs of any; and it appears to me in the light of such knowledge as I now possess, that at that date there were none there, or very few. They had not penetrated so far west in 1930.

The aim and object of the gentleman who owned the pack-horses seemed to me then, and seems to me now, to be plain enough. However, the real culprits were the Travel Agency people, who had foolishly played into this man's hands.

We retired to our wooden cubicles that night in a very unhappy frame of mind.

Next day, however, after much use of the telephone, things brightened up a bit. I must explain that in 1930, South Westland, or such parts of it as contained deer, was divided up by the Westland Acclimatisation Society into 'Blocks,' and the Blocks were allotted to stalkers who applied for them on payment of a £10 fee. We had applied rather late, and had

George and L. in the Landsborough Valley.

been allotted Block 10—a poor one; though some of it was perfectly stalkable, but not from the Okuru side.

Acting on George's advice we got through to the gentleman who had taken Block 5, and he not only handed it over to us, but told us that Block 4 was vacant too, as the man who had applied for it was not going out. The depression was very acute, and some of the sportsmen who usually stalk in Westland found themselves obliged to save their money and stop at home. You want a considerable and quite expensive outfit for a Westland expedition.

Blocks 4 and 5 together comprised the whole of the Landsborough River valley, from its source to its junction with the Clarke River, and the entire watershed. So we were free to roam over a strip of country about forty miles long, and anything from five to ten miles wide; a long, winding valley, hemmed in by great hills and snow mountains on either hand, their flanks covered to a height of about 3000 feet by beech forest ('bush'). In the valley itself lie grassy flats, save where the hills advance on either side to pinch the river into a precipitous gorge. Above the bush are green alps (where the big stags roam in autumn), running up to the

region of glaciers and perpetual snow. The mountains to the west, Mount Dechen, Mount Strachan, and others, are high snow peaks with glaciers in between; to the east, the hills forming the divide between the Landsborough and the Hopkins Rivers are lower, and though there is usually some snow on them it is not perpetual, I believe.

This was well enough; George and Jack D. had both of them been up the Landsborough before, and were ready to go again, even with a lady in the party! I did not know it then, but, two years before, George had been with an English Colonel and his wife when all three were nearly drowned in the flooded river.

The Colonel, in a published account of his experiences, has written: "I do not wish to choke a single soul off going to Westland to stalk, unless it be a woman. Even so, several parts are quite within their scope; but not the Landsborough Valley. My wife, incidentally, has the honour of being the first and only woman who has ever set foot in it, and if I had known what we were ultimately in for, I would never have taken either her or myself there."

Let me say 'right now' that Westland is

not a country to play with. It is much too big and too fierce, too variable in its moods, for trifling. But if you have the right guides, *and do what they tell you*, fairly active persons of either sex can go about in it without undue risk, in my opinion. Of course, if you try to do things 'on your own,' you are asking for and will surely find trouble.

We had a consultation with Mrs E. We had our hacks, and she had some pack-horses, if more were wanted, which she could let us have for a few days. However, I think after all we made do with those originally hired. They had not all gone down to Okuru. Tents and stores were another problem. Luckily one good tent for my wife and myself was still at Makarora (we were to have used it on the way to Okuru), and by stripping Mrs E.'s storeroom of all that was in it we managed to satisfy George that we should have enough to go on with. A messenger with fresh orders was sent off at once to our two porters and the packmen up the Okuru River. Until our porters joined us we should be very shorthanded, and the heavy carrying would fall entirely on the two guides and Jack W., our cook.

That evening Mr John Forbes and Con H.,

the Westland ranger, strolled in from a twenty-five mile walk over the Haast looking as fresh as paint. Con, as his wont is, immediately became most helpful. He could and would lend us a tent for the men, and other necessaries.

So we were able to start on the 13th, with our train of hacks and pack-horses, and about ten days' supplies. Besides the packmen, we had for company George, Jack D., and our cook, Jack W., a fine upstanding young man, who was quite ready to do his share of the porterage. We reached the Burke Hut, on the Haast River, by four o'clock that evening. The Haast is rather an ordeal for nervous riders. It is never more than a narrow, pack-horse track, except for the first few miles over the Makarora river-flats. Sometimes the gradient is very steep, and it skirts many deep ravines and precipices, with a wall of rock on one side and nothing at all on the other.

One of the worst places is called Riley's Corner, where a gentleman of that name once departed into the abyss, horse and all.

In places the track is blasted out of the stony mountainside, and there is one evil stretch across a long shoulder of loose shale and débris, which is always moving. Also, there is a good

deal of fording to be done, easy or the reverse according to the amount of rain there has been lately. First you have the Makarora River, and then many mountain streams and torrents, and there is one fearsome narrow bridge across a chasm. The bridge has a slightly cock-eyed appearance, as if it had had a heavy nudge from something; the nudge came from the stream, fifty feet below.

There was a cloudburst in the hills, the brook rose fifty feet in an hour, and nearly took the bridge with it. It seemed incredible; but we had not then had, nor indeed did we have till 1933, an experience of real rain in Westland.

At the Burke Hut live two roadmen, who are responsible for keeping the north end of the pass in a tolerable condition. One of the roadmen had blown himself up with dynamite early in the year, and we passed the improvised stretcher on which his mate and a passing traveller had hoped to bring in the remains. But nothing could be found sufficiently large to warrant transport, and the stretcher remained as a monument at the scene of the catastrophe.

The roadmen live a lonely life, as no human being exists within twenty-five miles of them,

and their only company is the occasional passer-by.

The hut itself is a wooden shanty with a tin roof. In the centre is a small room with a large open fireplace, and at each end is a bunk-room in which five men can sleep.

Our tent was pitched near the river, and we slept on two large bundles of fern, comfortably enough, as the weather was fine and warm. I was troubled by the fact that the personal kits, sleeping-bags and so forth, of our two guides was somewhere on the Okuru River; but I think it worried me more than it did them. They were much too hard and keen to take minor discomforts very seriously, and we had a good many of Mrs E.'s blankets with us.

We left the Burke Hut pretty early on the 14th, and reached Harper's Bluff, on the Landsborough, soon after one o'clock. Though a short trek, it has its difficulties. The Landsborough has to be forded twice, the first time just above its junction with the Clarke River. Even when it is low it is up to the horses' bellies, swift, with a rocky bottom and milky, opaque water, which makes it impossible for a horse to see where he puts his feet.

And in places our way lay over the boulders

of old dry river-bed (these rivers are always shifting) and great stones brought down by many floods. The horses were expert at this sort of work, moving almost leg by leg in the bad bits, and making no mistakes.

At Harper's Bluff the pack-horses were unloaded and departed down-stream.

We pitched our first camp on the south side of the Bluff, feeling that things might well have been worse, in spite of our muddled start.

Harper's Bluff is called after the first pioneer who entered this lovely valley, in 1894. I met Mr Harper later on, in Wellington, and he told me something about his journey down from the head of the river with a single Maori companion and a dog. The bush was full of flightless and wingless birds in those days—kiwis, wekas, and kakapos; the dog caught a few, and they snared some, but they were pretty thin by the time they reached the Haast. The exhausted Maori had much difficulty in getting over the Bluff, a 900-foot climb.

The birds are all gone now, alas! Stoats and weasels were introduced to kill the imported rabbits, but found birds which could not fly an easier prey; and now, except in a few sanctuaries and chosen places, these strange and

interesting creatures have almost disappeared. There is not one up the Landsborough, where thirty-five years ago they abounded.

I shall always remember our first night in camp by the Landsborough. Jack W. cooked us a good meal, and Jack D. made us a fire-place in front of our tent-opening, also bed-steads and mattresses, all out of beech logs, twigs, and leaves. The night was fine, with a touch of autumn frost in the air, and we fell asleep to the monotonous but somehow soothing serenade of the 'more-pork' owl. At last we were really in the wilds.

At the Bluff the river runs narrowly through a deep gorge. On the east or left bank, on which we were camped, the rock stands sheer up from the water's edge in a magnificent cliff. If the river is dead low it is possible to wade across to the right bank, scramble along it through a dreadful bit of country for half a mile, and then ford back again to the left bank. But usually anyone who wants to go up the Landsborough must climb the Bluff through the bush from the south side.

There was a large, undulating, grassy flat below the Bluff, much cut up by dry water-courses. It extended over perhaps a hundred

and fifty acres. Here there lived a few rabbits, the remnant of huge hordes which once had covered the flat. They slowly starved (as all the available food supply vanished), became diseased, and perished miserably, victims of their own unbounded fecundity. Now there are dozens where formerly there were millions, and they appear to be healthy enough. It will be interesting to see if they repeat the old catastrophic cycle, but our men were of the opinion that they are not now increasing in numbers. There are a good many stoats about, and as the kiwis and wekas have gone the rabbits no doubt now pay toll.

As the rut had not begun, and there were at present no stags to be seen so low down the river, we were anxious to push on; but it seemed only prudent to wait a few days for our missing stuff. There were a few deer about, and on the 15th I shot a small hind—a 'six quarters' calf—for the pot, as meat was wanted; and George cut it up.

It rained all that night, but next morning, in spite of the soaking state of the bush, George and Jack D. went off over the Bluff, with heavy packs, to make a dump of food half-way to Mackenzie's Creek, our next camp. They came

back in the evening, after a useful day's work. Next morning George and the two Jacks went up over the Bluff heavily loaded ; George came back in the evening from the dump, but the Jacks went right on up-stream to Mackenzie's Creek with their loads, a whole day's journey, in order to make preparation for our next camp.

The 17th was a lovely hot day, and we wandered about trying to catch glimpses of various bush birds, such as the tui and the bell-bird, whose songs we could hear, though the singers were difficult to see. There was a host of little birds, tits, fantails, and others, to which we could put no name ; and we admired the handsome New Zealand wood-pigeon, and were amused at the bold friendliness of the robin, which has the same shape as our own, but is a size larger, with a yellow breast and a black back. He hops about the camp in the boldest way, and is full of insatiable curiosity.

On the 18th the Jacks came back, and George developed a raging toothache. On the 19th he was so bad and shaky after a sleepless night, with a fearfully swollen jaw and a high temperature, that it seemed only prudent to send him back to civilisation. So he and Jack D.

set off down the river—he was too bad to send alone, and for a time we saw him no more.

This was a dreadful blow, shorthanded as we were already; but the 19th was the date on which our pack-horses were due to arrive at the Bluff with the Okuru stores and our two porters. If we got them we could manage. But evening came, and there was no sight of them.

Jack W. and our two selves were just sitting down on the softest logs available to eat our supper, feeling rather depressed, when in walked Con H. He had met George and Jack D. near the Burke Hut, and immediately came up to help us—bless him!—with no kit but what he stood up in. That is Con all over.

So at dawn next morning we broke camp and tackled the Bluff, Con and Jack W. both carrying 70-lb. packs. A note was left in camp telling Jack D. that we had gone on up-river.

It was a stiff climb through the bush, but we reached the top of the Bluff in an hour, which Con said was good travelling, and scrambled down the other side on to a small open space called Twenty Pointer flat. It earned its name some years ago when a party descended upon it from the Bluff and gazed

upon a stag with the largest head ' what ever was seen,' peacefully feeding. Rifles were hastily unslung and loaded, but by the time someone was ready to open fire the stag had vanished into the bush. Con had warned me beforehand to have my magazine charged, but this time no stag appeared.

Our way now lay along the stones and boulders of the river, with occasional detours into the bush to avoid particularly bad bits of the river-bed. The bush was very thick, as we could not hit off the deer tracks ; and beech bush, well thickened with black scrub, creepers, brambles (' bush lawyers '), and thorns, is awful stuff to struggle through, especially when you are hung all over like a Christmas tree with your treasures and belongings.

Later on I learned wisdom, and carried nothing but a small pack, rifle, and telescope. Haversacks are a perfect curse in a scramble, as they will work round from back to front.

The beech is not a bit like an English beech (though I believe it belongs to the same family), but has tiny leaves, and with its saplings forms a dense forest of twigs and foliage. It is useful wood for the camp, as it burns well even when

green, and its leaves and twigs make a most comfortable mattress.

We halted at about mid-day for a 'boil.' Billy tea, when you are very hot and thirsty, is the best drink in the world. After that we battled on for several hours, reaching our camp just above the big flat by Mackenzie's Creek before five o'clock, weary indeed, but well pleased at having finished our day's march successfully.

Our tent was already pitched (by the two Jacks on the 18th), and Con and Jack W. soon had a good hot meal ready for us. Then I lay down in the tent and had a nap, from which I was roused by Con's voice asking if I felt energetic enough to go down to the big flat, just below the camp, and try for a hind, as we were very short of food.

I would much rather have stayed where I was, but did not dare say so.

"Can you gralloch her if you get one?"

I thought a moment. "Yes, if you will lend me your hunting-knife," I answered, reflecting that a hind presents fewer complications than a stag, and that anyhow no witnesses would be present.

There were several hinds out on the flat

feeding, but the first party I stalked either heard or winded me, and it was half-past six, and beginning to get dark, before I got a shot at one from the edge of the bush. She was hit, but ran off. However, another hind near-by stood still for a moment after the shot, and gave me time to reload and kill her.

I will draw a veil over the gory proceeding which followed, but I did gralloch her, *tant bien que mal*, and removing the liver and kidneys wrapped them up in my handkerchief and went down to the river to wash them—and myself. On the way I came across the first hind stone dead, and, after some debate with myself, gralloched her too; so we now had a great deal more venison than we could eat before it went bad on us.

After dark Con and I took a torch, and I showed him where the two hinds were. He cut off the haunches and hung them on the nearest tree without skinning them. "The bluebottles can't hurt the meat much if you don't skin it," he explained. "We can make a bush larder in the morning if you have any muslin, and skin it then."

The bluebottles or blowflies are, after the sandflies, the greatest bane of tent-dwellers in

New Zealand. If you leave anything made of wool uncovered in the daytime you will find it fly-blown and slimy almost before your back is turned. If your boots are wet they will try to blow them, and they have even been known to make an attempt on an oily rifle barrel!

That was a tiring day, and we slept soundly on our beechen beds.

Mackenzie's Creek is a most beautiful place for a camp and comparatively free from sand-flies. The little creek runs down from the hillside not fifty yards away and is clear and icy cold. At the Bluff we were obliged to drink the Landsborough water, which is cold enough, being glacier fed, but not at all clear. It contains a solution of milky silt which cannot be good for the inside.

The wind almost always blows up-stream in this valley, and we were protected from the south by an arm of the bush, which also served to hide the tents from any deer on the big flat. On the opposite side of the river, but further to the north, Mounts Dechen and Strachan raise their glacier-clad heads. In 1930 they were virgin peaks, and I have not heard of their being climbed since. The end

of the valley appears to be walled in by an enormous precipice of rock called Zora.

That evening there was a stag roaring in the bush—the rut had begun. It rained in the night, but the morning was fine, and Con built us a large fireplace of big stones at the mouth of the tent. It is probably there still, if no earthquake has upset it.

In the afternoon he took me down to two little flats below the big one; but there was nothing to be seen, though a few broken bushes and twisted boughs showed that a rutting stag had passed that way.

It was very cold in the night, with a touch of frost; autumn was advancing, though we were standing still. Con could stay no longer; he had already done more than could possibly be expected of anyone, and had some work to do for his Society. He was obliged to go, but we hated losing him.

That day, after he had gone, we saw our first New Zealand stag. He was a long way off, on a high alp across the river. We had no guide, and the river was too high to ford, so we could only look at him through the telescope. He seemed to have a very good head, and the sight of him cheered us up.

Also two keas paid us a visit and entertained us quite a lot, though Jack W., who knew them of old, advised us to throw stones at them and frighten them away. They have a playful habit of walking along the ridge pole of a tent, with a sharp bill in the canvas, ripping it up as if with a knife. If encouraged, they will walk inside a tent and pull everything in it to pieces.

The strength in their bills is amazing. I saw one of them nip off a small branch, on which he happened to be sitting, as easily as if his bill had been a sharp pair of shears. He then pretended to be astonished at finding he was sitting on air, and broke into roars of laughter, in which his mate joined. They are wonderful clowns.

Actually they are parrots, dark green in colour, with a lovely flash of crimson under the wings.

Next morning, the 23rd of March, Jack W. left camp early and went down to the half-way dump in order to bring up some more stores, so we were left by our two selves. There was not much to do, and in the afternoon down came the rain.

Both Jacks turned up later on, pretty wet.

They had met at the dump. Jack D. brought up 'half a hundred' of flour with him, which had followed us to the Burke from Makarora, so at least we had bread and meat in plenty. He reported that he had seen nothing of our own pack-horses, and that George had been able to get a ride from the Burke over the Haast with a pack-horse train returning to Makarora. That we were pleased to hear, as we feared he was very unwell when he left Harper's Bluff, and might not be able to walk the twenty-five miles from the hut to the lake.

It rained all night, but cleared enough in the morning to beguile Jack D. and myself into taking a walk up-stream. However, we had not gone very far when down it came again, so we got a wetting for nothing, and had to hurry back lest the creek should rise behind us and cut off us from camp. That is one of the real dangers in Westland, for the creeks become foaming torrents in a very short time.

It turned very cold, and there was snow on all the hills just above the bush in the morning, with a very low glass and a thunderstorm.

We could do little but mark time for the next two days, as the weather was bad, and we were

short-handed and short of stores. It was very vexing.

However on the 26th our luck turned at last, for who should meet us in the dusk just outside camp but George, with an electric torch. He had been to Alexandra and back in eight days —quick travelling. Once the tooth was out he had recovered quickly.

That evening we decided that George and I, with a light ' bivvy ' tent and a little food, should push on next morning to a big flat about six hours away up-stream, where there was a chance of a ' good ' stag. One reckons distance on the Landsborough by hours, not miles ; for sometimes a very few miles will take up a great many hours.

The early morning of the 27th was foggy, but the sun came through and it was very hot later on.

After breakfast George shouldered his pack and off we went. Six hours travelling brought us to a large flat, the largest on the river probably, which I shall call Nameless flat, as it had no name.

It is a series of grass-grown plateaus, divided by steep banks ; the biggest and highest plateau may be close on two hundred acres.

We pitched our little tent near the river in some trees, had tea, and went forth to see what deer were about.

We soon spied two big stags and several smaller ones. One of the big fellows had an attractive eleven-point head; the other, a Royal, was good up above, but his bays were weak.

After some consultation we decided to try the eleven pointer, though he was in a bad place.

"We can't stalk from the bush," said George, "as he's too far out. D'ye mind a long wet crawl?"

I shook my head, and we went on our hands and knees into some swampy ground where tall tufts of rushes gave good cover. We crawled through some very wet places till we came to the edge of the swamp.

There were the hinds, a dozen or more, at least three hundred yards away, with the stag chasing them about in the apparently aimless way common to rutting stags.

He had a particularly strident roar, and for the first time I heard the deep-throated 'Ha, ha, ha!' of a big New Zealand stag. He looked enormous to me, and I believe that a full-

grown Westland stag weighs from thirty to thirty-five stone. It is a matter of guess-work, however, as it is impossible to weigh a stag in the wilderness.

We could get no closer in. George whispered, "He will run this way soon," but we waited and waited till I was afraid the light would be gone; and still he came no nearer. At last, when I had almost given him up, two hinds broke away from the mob and came towards us. The stag saw them, and followed at a run, trying to turn them.

Nearer and nearer came the hinds, till they saw us crouching in the rushes, and stopped, staring. Nearer came the stag, till he too came to a standstill less than a hundred yards away.

We were squatting on our knees; resting my rifle on George's shoulder I pulled the trigger. Such a rest is not to be commended, but in this case there was really no alternative. From a sitting position I should not have seen over the rushes.

The stag toppled over dead. We were very pleased—I had come a long way to get him.

His horns were 43 inches long, each side, and 39 inches across—nothing out of the way

for Westland. One horn is almost perfection; but the other lacks a point on top, and is not so good. It is a taking head, all the same.

It was quite dark before George had the head off, and extracted the liver for our supper and breakfast. What with starting a fire of green wood, frying the liver, eating our meal, and drying our wet clothes, it was pretty late before we turned in.

It was a very cold, star-lit night, and our carpet of reeds and beech twigs was rather thin. So long as the fire lasted I slept—for an hour or more. Then I began to shiver under my blanket, and continued to shiver till dawn broke, envying George, who snored peacefully.

The dawn was very welcome, and as soon as it was light enough to see, we dressed, boiled the billy, and made a cup of tea. The ground was white with hoar-frost and I had a job to pull my boots on as they were frozen stiff.

It was still not much more than twilight when we got out on to the big flat again, but there was no stag there, so we went half a mile up-stream to look at a small flat George knew of, tucked away in the bush some distance from the river.

There was a young stag there by himself,

who caught sight of us and came running up to see what sort of creatures walked abroad on two legs. I suppose that in 1930 many of the deer up the Landsborough had never seen a man, and the younger stags were amazingly fearless. The hinds and old stags were much more suspicious, though even with them you could take liberties at which a Scottish stalker would open his eyes.

But, as Con remarked to me, you have to know just what liberties you can take. If Westland deer get your wind they bolt as fast and as far as their Scottish cousins; and a sound which is strange to them, such as the clink of metal on stone, will frighten them away.

This young stag trotted up to within fifty yards of us, and stood staring. We turned to go back, and he began to follow, and came after us till we lost him in a strip of bush.

We made a large breakfast, and till eleven o'clock I drowsed in the sun while George skinned the head, lightening it as much as possible for travelling.

We did not hurry on our way down, and it was half-past five or more before we reached camp.

My wife ran down to meet us by the creek,

with the news that there was a good stag at the far end of the flat below; Jack D. was watching him, and wanted me to come and stalk him as soon as I could.

Leaving George in camp, unburdening himself of his pack and the head, I discovered Jack D. on the edge of the bush, plying a telescope.

"It's a fifteen pointer and a fair head," he said.

I was a bit weary, but a look through the telescope put new life into me.

We worked our way round the flat, climbing some distance up into the bush as we did so. In half an hour we came down into a little projecting promontory of bush, close to the point where we had last seen our stag. From our cover we could hear him roaring but could not see him.

We were wondering what we had better do, when we heard him roar quite close by. Peering through the undergrowth I saw him walking slowly towards us, about eighty yards away.

I had to fire standing, but got support for my left hand against a tree, and aimed at his chest as he stood facing us.

The bullet hit him, but he turned and fled as if nothing had happened. My wife and George

were watching him through their glasses, half a mile away, at the other end of the flat; and George, putting down his telescope, murmured sadly, "A clean miss."

But it was not. The stag ran a hundred yards and then collapsed, dead. The head, as so often happens, was a little disappointing. It was shapely, with five points on top one side, and four the other, but rather small (38 inches long, 35 inches wide) by Westland standards. He was an old, heavy beast, and was probably past his best.

However, my wife and I were glad to see his horns in camp. Fifteen pointers do not grow on gooseberry bushes, and we now had two fair heads to show for our trouble.

The next morning, the 29th, was a lovely one. We were very anxious to push on up the river, but the question of supplies had become urgent. We were short or had run out of many things, including salt, baking powder, and candles. The stores from Okuru were many days overdue.

However, we thought we could hold out for another week if everything from the base camp and from the half-way dump was brought up. Accordingly the two Jacks went off down-stream

to bring along all they could find. They intended to return next day.

The river had gone down a good deal, and George discovered a practicable ford. He carried my wife across, and I waded after them. The water was waist-deep and very cold. There was a big flat a couple of miles away up-stream, on the right bank, which we wanted to have a look at.

It held a good stag all right, and I got a shot. He was standing close to some very thick bush —really impenetrable jungle—and although I hit him (fatally, I think) he got into this and we could not find him.

That evening after supper we were preparing to turn in very early, having no candles, when we heard a noise quite unlike any of the usual night sounds of the bush. It was neither morepork nor stag ; but supposing it was some other bird or beast we did not pay it much attention.

However, George had heard it too, and ran over to our tent to ask if we had heard anything unusual. " It sounded like a coo-ee," he said.

I slipped on my boots again, and we stumbled in the darkness through the belt of bush separ-

ating us from the flat. In the black night, downstream, and a long way off, there was a tiny flicker of flame.

" That's a fire," said George. " I'd better go and see what is the matter. Looks like trouble to me."

He took his torch and departed. We made up our fire, put a billy on to boil, and reviewed the medical stores, which consisted mainly of iodine and calomel. We wondered what we should do if someone had broken a bone.

It was an hour before George returned, shepherding two extremely weary strangers; indeed one of them was all in, and George was carrying his pack. They were our missing porters from Okuru, I don't know how many days overdue.

They had arrived at the Bluff with some of the missing stores on the 28th; the pack-horses were unloaded and went off. Next morning, at about ten o'clock (absurdly late), they started off over the Bluff with heavy loads of food, and met the two Jacks, who were quick travellers, at about one o'clock, somewhere near Twenty Pointer flat.

" They told us to keep the river on our left and we couldn't go wrong," said the younger

and less tired man, "but I don't think we were ever right. Didn't seem so to me, anyhow."

They stumbled along over the boulders, and when darkness came down were on the river beach a little below the big flat. They lit a fire—as luck had it, in about the only place where it would be visible for a good way upstream—gave a few despairing coo-ees, and settled down to an uncomfortable night. As I have remarked, the wind always blows upstream, or we should not have heard them.

We were extremely pleased to see them, and to hear that enough stores had reached the Bluff to allow us to stay out for another fortnight, at least.

Asked why the pack-train, which should have returned to the Bluff in five days, had taken fifteen, they were distinctly vague, talking of swollen rivers and tired horses. They were not going to give themselves or anyone else away, if they could help it, and it was a long time before we learned the true story of those fifteen days.

The ingredients of the mess were lack of leadership, inefficiency, laziness, stupidity, and downright dishonesty, in about equal portions. A lot of our stores, including a whole tent,

had vanished completely, and were seen no more.

However, I do not think Huntley and Palmer, as we soon nicknamed our two porters, were very much to blame. Both proved to be quite adequate, under George's eye. Most men of their sort go to pieces when leaderless.

On the morrow, the 30th, the two Jacks were back in camp with heavy loads soon after mid-day, having been able to short-circuit the Bluff by fording the river twice.

Their energy enabled George and me to get off across the river with a light tent, and we camped for the night at a flat on the right bank about three hours away.

We watched the flat in the evening, and towards dusk I got a shot at a fairly good thirteen pointer, and killed him. It was quite a hot night, and as we had plenty of time to cut beech twigs for our tent floor after pitching it we slept warm and soundly.

In the morning we pushed on up the river, leaving our tent standing, with the head by it, for our porters to bring on. According to the programme the whole of the remaining party at Mackenzie's Creek—my wife, the two Jacks, and Huntley and Palmer—were to come up

the right bank and join us at Belper's flat, the most northerly of the Landsborough flats, where our third and last camp was to be pitched.

This flat, some six or seven hours above Mackenzie's (nine or ten if the left bank only is available), is named after Lord Belper, who killed a very good stag indeed there a few years after the War.

The programme could not be carried out, as George and I were presently brought to a full stop by a large and recent landslide, which had pushed the river out of its old course and had created a new bluff several hundred feet high.

No doubt we could have climbed it, but with a low river it was not worth while. So we sat down and waited for the others, and eventually we all forded the river a little above Nameless flat and pitched our camp by a little dry creek opposite the south end of Belper's flat.

Over the river, Dechen towered above us, and we could hear and see the avalanches falling from his steep snow-fields. Also new snow mountains had come into sight beyond and to the right of the Zora rock wall. We

were now, of course, not so far south of the highest peaks in the Mount Cook range.

It was a beautiful place for a camp, but not so satisfactory as Mackenzie's Creek. For one thing, we had to drink the river water; for another, the sandflies were atrocious. At Mackenzie's I had been in the habit of going down to the creek every morning for a bathe in the cold, clear water, without more than moderate inconvenience from these pests, but in this camp washing in the open was impossible. As soon as one's shirt was off one's back it was replaced by a cloud of voracious blood-suckers, and in a couple of minutes one was bleeding and itching all over.

We became, after a time, more or less immune against bites on the wrists, forehead, and neck, but bites on the body never ceased to irritate. So we just had to go unwashed. I noticed that our acclimatised companions were quite as much worried as we were; which was not much consolation.

The next day, the 1st April, was a red-letter day for me.

We had not intended to do anything very strenuous, but after breakfast George spied what seemed to be a good stag high up on a

little craggy alp, above the lower part of the Dechen glacier. He was a long way off, but the more we looked at him the better we liked him, and had no difficulty in deciding to go after him.

So George and I left camp at about nine o'clock, and fording the river at a bad, stony place (we found a better one later on) landed on Belper's flat.

It looked as if we could avoid the three thousand feet of bush which rose up between the flat and the lower alps of Dechen (I am using the word alp in its true sense—a grassy slope high up on a snow mountain) by climbing up the bare, rocky banks of the glacier stream, under the moraine. All went well at first. It was definitely climbing, at anyrate in places, but there were plenty of hand and foot holds in good rock at the steeper bits, and we met with no great difficulty till we were half-way up. Then we came to a waterfall with a sheer rock face which could not be turned. Possibly a man shod with grass-plaited shoes, such as they use in the Dolomites, might have done it, but we thought it prudent to give it up and take to the bush.

Unfortunately we were obliged to do so on

the west, or wrong side of the stream, which was not to be crossed at that point. We could not find a deer-track, and had a most punishing struggle upwards through dense virgin bush, not getting clear of it till about one o'clock.

We could not see our stag, but there were some hinds close to the place where we had first spied him. They were still a long way off, as we had to cross a steep and broken amphitheatre of shale and moraine before we could get near them.

Time was getting on, so we boiled no billy, but started to cross the moraine right under the glacier. All went well for a bit, but suddenly a young stag, which must have got our wind, jumped up out of a hollow and ran off in front of us, following our intended course. This was bad, as we feared the hinds above us on the other side would be sure to see him. However, we were not far from the glacier now, and once there would be out of their sight.

We took a look at the hinds with a glass. Yes, they had seen the staggie, and were all staring down at him. And, by Diana, there is the big fellow having a look at him too. "He's got fourteen points, and it is a heavy head," said George, looking through his

glass, "but the little stag will take them all away."

We waited till the little brute had crossed the stream, and then followed, moving very slowly.

I did not raise my head, as one's face is a most visible part, but when we reached the water, where we stopped for a sip and a piece of chocolate, George told me that the hinds were still there when he last had a look.

It was past two o'clock, and would be dark at half-past six, so we dared not take a spell, but tackled the steep climb up the other side of the moraine without delay.

Twenty minutes scrambling found us on an abrupt shoulder, bare, save for tussocks of long grass; it was the lower continuation of the alp on which our deer were feeding. George crawled on a little, while I sat down to get my wind, and admired the magnificent view. From this height I could see the whole of the Mount Cook range, not thirty miles away, a most wonderful sight.

Far below I discovered our tents, but did not know that everyone in camp who could raise a glass was watching us and the stag in a state of great excitement.

When George came back he reported that he could see hinds feeding peacefully between two and three hundred yards away, that the slope was bare of all cover, and that we could not get any closer in. So we lay still and hoped they would feed our way, or that a miracle might happen. For indeed we seemed at the moment to hold very few cards in our hand, as a long wait was out of the question.

Oddly enough the 'bit staggie,' whom we had cursed so vigorously, won the rubber for us. He must have made overtures to some of the hinds, only to be run out promptly and chased off by the big stag.

He came down the hill till he saw us, and stopped, in full view, not sixty yards away. His pursuer also stopped, not quite so close, and not in full view.

He stood gazing in our direction, and I could see the whole of his head and neck, with the snows of Dechen as a background. Not an easy shot, for lying down I could not see him at all. However, it seemed the only chance. I knelt, and kneeling took a snap shot at his neck, and was lucky enough to break it.

He slowly toppled forward, then his great body came sliding and somersaulting down the

mountain past us at an ever-increasing pace. We followed, as fast as we could, in fear lest his horns would be smashed to bits.

"Before I heard the shot," my wife told me afterwards, "I saw through the glass you and George and the stag all tumbling down the hill together, till you disappeared."

By the greatest piece of good luck he stuck fast in a little hollow a couple of hundred feet lower down, and when we reached him we found that his head was uninjured.

He was technically a sixteen pointer, as he had two sharp prongs about two inches long sticking straight up on each side above his brows—a queer peculiarity. It is a heavy, massive head, and the points are long, rough, and shapely; but the over-all length is not enough to put it in the first class; 40 inches is nothing much, in Westland. However, heads of that weight and substance are not very common.

He lay in the gully with his head doubled under him, and George could not get the knife round his neck. So we tied his hind legs to a tuft of spear-grass with our telescope straps, and very gingerly shifted his position. He was a very heavy stag, and I was in terror lest he should again start on his downward

career. However, the straps and the spear-grass held, and George was able to get his head off. When we untied the straps a touch sent the carcase cascading down the hill again, and I do not think it stopped till it reached the bush.

It took us a long time to get down to Belper's flat. The bush was very thick and the hill very steep; we could find no deer-tracks, and a stag's head is an awkward thing to carry through jungle. However, we got down before dusk, and lay watching the flat for twenty minutes. There were three or four stags and a lot of hinds on it, but nothing that was any good; so we forded the river and reached camp just as the light failed and they were beginning to get anxious about us.

Next morning I killed a young stag for the pot, and in the afternoon we crossed the river and watched the big flat for some hours, but nothing worth a shot appeared.

On the 3rd there was a threat of rain and a falling glass, so it seemed wise to send my wife back to Mackenzie's, with Jack D., making use of the right bank and the fords. If the rain came on and the river rose she would have to take the much more difficult and toil-some route along the left bank.

On the way down they saw a very good Royal indeed—naturally, as they had no rifle—and reached Mackenzie's before the worst of the rain.

George and I made a day's excursion up the left bank beyond Zora Creek, but saw nothing worth while.

It was raining before we got back to camp, and a deluge all the next day, with nothing to do but eat largely and watch the sandflies swarming on the roof of the tent.

On the 5th it stopped raining, and we decided to break camp and go down river, as there seemed to be no good stags at Belper's.

The others went right down to Mackenzie's, but George and I put in another night with the 'bivvy' tent at Nameless flat, and early next morning I shot a fairly good Royal—good tops, but rather weak below.

That evening we were all back at Mackenzie's again, and rejoiced to be away from the sandflies. They made our camp opposite Belper's flat a good imitation of purgatory.

Just before sunset, we spied a useful-looking stag, with some hinds, a long way off, high up in a big grassy corrie under the crags from

which Mackenzie's Creek tumbles down. He looked big enough, though we could not read his head. So we started at dawn next morning, and were clear of the bush by nine o'clock, finding a fairly easy deer-track most of the way up. George had climbed up this, the east side of the valley, once before.

The spur of bush-grown hillside up which we toiled is joined to the main mass of the hill, above the tree-line, by a very narrow, rocky arête—not too easy a place. We were about half-way across when we saw some hinds a couple of hundred feet below, in a clearing, with a very good stag. The rifle was on my back and in its cover. Also, before I could fire I had to find anchorage on the ridge; and by then the stag had disappeared. It was vexing, but when you are using hands as well as feet, you are bound to sling the rifle. I shall always believe that that stag had an enormous head—but the fish you lose are invariably the biggest.

It had seemed to be a pretty settled sort of morning when we left camp, though the glass was dropping a little, but it now began to rain and the sun went in. However, we pushed on up the hill, which got steeper and steeper as

we got wetter and wetter. The last part was almost a climb.

George went much faster than usual, no doubt wishing to get our business done before the weather became impossible. I was not far from the end of my tether, a horrid, middle-aged feeling, when he stopped, and peering through the sleet—for it was cold up here—said he thought we were near the top, and the stag must be on our left, and below us.

There was a good deal of old snow lying about among the crags, and it was deep in places.

Presently we came to a dip in the ground, and George told me that this was the way down the other side, if we wanted to get to the Hopkins River. It is called, I think, the Brodrick Pass, and is about 5000 feet high. The hills each side run up to nearly 6000 feet.

We halted in the col for a few minutes, hoping for a break in the weather, as I wanted to look beyond the Divide ; but no break came.

" They say it's through here that the deer got into the Landsborough," George told me.

However that may be there were no droppings visible, and it did not seem as if they were using the pass at all.

It was too cold to sit for long. Obviously

we were now above our deer, which were somewhere in the big corrie beneath and behind us, but the snow showers made it difficult to see anything.

However, we slid down into the corrie, and presently caught a glimpse of the hinds, in between two storms. We tried to get our telescopes on to the stag, who was there right enough, but down came a squall and we never saw him properly.

When we were about a couple of hundred yards away from our beasts I clumsily dislodged a stone, which rattled down towards them, and they all put their heads up. Seeing they would be off in a moment I got into the best firing position I could, and asked George if he was worth killing. George answered, "Yes, I think so," so I fired, and was pleased at getting him, for he was not an easy shot—fairly far out, and moving slowly.

When we got down to him, however, I found we had made a mistake. He was a very old stag, with fair tops, but his lower tines had gone right back to nothing at all, and he had lost several teeth.

"A useful piece of culling, anyhow," was George's consolatory remark, as we turned to

go, after taking his liver. I suppose he was better dead, but we had meat in camp, and I dislike killing a beast for nothing. I should have waited till I could get a good look at him; but using a telescope froze one's fingers that day, to say nothing of the impossibility of seeing through falling snowflakes.

'Culling' is a good word which one hears much used in New Zealand. It means "removing an animal from the herd for the good of the herd, such animal being inferior, or too old for breeding." I wish deer culling, and not wholesale slaughter, was the policy of the New Zealand Goverment; but we will come to that later on.

We did not find it too easy to get down the hill, as the storms were blinding at times. At first we strayed too far to the south, but in a lull we distinguished our arête, and after that it was plain sailing.

The pack-horses were due at the Bluff on the 12th April, so on the 9th we broke up our happy camp at Mackenzie's Creek. In spite of the rain on the 7th the Landsborough remained unusually low, and we were able to avoid the Bluff by fording to the right bank and back again, my wife going over on Jack D.'s sturdy

back. The fording is not much fun, as the water is so bitterly cold; but it saves no end of time and trouble. If you are not prepared to cross a glacier-fed river, waist-deep, it is no use going to Westland.

On the 10th and 11th George and I worked hard, mainly in the Bush, but though we saw and heard a number of stags we could not find one that was worth a shot.

Mrs E.'s son, Russell E., was due at Harper's Bluff on the 12th, with his mother's pack-horses, to fetch us out. Expecting him at about mid-day my wife and I, with George, left camp at ten o'clock, partly for the sake of the walk, partly to avoid riding over the worst of the boulders.

It was just as well, for young E. had trouble in catching one or two of his horses at the Burke Hut that morning, and we did not meet him till we were a long way down the river.

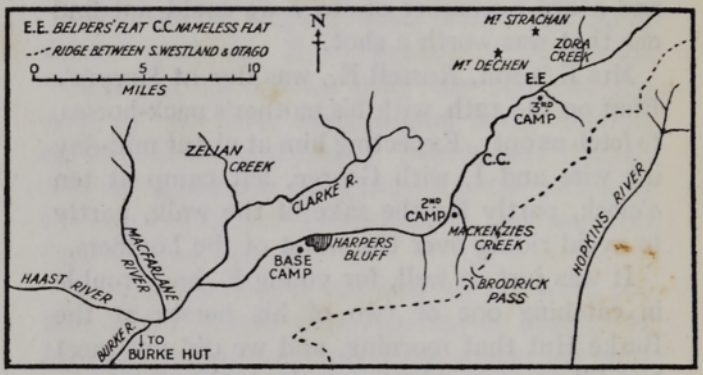
We took our hacks, made the river crossings successfully, and arrived at the hut an hour or more before sunset.

It had been a hot, sunny day, but as night fell it began to freeze. We had tea, sat comfortably before a blazing fire and listened to a gramophone, the cherished possession of our friend Len. D., one of the roadmen.

The hours went by, and we began to get anxious.

The pack-horses did not arrive till nearly nine o'clock, and we were not surprised to hear that there had been an accident. One of the horses slipped up sideways in the darkness at a bad

1930. LANDSBOROUGH RIVER.



place, and the point of one of the heads, which was tied on top of the pack, had pierced the poor beast's flank, making a deep and ugly wound.

The intention had been to pitch a tent for my wife and me, but it was so late and so cold that we gave it up. There was just room in the bunks for all the men, and we dossed down in the tiny living-room, in front of the fire.

It was very cold, but I slept soundly. Not so my wife, who very nobly kept the fire burning briskly all night.

In the morning, with one of the quick changes common in Westland, it was pouring rain, and we had a cold, wet journey back over the Haast to Makarora, getting in about five o'clock.

Mrs E.'s warm welcome soon made us forget our miseries, however.

XIV.

NEW ZEALAND, 1933.

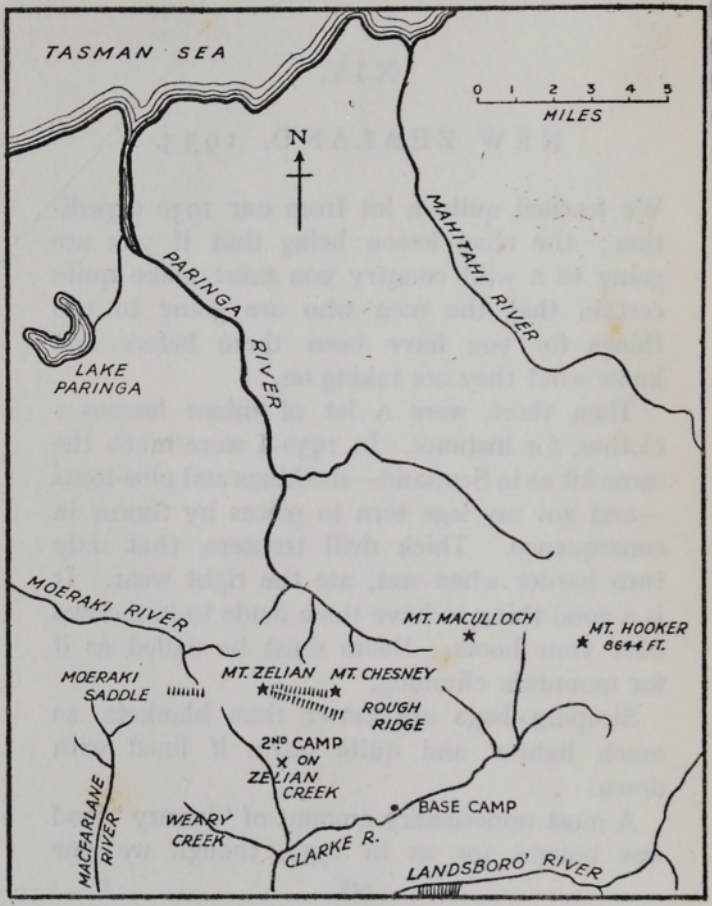
We learned quite a lot from our 1930 expedition; the chief lesson being that if you are going to a wild country you must make quite certain that the men who are going to run things for you have been there before and know what they are taking on.

Then there were a lot of minor lessons—clothes, for instance. In 1930 I wore much the same kit as in Scotland—stockings and plus-fours—and got my legs torn to pieces by thorns in consequence. Thick drill trousers, that only turn harder when wet, are the right wear. It is a good thing to have them made to lace down over your boots. Boots must be nailed as if for mountain climbing.

Sleeping-bags are better than blankets, so much lighter, and quite warm if lined with down.

A most unnecessary amount of 'luxury' food was bought for us in 1930, though we saw

1933. PARINGA BASIN.



little enough of it. One has astonishing health on a Westland expedition, and thrives on very simple fare. Dried fruit, oatmeal, flour, baking powder, jam, butter, sugar, tea, and candles; you want very little more, as you can kill all the meat you need. A good deal depends on the skill of your cook in making bread from a camp oven. It is a knack, to be acquired by experience, and not so easy as it looks.

We learned also that really first-class heads are very few and far between, and that getting one is largely a matter of luck. We were not dissatisfied with our moderately good ones, which were the result of much toil and trouble; but still yearned for that really great head, which we believed lurked somewhere in the Westland hills, waiting till we came again.

So we resolved to break one record, anyhow, and have a second try. We would be the first party of stalkers from Great Britain to have another go. The others have all departed saying they would come again; but so far as I know, not one has done so.

Of course we were extremely lucky with our weather in 1930; everyone told us that. Just how lucky we had been we did not find out till 1933, when the autumn was definitely a

wet one. I can understand anyone who had our 1933 experiences not caring to go again.

We landed at Wellington on the 20th February, and found a long letter from Con H., who was running things for us. He and the men and the stores were all held up at Makarora. The Makarora River was in flood, and they could not get over the Haast. He intended if possible to take us up to Zora Creek, where our advanced base camp would be, and to penetrate thence into the Mahi-Tahi valley, towards the west. The Government deer-killers were up the Landsborough, and it was most unlikely we should find a good stag there.

I soon discovered that the Government slaughterers were at work not only up the Landsborough but in all the more accessible parts of Westland.

An agitation had been on foot for some years in the matter of the deer, and finally the Government were induced to take what, to the unprejudiced observer, can only appear to be a very expensive and foolish course.

I had made friends with several people in 1930 who had an altogether exaggerated idea as to the damage the deer were doing to the impenetrable Westland forests. To listen to

them you would have thought the ' bush ' was eaten out completely, and rather resembled a Kentish hopfield.

They said that the rainfall would be affected, and the country would suffer from denudation. Furthermore, someone had started a theory that Westland would form a sort of deer reservoir, the overflow from which would drift back into the Otago farms.

With regard to these varied arguments I can only say that in the Landsborough valley the ' bush ' was thick enough, almost everywhere, to stop an elephant. Here and there one met well-defined deer-tracks ; and I think certain shrubs, such as the castor-oil plant, which the deer are fond of, may have suffered in some places. But the general mass of beech forest was quite unaffected.

As to rainfall, South Westland is a very wet district—on the coast I believe the annual fall is about 200 inches—and it might be drier with great advantage to its very few human inhabitants. Anyhow we found no particular drought in 1933, and there is no evidence that the country is becoming drier.

As to denudation, that is a process which is always going on, and heavy rain is one of its

chief agents. I suppose that if the forests died, the bare hillsides would be scoured by wind and water, but the deer-haters really cannot have it both ways; if all the forests died, and as a result there was less rain, there would obviously be less denudation. The beech timber has little or no commercial value in any case.

As to the 'reservoir' theory, I have only this to say. The west wind blows for about 360 days out of the 365, and it is this west wind which has brought the deer from Otago to South Westland, and will finally take them to the Tasman Sea. A few may be there already. If they can, deer always feed, and walk, up-wind.

Hitherto the pioneers of the herd have gradually edged farther and farther westward, and have never turned back. What will happen when the whole country right up to the sea is full, I cannot say. But I doubt if even then there would be any considerable drift down-wind.

No, the policy of indiscriminate slaughter is a foolish one, and is the result of a mass of very ill-informed agitation by people who will not take the trouble to make themselves acquainted with the facts.

In past years the rangers of the Westland Acclimatisation Society did a lot of useful work

in killing bad hinds and stags with poor heads —proper ' culling.' They were men of experience who knew what should be killed and what should be spared. Perhaps there were not enough of them—but more could have been trained by men like Con.

Now these experts have been turned off, and in their place is a very different sort of man, with a limitless amount of ammunition and instructions to kill everything at sight.

As far as stalking goes, most of Westland is spoiled, at any rate, for some years to come.

Yet stalkers from overseas must have brought quite a lot of money into New Zealand, from first to last, and one would think the sensible thing to do would be to encourage the devotees of this magnificent sport.

However, regrets are in vain, and I am glad I went up the Landsborough before the killers descended upon it.

At Makarora it rained and it rained. Con did not get away till the 1st March, and when we arrived at Pembroke on the 2nd we found a letter from him saying that he had been obliged to alter all his plans, as there was no time now for the long trek up to Zora Creek. He was going to take us up the Clarke River

instead, and thence into the hills towards the sea.

This time we motored to Makarora, as the road by Lake Wanaka was open—more or less —it is much subject to falls of earth and rock. On the 5th of March we—that is my wife, my daughter, and myself—rode to the Burke Hut under the charge of Jack D., who that season was running Mrs E.'s pack-horses. My daughter, whom I will call M., was a new recruit, it will be noted.

The next day we reached our base camp on the Clarke River—a much easier place to get at than Harper's Bluff—and were made ever so welcome by Con and his men. He had his three brothers-in-law with him—Harold as cook, Arnold and Edgar as porters—and also a stalwart young rugby footballer, Leslie, a friend of Con's, who had been allowed to join the party as an extra hand without pay. He did his full share of the work.

The sandflies also rejoiced to see us, and got busy immediately. Our camp on the Clarke was as bad in this respect as the top camp on the Landsborough. Otherwise it was charming, and the Clarke water is clear and wholesome.

We stayed there till our next camp up in

Con in Marching Order.

the hills to the west had been made ready, and on the 11th of March we started at daybreak. The men had heavy loads, and it was nearly mid-day before we got out of the bush.

We boiled a 'billy' and had lunch where the trees ended. On our left, as we sat looking back over the Clarke valley, the snowy twin peaks of Hooker and Maculloch—virgin mountains also, like Dechen and Strachan—rose up magnificently. In front of us, across the lower range of hills which extends to the south from Dechen and Strachan, we could see part of the Landsborough valley, including the hills behind Mackenzie's, and my old friend the Brodrick Pass.

We toiled up the steep, grassy slopes and presently found ourselves walking under a stony face—Rough Ridge it is called—and looking down upon a new valley.

Into this we descended, over some rough going, and got to our camp on Zelian Creek by four o'clock.

This camp had one great advantage—it was too high up for all but the hardiest sandflies. Otherwise I did not like it much. The valley under Rough Ridge is very deep and narrow, so the sun arrives late and departs early. Also

our tents were pitched on a rushy bit of ground which obviously would become waterlogged if it rained. There was no help for that, however, as it was the only level bit of ground where the bush gave some shelter from the wind. The camp was about 3000 feet above sea-level.

Zelian Creek runs into the Clarke, but there is no way down it. That road has been tried, but is barred by precipices. The way we came is the only practicable route.

The next day, the 12th, was fine. Con, M., and I made a very early start, walked up the valley for a couple of miles through rocks and low scrub, then turned right-handed and tackled the side of the saddle which joins Rough Ridge and Mount Zelian.

It is a steep place, and there must be fifteen hundred feet of it. Con and M. ran up as if it was flat, but my bellows wanted mending by the time I reached the saddle.

From the saddle you look into the great basin which collects the waters of the Paringa River, to be spilt into the Tasman Sea and returned in mist and cloud.

It is as wild a bit of country as can be imagined, and you can count on five fingers the people who have looked into it from above.

The saddle is very narrow, though not difficult. In places you can almost swing a leg on either side, and it is no place at all for anyone with a dizzy head.

We walked along it for some way, then turned left-handed along the seaward face in a northerly direction, and presently sat down to spy.

There were two or three stags in sight. One, a big heavy fellow, was slowly climbing up the north-western face of Rough Ridge, half a mile away. We rather liked the look of him, but he disappeared from sight without stopping. However, there was another one farther to the north, nearer Mount Chesney, into which Rough Ridge runs. He seemed to be worth a shot, too, so we walked along the side of the Ridge, on a steep slope, very slippery because it was so overgrown with a broad-bladed sort of coarse grass called snow-grass. On this stuff one's boot-nails got little grip ; and as, emphatically, it would not have done to slip, our progress was slow. Afterwards I cut myself a long pole, which was a great help on this unpleasant surface.

After a while we got to some rocks again, and two little ' staggies ' began barking at us.

This was annoying, as the big stag, though out of sight, was not far off.

We sat down to have a careful spy, and as we did so the big fellow appeared, a good bit above us, no doubt wondering what the two small beasts were making such a fuss about.

Wanting M. to get a shot, I sent her off with Con to climb the ridge and try him, while I lay and basked in the sun. We had by now come far enough to the north to open up nearly the whole of the Paringa valley. I could see the winding river through most of its length, and in the far distance the sea, twenty miles away.

Con and M. climbed back to the top of the Ridge, and I lost sight of them. I kept an eye on the stag all the time; he stood looking down at the 'staggies,' who continued to bark at intervals but did not move away.

It took the stalkers perhaps half an hour to get within shot. M. was just going to open fire when the stag moved, and seemed to be making off, so Con uttered an imitation roar (he was very good at it) which pulled the stag up short.

I saw the stag stop, and then crumple up, before I heard the crack of the rifle.

It was a very good shot, but most unluckily

he did not lie absolutely motionless when he fell. He gave an expiring kick or two, and before Con could reach him had started rolling down the hill. Down, down he went, in a smother of stones, and when we eventually got to him, several hundred feet lower down, his head, a good one, was all smashed to bits. Bad luck on a young stalker.

After that we turned back and had a look at the slopes of Mount Zelian, but could not find a good stag, and went back to camp.

The next day the mist, the great curse of the Westland seaboard, was down on the Paringa saddle, and nothing could be done.

On the 14th M. shot a fat stag in the valley for the sake of his lard, which we wanted for cooking and for dressing the tent-flies. The clouds were still on the hilltops.

The following day we walked up to the head of the valley, a matter of three or four miles, and climbed the saddle to the south of Zelian mountain. This is not so steep or so high as the Paringa saddle, and from it you look down into a corner of the upper basin of the Moeraki, another river which runs into the Tasman Sea. But no good stag could we discover.

For the next two or three days we worked

very hard, but in vain. On the 20th, however, M. got a nice stag, a fourteen pointer, within two miles of camp. He had the thickest, roughest horn of any head I have ever seen—a shade under seven inches of beam—and if only his tops had been as good as his lower points he would have been a winner. The length, 42 inches, is respectable.

Our intention now was to make an advanced camp somewhere in the Paringa basin, and we were to have started next day, on the 21st. But it rained heavily all night, and at dawn a fierce gale sprang up, which threatened to lay our tents flat.

Perhaps I should say that on the afternoon of the 20th there had been a rather violent earthquake shock, the noise of which seemed to pass under us from east to west. Con remarked at supper that night that earthquakes sometimes meant bad weather.

Anyhow this one did, and for the next five days we had a miserable time. My diary reads :—

21st. Rain and heavy gale all day. Fly over Harold's fire-place blown away and no fire. Thought our tents would go.

Con, with M.'s head, L., and M.

22nd. Rain, hail, and snow all day. Fire out again. Very cold. Thunderstorm in morning.

23rd. Rain heavy as ever, but warmer. Fire going in galley once more.

24th. Fierce gale again in early morning. Dressed before daylight and shouted to H. and M. to dress, as thought tents would go. Torrents of rain all day, cold.

25th. Heavy rain all day, warmer. Harold's eyes very bad.

Harold was the cook, and his efforts to make green wood burn in heavy rain, with a small river running all round his fire-place, resulted in inflamed and swollen eyelids. On the 25th he could see nothing, and Edgar took over his job.

It really was a pretty rotten time. No tent, however excellent—and ours were very good—will keep out rain of that description entirely.

The ground became a swamp, and water stood in all the tents. On two days there was nothing hot to drink except what we could boil with Meta in a tiny tin; though that was much better than nothing.

Our men had no chance of keeping dry, as they had to cut wood, and scrape ditches to fend the water off. They were soaked pretty well all the time, as their tent had no fly and let in a good deal of water. But I never heard a grumble.

The odd thing was that no one seemed any the worse—except for Harold's eyes. There is some health-giving magic in the Westland air which nothing can quell. All the same, if our tents had blown away, as at one time seemed more than likely, we should have been in rather a hole, though I have no doubt that Con would have pulled us through somehow.

On the 26th things at last began to mend. "Rain less heavy, warm. Went up glen at one o'clock, but still too much rain for spying. Evening finer. Saw sun for five minutes."

The next morning we sent Harold down to the base camp with Arnold. His eyes were better, but we thought it as well to give him a rest for a day or two.

We now had to decide whether we should spend the rest of the stalking season where we were, more or less; the alternative being to go back over the Haast into Otago and put in our last fortnight up the Wilkin, a tributary

Camp in Zelian Gully, and the Paringa saddle.

of the Makarora River. The Wilkin valley has produced some notable heads in the past, and in 1933 it had been kept quiet for some time, as it was hoped that the Governor-General and Lady Bledisloe would be able to stalk it. That had proved impossible, to everyone's disappointment; and the reversion of the valley had fallen to us.

After much debate we decided to go back to the Wilkin, and to start on the 29th. I think the thing which decided us was a chance remark of Con's that you get less rain in Otago than in Westland; we were rather weary of rain, undoubtedly. Also the prospect of another fortnight in the quagmire our camp had become was not very alluring.

This left us two more stalking days; but cut out all possibility of an advanced camp in the Paringa basin. We felt that in any case with the weather so unsettled an advanced camp over the saddle was a bit of a gamble.

On the 27th we tried the country over the Moeraki saddle, but the mist and rain bothered us, and although the bush below was full of roaring we saw nothing worth a shot.

The 28th was a good day. It was fine when we (Con, M., and I) left camp in the early

morning, but by the time we had climbed to the top of the Paringa saddle you could see clouds hanging about the lower reaches of the river, and Con said he was afraid we should get some mist by-and-by. We went along pretty quickly, over much the same ground, to begin with, as on the 12th, and had a long spy from the place where I had waited while Con and M. did their stalk—a sheltered little shelf in the mountain-side. There were several stags visible, but the one we liked best was a long way off, with some hinds, under the steep slopes of Mount Chesney. He seemed pretty good, and we decided to have a nearer look at him.

The snow-grass bothered us a little at first; then we came to some big slabs of rock, and a series of young precipices, too steep to clamber down. Con discovered a negotiable chimney, however, down which we slithered. Below this the ground was easier, and we travelled fast.

All the time the mist was creeping up from the sea, and the empty spaces beneath us had begun to swirl and bubble with fog, like a pot boiling.

I asked Con rather anxiously if he could find the way back in a thick mist. He considered

a moment, and said, "Yes, but it might take some time."

Before the clouds reached us we were able to have a good look at our stag, and decided he was worth a shot. But it soon became very doubtful if we were going to get one.

The advance guard of the mist slowly closed in upon us, and although we heard our stag, or a stag, roar once or twice, neither Con nor I were satisfied that he was still where we had last seen him. A glimpse we caught of one or two of his hinds, before visibility departed, made me think they were on the move and walking up the hill; if it was so the chance of a shot was remote.

We sat still for some time, listening. There was a roar—not far off. "They are coming our way," whispered Con, and we crawled to the top of the hillock behind which we had been sitting.

Vague forms appeared in front of us. Then suddenly the patch of fog blew away, and there were the hinds, the nearest not eighty yards away. They walked slowly across our front. Where was the stag? And was it our stag? A great beast—our stag right enough—came in sight when most of the hinds had disappeared;

but he showed no signs of stopping to feed. At the critical moment, however, Con emitted a bellow, and the stag stopped short, giving me an easy shot at about a hundred yards. If you roar at a stag in Scotland he will very often run away, but these New Zealand beasts are less suspicious, or more warlike.

His head was a heavy thirteen pointer; perfect lower tines, but only fair above. The length was perhaps half an inch more than M.'s Zelian Gully stag, and the outside span was 38 inches. Not perfection, by any means, but a great strong rough head, typical (to my eye) of the big, wild country in which he was bred.

The mist shut down again a minute later, and we agreed that he had been a very unlucky animal. While Con was removing head and headskin we boiled the billy and made a meal. By the time we were ready to move on again the mist had vanished once more from our neighbourhood, but there was a sea of it in the valleys below, and we debated what we should do. We were loath to turn back, as it was little more than eleven o'clock.

So we left our impedimenta in the hollow where we had eaten, and pushed on, over

fairly easy country, till we were right under Mount Chesney, at the extreme head of the Paringa basin.

We sat down and spied for an hour or more, seeing several stags, but none so good as the one I had shot. We decided that unless a really first-class head appeared we would not take the risk of a second stalk. A bivouac in the clouds, at that height, did not appeal to me much; though we had plenty of food, and no doubt a night out would not have hurt us.

While we waited Con showed me the spot below, near the edge of the bush, where he and Mr Forbes had seen a stag with a head which they both thought was the biggest they had ever set eyes on; and there are no better judges. He showed himself for about five minutes, then disappeared into the trees, and they never saw him again.

As no prodigy appeared to us we retraced our steps; Con picked up the head and we made our way home. The drifting patches of mist slowed us down a bit, and we did not reach camp till a little before dark, though under Con's leadership we were never in danger of losing our way. Incidentally, this head is the first to be taken out of the Paringa basin.

The next morning was dull and heavy looking, with a falling glass, so we decided not to tarry longer in Zelian glen, but to go down at once to our base camp and the sandflies. When we were fairly over the main divide we heard a brisk fusilade in the distance, south of Weary Creek. There must have been forty or fifty shots in half an hour.

The *modus operandi* of the killers is to start firing at very long range, and if possible gradually to drive a bunch of frightened deer into a cul-de-sac, or a snow-field. Then they go on shooting till their cartridges are all gone, or the deer—stags, hinds, calves, everything—are all dead. A few escape, wounded and unwounded, but the men know their job, and are, I believe, extremely efficient. They lead the hardest of lives, and one can sympathise with them; but not with the policy which sends them out to make such a wanton killing in that wild and lovely country.

On the 31st, Jack D. and his pack-horses turned up at our camp on the Clarke, and we assembled at the Burke Hut in the evening. It poured rain all night, and was still raining hard early next morning when Con and our three selves got on our hacks and started off before the pack-horses.

We did not get very far, for the moving hillside which I have mentioned had slipped a bit more, and the track was obliterated by two or three huge boulders.

So we returned to the hut, and a little later Jack D. and a roadman went off with some dynamite to see if they could remove the obstruction. At mid-day they returned and told us that our hacks could get by now, but not laden pack-horses.

We went off again—it was still raining—and after leading our animals through the broken boulders hurried away from that slide as fast as we could. It is definitely a danger spot in heavy rain.

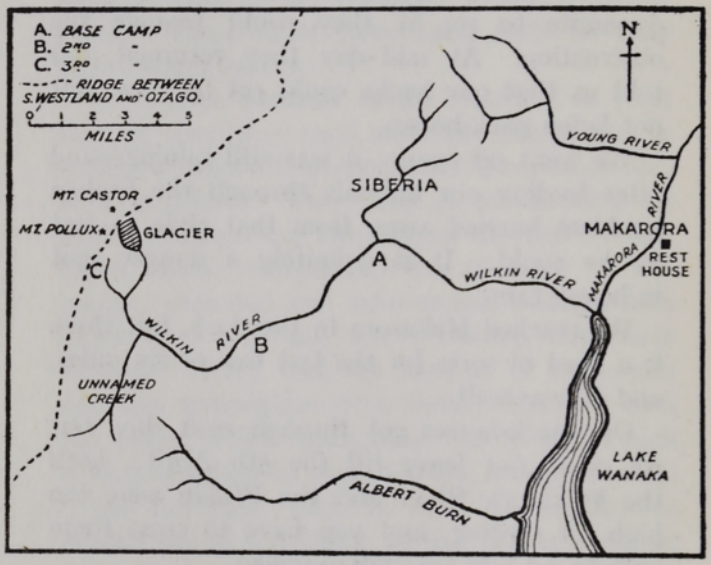
We reached Makarora in the dark, but there is a road of sorts for the last five or six miles, and all was well.

Our pack-horses got through next day, but we could not leave till the 5th April; both the Makarora River and the Wilkin were too high for fording, and you have to cross them both to get into the Wilkin valley

Some years ago it was possible to ride to the head of this valley. There are big grassy flats there on which bullocks used to fatten, and the riders of the Wilkin cattle-station visited them

for a periodical round-up. But now the whole place is derelict; the upper part of the track has become impassable for horses; rabbits swarm incredibly, and the steers on the flats

1933. WILKIN RIVER.



are running wild. The unfortunate station owner was very hard hit, I believe, when the bad times came, and everything has been let down.

We camped twice on the way, saying good-bye to the pack-horses at the first camp.

Our top camp was some distance above the big bullock flat, under the snows of Mount Pollux. It was a perfectly lovely place for a camp, with few sandflies and good water—the only objection being that we could see no signs of deer.

We had picked up our old friend George H. at Makarora, as he knew the Wilkin valley and Con did not; it was good to have him with us again, and gave M. and me a stalker apiece.

George said the valley had been very much overstocked with cattle, which had driven the deer off the flats. He thought we should find some farther on, beyond the Pollux glacier. Pollux is a double-headed snow mountain, and is marked in the map as Castor and Pollux. It has a most remarkable glacier, with a gap of about fifteen hundred feet of sheer precipice in the middle. All day and all night the ice keeps falling from the top to the lower half in a succession of perpetual avalanches. The lower end thrusts out a dirty, moraine-covered tongue, more than a mile long, into the valley.

The familiar drumming of heavy rain on

canvas woke us on the morning of the 7th, and it did not seem as if Otago was much drier than Westland. We were careful to point this out to Con.

In spite of the rain, Arnold, Edgar, and Leslie went off down to our first camp, as we should need more stores than we had brought with us the day before. They got down safely, but had much trouble with flooded creeks. Our tents, kit, sleeping-bags and so forth, made a pretty load by themselves for five men, and we were rather short of food.

The next two days were very wet, and all the small creeks came down in spate, but in the afternoon of the 9th George borrowed my rifle and crossed the nearest one. He banged his leg badly in doing so, but managed to kill a small stag for the pot, half a mile from camp.

On the 10th it was fine, and we all crossed the creek. Some fairly thick bush had to be overcome; but in about an hour's time we emerged on to a big expanse of open country below the glacier.

There was a good stag down by the river, and we sat down to watch M. and Con stalk him. This they did successfully, and she killed a nice fourteen pointer, 43 inches by 41 inches.

Two of the tines were broken, however, and we noticed that a lot of the Wilkin stags had damaged heads. Either they are very pugnacious or have brittle horns. Their heads are well shaped and measure well, but the horn is not so rough and heavy as that of the Westland stags.

After a 'boil,' M., George, and I went on up the valley, leaving my wife and Con to attend to the head and headskin.

We saw several promising stags on some high ground opposite Pollux and beyond the lower glacier, but it was too late to go after them that day. Retracing our steps in the afternoon we spied a big stag near the river, not far from where M. had killed hers in the morning. "A Royal, and a good one," was George's verdict. We took cover under the river bank, and the stag saved us a lot of trouble by walking up-stream towards us.

He was on the opposite, or left bank, and I found (when he came within shot) that from where we were squatting I could not see him at all. So I had to stand up to fire, and missed him clean.

He ran off, and I dashed into the water and up the bank the other side, hoping to get

another shot. There was some thick scrub the best part of two hundred yards away, and he stopped for a moment to have a look back before he disappeared into it. He stood just long enough for me to shoot, and I got him.

In some ways it is the best head I have. The measurements are almost identical with those of M.'s stag of the same day—43½ inches by 40 inches—but the horn is a little heavier. The shape is very good, and all the points are well formed and symmetrical. Actually he is a thirteen pointer, having a small extra point (which he would be better without) on one top.

Next morning, the 11th, it was still fine, and we divided forces. M. and Con wanted to try to get on to the ridge to the south of Pollux, and look into the valley of the Waiatoto, over the divide. There was an unnamed creek running down an unknown gully which promised to hold deer, and appeared from below to offer a means of approach to the ridge. So off they went with one rifle, and George and I left camp soon after with the other.

We intended to cross the Pollux glacier and have another look at the country beyond.

It was an interesting day. We wandered about on the glacier for some time, and I killed

a nice fourteen pointer some way up the steep hillside opposite Pollux. This head is 43 inches long, with 39 inches span, and was the last one we got.

M. and Con had a very hard climb, saw a few deer but no good stag, satisfied themselves that no deer or humans could possibly get over the divide by that route, were bothered by mist, and came home. The last five hundred feet is absolutely sheer, and, from what they said, quite unclimbable.

We talked things over round the fire after supper, and decided to go down to the base camp next day. The glass was falling, and the sunset looked angry. We had explored nearly all our ground, and it was very unlikely we should see anything better than the heads we had already got.

So next day, the 12th, we made a long march in dull weather, cutting out the second camp, and got back to our first camp before dark. There was not much rain that day, but it rained all the 13th, in torrents, and if we had not come down on the 12th we should have been stuck in our Pollux camp, for the creeks would have been too ' fresh ' to cross.

It looked as if we should have to wait for

three days till our pack-horses came to get us out. They were not due till the 17th—Easter Monday.

However, on the 14th three local deer-stalkers turned up in camp from across the river, with two horses. They had been up in 'Siberia,' a subsidiary glen running north, opposite our base camp. They had had no luck, were short of food, tired of the rain, and were clearing out.

They readily agreed to give my wife and M. a lift over the fords, which George and Con thought were practicable, but not much more, for men on foot.

We gave our friends a meal, and started off at one o'clock, leaving Arnold and his brothers in charge of everything till the pack-horses came.

It began to rain heavily as we left camp, and we made as much haste as possible, for we had to cross the Wilkin eight miles lower down, and the Makarora River after that.

We had quite an exciting race against rising water, and just won. Our new friends took up the ladies on the saddle behind them, and got over well enough, but I can answer for it that it was deep fording for the footmen. The Wilkin was the deepest, but the Makarora River the broadest.

Tea at Mrs E.'s was the best part of the day.

I am often asked if we are going to have a third try, and I find it very hard to give an answer. The valleys within easy reach of Pembroke and Makarora, such as the Matukituki, the Albert Burn, the Wilkin, the Young River, or the Hunter all afford pretty stalking and a chance of a 40 inch by 40 inch head. But they are all stalked quite regularly, and there is no guarantee, as a general rule (the Wilkin in 1933 was exceptional), that you will not be interfered with a good deal by other parties. Nor are the heads in the same class as the best Westland heads.

The Westland Acclimatisation Society 'Blocks' beyond the Haast have been devastated by the Government killers. But of course not all the big stags have been assassinated. There is so much thick bush that no doubt some have survived. At the same time the chance of meeting one must have diminished considerably. The noise of the killers' rifles, and their constant presence in the Clarke and Landsborough valleys, and others, will certainly make the deer more shy and less inclined to leave the shelter of the trees.

If ever we go again it will be to the wild, almost unknown country within twenty-five miles of the sea, on the extreme west coast. It is too big, too remote for the killers, and there alone, now, is a chance of the record head—the sort of head that Con and Mr Forbes saw that day in the Paringa basin, in 1932. But it is rather an awe-inspiring country.

The Mahi-tahi, the Paringa, the Moeraki—I think one's choice would lie between those three rivers. Half one's time would be spent in cursing the mist, and most of the other half in glooming at the rain. We should try to get a very rough log-hut built instead of a base camp. It would be such an inestimable boon if one had a week of rain, such as we had in Zelian glen. And we should cut out the Haast Pass, fly to Okuru, where there is a landing-ground, and work inland from the sea.

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