

IN HIGHLAND QUARTERS.

BY the end of August most sportsmen have taken their moors and made preparations for the autumn campaign, the gaities of Goodwood holding them for a week longer, while some who like a little sailing may hang over another to enjoy the yachting attractions of the Solent. It is not, however, such a far cry to Loch Awe now as it used to be; and one can quite well have all the comforts of Piccadilly, as Bailie Nicol Jarvie would have said, had he been domiciled in that happy region, instead of his own loved Sautmarket, and hear the cock crow in the pass of Aberfoyle next morning, thanks to the invention of the once despised steampot. "The old styles and the new" of travelling have been made the subject of more than one picture; and somehow the sportsman, when he turns from the neat team with its roast-beef-complexioned old driver, waiting for the reins from the smart strapper of the halfway house, wishes that Geordie Stephenson's "Coo," which is so often mentioned in railway anecdotes, had been a little more awkward for the train than as events proved it to be awkward for the "Coo." There is not much pleasure to be got out of a railway journey now more than a semi-sound sleep, if that expression be admissible, a sawdust sandwich, the wing of a wire-pinioned chicken to carve which requires the half of the allotted five minutes allowed for refreshments, or a plate of thrice-boiled soup, something like the "cauld kail het again" which the average Scotch sermon is said to resemble. It is, however, satisfactory to know at times that your journey will be a short one, and that, sharp to a minute, you will be landed, if your lodge is not a remote one, and you have been travelling fast, in time for breakfast and a few brace on the opening forenoon. In the olden days the northern starts from Hatchett's and other coach resorts were always very interesting, and it is needless to state that all along the road there were numerous little incidents and adventures which afforded changes of conversation at the close of the day's sport quite away from the pursuits of the field, the stories about which sometimes get painfully slow and wearisome, more especially

when one feels leg-weary with walking, and has eyes "double reefed" with the effects of the strong mountain—air, ahem! I had almost written dew. Since those days the landscape has been greatly changed by modern systems of agriculture, and the landmarks of a bygone age have disappeared even to the very "pike," the last to be rubbed out. The halfway houses are no longer the snug, cheery places they were; the landlord is no longer the burly Boniface who hearkened at the door for the coach horn; the barmaid no longer the cheery-faced girl the coachman chucked under the chin; all these have gone, and even the stables by the lonely roadsides, which held anxious tits which neighed in their stalls as they heard the winding notes come on in advance of the autumn breeze, are roofless and deserted, or have been turned into outhouses for cows. A well-planned drive north now to one's moor would form a most pleasant excursion, more especially if in the company of some veteran who recollected the good old times before railways became general, and could point out the old places where coaches came to grief, the inns at which halts were made, and the many changes which have taken place during the past forty years. We see little of the scenery now from the railway carriage windows, for no man can properly appreciate scenery hurriedly, and without its own music—the notes of wild birds, the hum of the bee or even the chirping of the hedge-mouse. In the days of old there was time for one to feast his eyes at leisure on the lovely views that every turn revealed, while the guard raised echoes in the wooded glens from bank to bank; and, if there was a little discomfort at times from boisterous weather, it was always cheerily borne. In fact, most men have happy reminiscences of the time when, like Tony Lumpkin, a man was appreciated who could wind the straight horn—the good old times—

THE COACHING DAYS.

You have the whistle's startling scream,
We had the guard's sweet winding horn,
 The lake, the lone meandering stream,
 The waving hay, the yellow corn.
Your iron horse may snorting hiss—
We had the gallant horse that neighs;
 Ah! gone are now those hours of bliss—
 The olden times, the Coaching Days.



St. Handell

The golden times of Coaching Days.

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'Twas then unto the freshening breeze
The hawthorn sweet its scent did yield
As on we sped, 'neath waving trees,
Past meadow green or golden field.
For us the reaper raised a cheer,
For us the wild birds tuned their lays.
Ah! Gone are now those pleasures dear
Of olden times—the Coaching Days.

Does woodbine still the roads twine o'er,
As oft it twined in Yorkshire dells?
Do heath-bells bloom as oft of yore
They bloomed full bright on Scottish fells?
Ah! Many a flower we gathered there
For loving smile or eyes' bright rays.
Now gone the hours, the flowers, the fair,
The golden times of Coaching Days.

But love in haste, it soon grows cold;
'Tis not from speed we gather joy.
Who travels fast will soon grow old,
E'en though in years he be a boy.
So let us sing of grey, and roan,
The chesnuts, blacks, the browns, and bays,
The good old horses that have gone,
The olden times, the Coaching Days.

But we might as well yearn for the Greta Green blacksmith, a willing heiress, and a well-horsed post chaise, as for the coaching days of old. Still, the good school who left London with their Joe Mantons snug in their cases must be getting as thin of numbers as Waterloo veterans; and a little gossip to wake up old reminiscences like what has been written may not be out of place. Euston, St. Pancras, and Farringdon-street will see the same old familiar faces running hastily to and fro superintending the packing of gun-cases, portmanteaus, ammunition-boxes, and the thousand other things which a sportsman now considers it essential to take to the Highlands. Had he lived in the days of stage coaches, he would have had to have been content with much less than he has now; but then the "boot" had not the accommodation which has the modern passenger parcel van; and it was not everyone who could afford to post the whole way

north. It is not necessary to state that all articles of luggage should be carefully labelled, and the labels should be affixed so that they cannot be rubbed off or effaced. Zinc labels for railway travelling are much superior to those of paper, and are readily procurable and cheap. All those who have taken a lease of their moors for more than one season should have a number of such stamped with station, address, and full particulars. Everyone has heard of the Scotch porter who was in a dilemma with the brace of setters which had eaten off their addresses, and determined to send one down the line and the other up, while the gun-cases, of which he had two, he sent on to the station halfway between. If luggage is not properly labelled, depend upon it it will be bundled out at some wayside station, and the sportsman may find himself—as a friend of mine once did—with a 16 bore on the morning of the Twelfth and not a cartridge to fit; every other man being a patron of the universal “12.” For the better accommodation of dogs going long journeys, the north-running railway companies might arrange for a hunting van or two running north on certain days and so fitted that someone could travel along with them; the whole of them, of course, being carefully benched and secured. Of course a great many of the dogs have remained at the lodges all the season, but the number that is each year taken north in the first and second weeks of August is very large, while the accommodation provided for them is very scant indeed.

When in Highland quarters, the sportsman, if he be a man who is not above communing with his gamekeeper (and who should be?—indeed I have heard a sportsman who has killed many stags assert that a gamekeeper should live till he was three score and ten, and begin again and make it seven) he will find out much that will interest him. The day the laird goes out to have a look at the birds is of course the day that the birds always appear most abundant, for the laird has a good memory behind an eye which sees far more than double, and that without the adventitious aid of Long John, Campbeltown, or Glenlivet. The back wall of the keeper's lodge is always worthy of inspection, as there will be found the vermin caught on the land. The little sparrow-hawk that bothers Mother Grouse is there, and so, too, there will be found the falcon, though the latter is very rare. On Lochlomond side I once shot, at the close of a day's

shooting, a large Norwegian or hairy-legged buzzard, I remember, which rose high up in the dusk, and on which, walking along in a pensive mood, I pulled the right-trigger on an empty shell, having not thought it worth while reloading, being so near home when I fired, as I thought, my last shot. On an appeal to the left-barrel I brought him to my feet, as fine a specimen of that rare bird as ever was seen, and the first that had been known in the neighbourhood for fifty years.

The sea gull, the bird of the seaside school of poets, will also be found occasionally, for he is a regular Viking when inland, and many and many a nest he will harry and suck the eggs. Traps with a bit of bait are, therefore, frequently set in little rain-pools in the moor, where he is snapped by the beak and drowned in his own element. Since gull-feeding has become an amusement of deck passengers on the Caledonian Canal, gamekeepers on either side have become much troubled with them in the hatching season, and have little to say that is poetical in favour of the poet's angel of the beach. The hoodie crow is the bird of the keeper's hatred—indeed, he is the bill broker of the moors, a thorough blackguard, in whose favour neither shepherd nor keeper can say a word. "Whenever one is in range, pull on her as quick as you can," is the opinion of everybody, no matter on perch, on wing, or in nest. She is fond, of course, of carrion, but sometimes she takes a taste for something fresh, and a young rabbit or a young grouse just seems to suit her appetite. The best friend of the grouse is the shepherd, and he should always be treated with great civility. Make an enemy of the shepherd, and if you can afford to wait a season you will see, or, rather, not see, the result. The man who means to take a moor should study all these things if he wishes to become a true Highland Sportsman.

Arrived at some lonely little wayside railway station, a long drive may be before the sportsman ere he reaches his lodge, but with bracing air and lively mountain scenery, he will not find it unpleasant; while the driver may be able to tell him "who shoots over Sligachan," or about "the strange gentleman who is to be next neighbour at Glentarn, and who arrived yesterday with his leddies." If a stranger himself who has taken a moor in that neighbourhood for the first time, he may depend upon it that he will be keenly scanned by keepers, gillies, shepherds,

and everybody ; and it will not be until he has been a day on the hill that he will have created a favourable or an unfavourable impression. He will have many questions to ask, no doubt, and will feel anxious if he is a day ahead of the legal opening, to know what sport he is likely to have, if there are many cheepers, and so on, or if birds are strong on the wing. Concerning the olden times, it may be interesting to some to know that by an Act passed in the year 1707, grouse or muir fowl were granted a close time from 1st March to the 20th of June, literally their nesting and hatching seasons. This limited period was subsequently enlarged by an Act of George III., and the present closing and opening dates fixed respectively at 10th December and 12th of August, black game getting an extra eight days, viz., till 20th August ; the present statutory days for partridge and pheasant shooting being fixed by the same Act. As grouse will be plentiful in Leadenhall Market on the morning of the opening day, it may be well to mark the fact that each of the Railway Companies which is found carrying such game is liable to be fined £5 for every bird so carried before 12 o'clock on the night of the 11th, under the same Act. The Post Office is now the great medium for grouse delivery to private friends, and several boxes have been made, strong enough to stand, while light enough to come within the rules. Unless the birds have their feathers carefully dried and cleaned of all clotted blood, it is difficult to see how they can be so carried without tainting, to a certain extent, other parcels less perishable with a "gamey" smell, which may be all very well in the larder but must be objectionable as regards many things which will be sent by parcel post. The postman may no doubt accept them as free from taint at Inverness or Kingussie, but when they come to the delivery van in London they may be less pleasant to the nose. Indeed, it would be well for the postal authorities to insert the same recommendation in the instructions to the postal receiver, that game, being liable to taint other articles, should be enclosed in a separate postal bag. If birds, not very severely shot, have all their feathers dried, the blood removed, and some nice dry heather placed round them, they will not prove so objectionable. The morning of the 13th will be, therefore, a sort of morning after Boxing Day to all those who have friends going north, and for a week following grouse will come tumbling in from all corners

of the Highlands, which, but a few days before, had crowed on their native heathery hills, while the first streaks of sunlight began to show over the mountain-tops.