

THE KING'S BIRTHDAY IN EDINBURGH A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

OF all holidays dear to the civic heart there was, once on a day, none to match in the ancient capital the festival of the King's Birthday. We are, I trust, none the less a loyal people, and we have probably as great a capacity for the enjoyment of holidays, but we are less demonstrative in the expression of our loyalty, and our holiday delight, than were our buoyant forefathers of merry memory. Perhaps we know more, and think more; we certainly take our pleasure less hilariously. A pale cast has crept over the native hue. We are older and doucer. If we go through the ceremonial of joy which tradition has sanctioned, it is with something of the sadness, at least the seriousness, of a religious duty; it is often done perfunctorily; almost, indeed, mechanically. And now and again, as the swift years glide, we perceive with a sigh a part of the time-honoured ceremonial drop away; but we make no effort to retain it, or it falls without being perceived. The bundle of tradition gets less and less, and its original bulk is only known to him who returns to glean the travelled path.

The anniversary of the Royal birthday has been associated in the popular mind with summer weather

for now considerably more than a century. The month of its observance in the long reign of George III. was June; it was August in the times of George IV. and the latest William, and the city has now celebrated its fifty-seventh May holiday under Victoria. It is unnecessary to describe the present method of keeping the holiday in Edinburgh. The professions of law and arms, following Court guidance, did their rejoicing on Wednesday, each in its own characteristic way; the former ceased from wrangling and sank into silence, while the latter thundered and volleyed its ecstasy over the town. On Thursday, Church and Education took their pastime, in processions through the streets and excursions to the country; while Trade scarcely half shut its shop, and Labour toiled on, with only a casual and regardless glance at its festive brethren. There was a display of the military, and in the evening of rockets and such other fiery manifestations of juvenile mirth as squibs and bonfires. An uproarious excursionist or two, raucous, and redolent of rural inns, disturbed the street at midnight. Then came peace, emphasised by the patrolling boot. The Queen had entered upon another year of her long reign.

A hundred years ago the holiday was observed with more unanimity and heartiness. George the Third was King, and had already reigned for thirty-four years. The festival was held on the 4th day of June. It was called, indeed, "The Fourth of June" as often as it was called "The King's Birthday." This was owing partly to the long reign and partly to the holiday being regularly and rigidly kept on the right birthday. The fun, with

its concomitant noise and bustle in the streets of Old Edinburgh, seems to have been extreme. It was a hurly-burly past describing; one had to see it to know it. Fergusson, the city laureate, referring to the year 1770 or '71, doubted if even in London there was such a display of joyously reckless loyalty as animated the soul and body of Auld Reekie on the King's Birthday. He quite approved of it in the main, and spoke of it with pride. He was

“ Fain to think the joy the same
In Lunnon toon as here at hame.”

The universally-recognised method of holiday-making in the ancient capital then included, as an essential element thereof, copious and consecutive drams. It was an article of the city creed that drinking and tipping were the “stoops” of enjoyment. How could people rejoice without the countenance of Bacchus? the native Bacchus—not the wine god; Bacchus in tartan! How could they sing without “whiskey to scour their hawses?” Young and old, rags and rank, blind and cripple, began the festival and kept it up with strong drink. And there was no liquor question; even the clergy were sound on the subject, or regarded it as secular and beyond the pulpit pale.

The Auld Kirk shook its bells. St Giles, the tutelary saint of the city—that is, the old town (the new town disowned his guardian care—no wonder he scowls on Princes Street *), piped to the dancing of his “royd” but faithful bairns by “screeding them

* It was at first proposed to name Princes Street St Giles' Street.

aff a loyal tune." The old Castle on the rock by and by added its encouragement to the general rejoicing. The national flag was run up; the regulation salute broke, in smoke and thunder, from the battery; and, as if managed by clockwork, out came "the sodger blades and cocked their musket." There was universal regret that Mons Meg could not join her note to the general joy. How she would have astonished the country herds of Fife and the nowte on the distant Ochils! Alas! she had cracked her voice a century before, doing honour to a Duke of York.

Whisky, and the Castle guns, and St Giles and his (new) peal of bells are still with us, and are still—though with diminished effect—acceptable auxiliaries in the celebration of a Royal Birthday in Edinburgh. But one notable feature in the ceremonial of the olden time has vanished for ever. The Commissioner's Walk—with all courtesy, the gathering of the sable Assembly—with all reverence be it spoken! do not make amends for the want of it! We have the red coats and the black coats, but where are the Blue Gowns? Alack! mendicancy is a crime; even the aristocracy of the order, as Sir Walter phrased it, the king's bedesmen, the chartered and privileged beggars, the Edie Ochiltrees, have been overreached by that merciless measure of the Statute book, and are not. Their memory and their name are gone. Last century about this time they were not yet past their full glory on the King's Birthday. Let it be understood I speak of the year 1794. That year there were neither more nor less than thirty-four Blue Gowns or privileged gaberlunzies in Scotland. On the

morning of the 4th of June they were assembled with one more from different and even distant parts of braid Scotland—a picturesque throng of venerable but tattered forms—and then stood in front of Holyrood waiting for their livery of a new light blue gown, to which was attached a pewter badge, and their pension of fifty-six shillings Scots handed to each of them in a twalpenny leather purse by the King's officer, who figures in the older records of the Scottish Exchequer as the Royal "Eleemosynar." The institution of "the Blue-gown bodies" was a Scottish one, unknown to other countries. There was one for every year the Sovereign had reigned, and the pension (in addition to the yearly gift of a new cloak of "blew claith lined with harden") was a shilling Scots—that is, a penny sterling, for every year the King had lived. They were in return expected to pray for the King's health, and it was of course their interest to pray for a long reign, hence they were known as the King's *Bedesmen*. Robert Fergusson draws a graphic picture of their appearance in Edinburgh on the Fourth, just before they assumed the new livery provided for them. They were in the last extremity of ruined raggedness—

"Like scarecrows new taen down fra woodies."

However, a transformation was soon made. They flung off their clouted "duds," and got their pay, and then

"What magistrate mair prood is
On King's birthday?"

But they had other gear that day to gather. After the Royal bounty was received, they formed in

procession in the Palace yard and marched up Canongate and High Street—not unlike a certain other procession of greater pretensions—to the Tolbooth, and there, at the north wall, were presented by the Town Council with another service of leather purses and twalpennies. Thereafter they proceeded to the High Church, or Cathedral Church of St Giles, and were preached to, or at, by one of His Majesty's chaplains. Scott records that he had heard from one of the preachers that the Blue Gowns made a most inattentive audience. Their inattentiveness was doubtless the result of impatience, of both a particular and a general kind. In a general way they, as "gangrels," were impatient of restraint; and as they were probably "fasting from all but sin," they had a particular reason to be impatient of a long address on duties which they either knew or never meant to discharge. Immediately after the sermon they were led to a substantial meal, and having discussed it, they were free again to wander and squander over the length and breadth of the land, to scorn the supposed comforts of a settled life, and to "sorn" at the King's command on the industrious portion of the population.

A review of the City Guard, a kind of military police, which consisted of about a hundred invalided soldiers, mostly Tonalds and Tougals, which had been first instituted in times anterior to the Union, was an important part of the ceremonial of the King's Birthday in Old Edinburgh. A hundred years ago they were a savage and truculent gang of rascals, or blackguardly bandits, if poor Fergusson's testimony is

trustworthy, who did not scruple to spill the blood of the citizens they had been embodied and were maintained to cherish and protect. They were furnished with firelocks and formidable weapons known as Lochaber axes, with which they were licensed, apparently at their own discretion, to hack and stab. They were extremely unpopular, until latterly they became rather objects of good-humoured derision than downright hatred. There were constant collisions between them and the Edinburgh mobs. On all occasions that offered favourably, they were treated as fair game by the festive city youth. They were stoned, and pelted with mud by hostile rabbles on the King's Birthday—the more especially that on that day they were carefully shaven and powdered in honour of the King.

Then, as now, part of the citizens kept the Royal holiday by resorting to the fields, where "lambs were sporting on the gowany braes." As night fell, the town became disorderly and riotous. A raid was made upon wandering cats by lawless apprentices; an outlook was kept by the mobocratic youth for a stray buck or beau at whom they could launch their squibs, and fiery flying serpents, and unsavoury unmentionable missiles; there were street rows and fights, cracked crowns and broken noses; deep drinking, loud swearing, and "deeds of crime in darkness done." Next morning the Council Chaumer was crowded with the civic heroes and victims of a too tumultuous loyalty.

A SUMMER EXCURSION FROM EDINBURGH IN THE OLDEN TIME.

“Fareweel, bonnie Scotland! I’m awa to Fife.”—*Old Saying.*

THE citizen of Edinburgh in the last quarter of last century was still content to repeat his years in unbroken series within the extremely limited area of the Auld Toun. He never wandered. From year’s end to year’s end he was to be found at home, burrowing at the feet of St Giles. He lived among his business, strolled into a neighbouring tavern for his meridian at the summons of the dram-bell, and returned with little delay, but yet leisurely, to his shop or office, fortified till dinner-time. Dinner-time came early, and divided with only a moderate interval the hours of the business day. Indeed, the greater part of the professional or trading day was after that. The hour for tea, if the effeminacy was practised, was four o’clock. At eight o’clock the citizen was free—

“Auld St Giles at aucht o’clock
Garr’d merchant loons their shoppies lock.”

The next two hours were surrendered to sociality and recreation. If the weather was fine and the season permitted, the burgher daundered to Thamson’s Green, it might be, for a quiet game of bowls, or took

a turn or two in sober pursuit of the gowff ba' on Bruntsfield Common. If it was winter or wet weather, he dived incontinent into some profound hole of the High Street, and maintained in the benmost bore of the close, in some secret howff hallowed to all his senses by long use and wont, his reputation for conviviality and a sound constitution. If he was in the mood for hy-jinks, time during the dark hours was of no account—neither was liquor; he was prepared to spill them lavishly. If he was soberly inclined he sat till ten, interchanging song and seriousness over a bottle or two of Younger, a haddie lug, and a gill. At the tuck of the Guard-drum his rotundity toddled home, insensible of evening savours, and rolled into blankets and oblivion. Sleep cleared his drumlie pow on the downy cod, and next morning he began a new day, another yet the same, before his desk or behind his apron. This, the even tenor of his way, he varied on a Saturday or Sabbath afternoon by a short excursion to some place or other that had the attraction of a change-house, within easy run of the High Street—at least within view of the airy crown of St Giles. Perhaps he drank toddy or port—claret was no longer the favourite it had been—at Lawson's, on the shore of Leith, on the secular afternoon; on the holy day he cooled his stomach with a dish of mussel-brose at Newhaven, or with a prievin' o' fat pandores a little further east the coast. A more distant excursion, beyond the bounds of Mid-Lothian, was the event of the year; but a summer's jaunt of one solid day's duration to Fife became for the most part only a memory to him after middle age.

In a mock-heroic poem that has been strangely overlooked by the historian of social life in Old Edinburgh (Modern Edinburgh is not older than the century), Robert Fergusson has left us a vivid and particular relation of the manner in which the younger and more enterprising burgesses were wont to consume their summer holiday in an excursion to the "unhallowed"* shores of Fife. The day selected was almost certainly a Saturday, the month probably June or July—

"When nature's rokelay green
Is spread ower ilka rig o' corn
To charm our rovin' een ;"

and the weather, no doubt, had been on its good behaviour for at least a week. But let us follow in all its essential features the poet's description of *his* outing ; it may serve as a sample. He took this particular holiday on a Saturday near the longest day ; and 1771—he was then still a minor *in age*—may be ventured upon as the very year. The spring of that year wore a wintry aspect. Pentland's "tourin' taps" were "buried aneath great wreaths o' snaw ;" not one bold golfer was to be seen "driving his ba' frae whins or tee,"

"Nor doucer folk wysin' ajee
The bias boulds on Thamson's green."

So late as April the Braid Burn and the Water of Leith were "rushing with torrents of dissolving snow." But seasonable weather came in June after all, and

* Twin chronic animosities of Fergusson were Fife and the City Guard. Of Fife he writes—

"To Fife we steer—of all beneath the sun,
The most unhallowed 'mid the Scotian plains."

with it to the breasts of the younger "burgers" the annual longing for a voyage to the Strand of Fife. The few needful arrangements were made the night before at Danny Douglas's in the Anchor Close, or Johnny Dowie's in Liberton Wynd; there, probably in the Crown or the Coffin Room, the party of three or four congenial spirits, such as Jamie Rae, and Hamilton, and Woods, was organised, and the plan of the day's campaign drawn up at a sober symposium. Next day at an early hour—

"While morn, wi' bonny purplin' smiles,
Kisses the air-cock o' Saint Giles,"—

the adventurous party, after breaking their fast on beef, sallied forth from the still slumbering city, and made for the port o' Leith on shanksnaigie, by Provost Drummond's new bridge and the Walk. The bridge, built only two years before, spanned the burn and valley of the Nor' Loch, then haunted by ducks, both wild and tame, and gave a high and dry path to our party from the Tron to Mutrie's Hill—the brae-top from which now rises the dome of the Register House. The Walk, now an enclosed street and roaring channel of traffic, was then an exposed and lonely enough gravel path, some twenty feet broad, which, from being a military mound thrown up about a century and a quarter before, had become a pavement or promenade, beaten into shape and feature by the feet of citizens taking the evening air. Cromwell may be said to have been the ultimate cause of this mound, for it was cast up by the Covenanting commander, Davy Leslie, to keep him out of Edinburgh. It was in its turn the

raison d'être of the North Bridge. Previous to the making of the North Bridge, intercourse with Leith had mainly been by Canongate and the Easter Road, the Walk, as the name implies, being strictly devoted to pedestrians. But after 1769 vehicular traffic and the hoofs of horses invaded the Walk, and, in a decade or two, spoiled its amenities to the daundering Burgess. The wheels of carts and carriages cut it, and it fell into such disrepair that its usefulness, which was now revealed, could not be maintained without great expense to the community.

Along the Walk, with green fields on each side of them, and a summer day stretching invitingly before them, our party hastened to the Kirkgate, and at last made the shore of Leith in time for the early boat. But there was no time for a refreshing "synd" of any species of nappy liquor at any of the numerous taverns that lined the water. For as soon as they appeared in view, their ears were assailed by a raucous voice at the gangway that roared peremptorily, "All aboard for Kinghorn! Straight aboard for Kinghorn!" The ordinary bustle of embarking passengers ensued; bodies and bundles tumbled in obediently to the stern call, which sounded more like a demand than an invitation. Equally stern was the note of the skipper, who bawled irately to the boatmen to hoist sail. Presently a dozen of brown hands were unfastening the moorings or hauling the sheets, and, glad to be free, the vessel glided out from the harbour and stood northwards across the lifting Firth for Kinghorn Pier. A strong west wind was blowing from "the Ferry"—*i.e.* Queensferry—and the rocking boat now and again

dipped her canvas, and fled precipitately over the white caps. Our party had time to cool, and it appears the passage was long and rough enough to favour an epidemic of sea-sickness. Even in very fine calm weather few cared to cross the Firth unless on business ; and those who could afford it preferred to pass to the North by taking the Forth at Stirling at the well-known bridge. Some took the Leith route as a medicine, as people take "the waters." About mid-channel, when the boat was "half-owre, half-owre," the crew commenced the interesting part of their duties—the collection of the fares. They were liable to be imposed upon, and debates would occasionally arise about counterfeit ha'pence. Vagrants, too, were sometimes unearthed from the hold, where they had tried to stow away their rags and wretchedness in the hope of escaping payment of the passage groat. At length Fife was reached, and pale and sharp-set our voyagers briskly hastened to the friendly inn, where they dined, and drank, and snuffed for a couple of hours at least. Snuff was the nostrum for a heavy meal. They were in the village of Kinghorn, which fame has consecrated to the memory of Patie Birnie, bard and gut-scraper ; but, alas ! Crowdero was dead, and his elegy chanted (by Allan Ramsay) half a century before. Fergusson and his friends were the very men to have relished his eccentric humour and pawky by-play.

“ When strangers landed, wow sae thrang,
 Fuffin' and peghin' he wad gang,
 And crave their pardon that sae lang
 He'd been a-comin' ;
 Syne his bread-winner oot he'd bang
 And fa' to bummin'.”

He was the reputed author of the richly humorous song with which Kennedy used to convulse a Scottish audience, "The Auld Man's Mare she's dead," which he sang and played with comical looks and gestures, "laughing and groaning at the same time"—"his beard," says Ramsay, "being no small addition to the diversion." It is right to say that he was in the habit of disavowing the authorship (words or air, or both)—perhaps to have the pleasure of praising the song. For he would conclude his performance with "A bonnie auld thing this, indeed, an't like your honour!" After their meal our travellers hung about the village, admiring from the green braes that overhang the beach the glories of the Lothian coast, and exploring a shore cave which used to harbour bandits. Fergusson had always little to say about the scenery of Fife itself; it was good enough as a stand from which to view his beloved Edinburgh, with her castled rock, and tufted groves and spires. On this theme his language was always fervent, but seldom so rapturous as the following:—

"As glower the saints when first is given
A favoured keek o' gloire and heaven,
On earth nae mair they bend their een,
But quick assume th' angelic mien:
So I on Fife wad glower no more,
But gallop to Edina's shore."

It was afternoon when our party set out on foot westwards, some twelve or fourteen miles, to Inverkeithing. They passed Burntisland not long after leaving Kinghorn, and there Fergusson's eye marked "the reverend dome" on the "gradual rising dale." There also a

tawdry signboard, on which were painted a man and a horse, with refreshments before them ; the man's, represented by an unshapely jug frothed with small beer, offended one taste, but courteously offered to gratify another. They accepted the offer of the legend over the inn doorway, but were content to "regale with sober can." They now set off at a rapid pace, for the day was declining, and covering in succession "hills, vales, and extensive plains"—to quote from the poem—found themselves at last, blown and breathless, in the ferry-boat at North Queensferry, where they could cool and come to. They crossed to the south side in "ten posting minutes," and marched at once to M'Laren's, where they ate an early supper of roast lamb and lettuce ; and as they felt the day's perils were now over, and they were now on the safe side of the water, they proposed to congratulate each other by cracking a bottle or two together. Accordingly the cheering glass went briskly round ; and by-and-by they proceeded to bumpers, having as their lawful excuse the toast of the ladies of their more particular regard. They journeyed leisurely towards Edinburgh in the cool of the long gloaming, and were surrounded on the way with a splendid sunset, which filled the north-western heavens, and was delicately reflected from the airy spires and cliffs of the capital. The glowing equipage had passed, and the steeds of the sun were stabled, and they were still "moving slowly on with festive joints and lingering pace." In short, it was night when they got into Edinburgh.

[An interesting account of the ferry passage between

Leith and Pettycur in the early years of last century will be found in the Appendix to *Major Fraser's Manuscript*, recently published by Mr David Douglas, who kindly brought it under my notice. The account is contained in a letter (of date 8th April 1715), and narrates the experiences of no less a personage than Duncan Forbes of Culloden, the future Lord President of the Court of Session.]

POACHERS AND POACHING.

CONVENTIONAL usage has established a wide interval between poaching and bagging. Your fine gentleman with a turn for sport estimates his success in the field by the size of his bag ; vulgarity, on the other hand, surreptitiously crams his pouch, and is no sportsman, but a poacher. To the etymologist there is no difference between poaching and bagging : to him the words name the same identical actions. Neither is there any difference between the actions to the student of human nature : he sees in both the exercise of the same instinct. The difference that obtains is the creation of legal enactments, and is dependent upon the status of parties. It is therefore convenient to recognise it. Law has caught up the simple, homely, harmless word "poach" from the obscurity of rustic cottages and roadside alehouses, has branded it with a bad meaning, and perpetuated the disgrace by definition and a place in the statute-book. Poaching is illegal. It is known to be an offence against law to the most unenlightened pagan in our country : bloodshed and theft are not more certainly breaches of the law. But the immorality of it is a different question, which the rustic is at any time ready to debate. In his view it is by no mean an immutable and eternal Cudworthian wrong.

He has probably a glimmering knowledge of the historical origin of its criminality, and he cherishes a sure faith that after a certain day of some month in a year that is coming it will cease to be a crime. With that knowledge, and in this belief, he goes on poaching himself or conniving at its practice by others. Every young rustic you meet is a very possible poacher, if he is not something more. For the statement may be hazarded that poaching is as common now in the rural districts as it has been any time during the last fifty years or so. The professional poacher, it must be allowed, could hardly survive the Prevention Act of 1862. That Act gave the constable power to search persons suspected of illegally taking game; and it required every dealer to account for the game in his possession—to state where, when, and from whom he got it. These were merciless conditions of life to the man who made his livelihood by poaching. But the Act did not suppress the occasional poacher: it rather put him upon his mettle. He became warier. Poaching became more than ever a game of skill. It rose almost to the rank of a fine art. The policeman as well as the gamekeeper was now to be evaded; suspicion as well as capture-in-the-act was to be avoided; there could be no further dealings with carriers and cadgers, and only hazardous intercourse with licensed purchasers of game; and in 1870 the necessary payment of ten shillings for the use of a gun for a year made the rustic who ventured upon the luxury a marked man. Meanwhile there was one thing in the poacher's favour. At the same time that these arbitrary laws were being proclaimed against

him, a natural law was operating in some measure to his advantage. The rural population was decreasing obediently to the greater attractions of town life ; and, of course, the less peopled a district becomes, the better is the opportunity it offers for poaching.

The impulse to pursue and take or entrap wild animals is instinctive. So long as there are sportsmen there will be poachers—who are only a kind of unlicensed sportsmen. What makes the pursuit of game attractive to the peer appeals equally to the same instinct in the peasant. To the gratification of this instinct, his poverty is his only barrier. He refuses to recognise the immorality of its exercise. Poaching may be illegal : he does not regard it as sinful. Even the outcry of rustic respectability against it is not on the score of sin, but that it is exposed to bodily danger, induces the formation of irregular habits, leads to quarrels (the respectable poor are eminently peaceable), and is attended by, or productive of, other evils. It is the belief—quite a universal one among the common country folks—that there is no sin in poaching that makes that breach of the law the common practice it is, and still as common as it has been. The peasant argues that what is your property only while it is in your possession—that is, on your grounds or your estate—may be his when it comes his way ; and if you deny it to him in his own croft or kail-yard, or on the public road, or in the neutral elements of air or natural water, he will reserve to himself the right of reprisal to take it wherever and whenever he can conveniently do so. His thesis is that game is no true property. When a cow strays it is pounded ; nobody

pounds a hare ;—I have heard the illustration again and again in such roadside inns as come in anglers' ways. And still more iniquitous, he will tell you, is the law against poaching salmon. His practice has been so long in accordance with his argument that the substitution of a simple trespass law for the obnoxious game laws would now hardly avail to keep the honest poacher on his own side of the hedge. Within quite recent years the rustic mind has had its ideas on the subject of land-tenure very nearly revolutionised. The poacher has been among the foremost to express his satisfaction with the revolution. A humorous illustration of the new attitude of the poacher towards the land question was given not long ago in one of our county courts. Black Rab, a notorious poacher, was "had up," as he himself would have phrased it, "on the auld chairge." He was seen, it was alleged, breaking the law in the moonlight, was chased and escaped, leaving, however, his furs and feathers behind him. Next morning he was apprehended at his work—"blasting" in a quarry—and denied the charge. In court he not only pleaded "Not guilty," but protested with a vehemence he was never before known to show that "the keepers were mista'en i' their man this time—for he was sackless." He advanced an *alibi* that was not conclusive, and at last, at his wits' end, declared with genuine candour and a confidence that was clearly expected to convince, "In fac', it couldna hae been me, for it wasna *on my laund!*"

Hares, pheasants, and salmon are, as they have long been, the principal objects of the poacher's quest. To these add rabbits, now that they too are in the

game list, though the old opinion of them still lingers among the older peasantry that they are only a sort of ground vermin. This bad opinion of Bunny doubtless arose from his abundance, and his destructiveness to the young crops. Time was when even salmon was regarded by our farm-labourers as they now regard the cheap but wholesome herring, and when they made it a condition of their engagement to have it as an article of diet not oftener than three times a week. There is no prejudice against salmon now; there will soon be none against rabbit. But partridges, snipe, and wild ducks have also a good share of the poacher's attention. The physical features and capabilities of his district determine the nature of his quarry. One district is rich in hares, another swarms with pheasants; and of course all streams are not frequented by salmon. Fifty years ago the tenant-farmer offered little, if any, opposition to the poacher; he may be said to have encouraged him for keeping his lands free of destructive creatures that preyed upon his crops, and were sacred. Those were the days of unfenced fields. But now the trespass law is enforced because there are fences the breaking of which by accident or malice is a sore vexation equally to tenant and laird. The foot of the poacher may do small damage to the enclosed field, but the gap he leaves behind him in the fence, where the paling gave way under his weight, offers an easy inroad to untended sheep and more destructive cattle. The mischief they do to half-grown and ripening crops lies partly in what they devour; but they work greater havoc by trampling and breaking the promised harvest.

The best poaching grounds for a big bag are, of course, in and around preserves. The poacher's victims here are hares, pheasants, woodcocks, and partridges. Hills and lochs furnish snipe, grouse, and wild-duck. Here the chance of a big bag is not so great as there is much less density of game; but there is less likelihood of interruption to the poacher, even though his use of the gun is almost imperative. For personal safety he prefers the open, with such means of escape as the hills afford, to the uncertain cover of the wood. Indeed, the poacher seldom finds it to be either to his safety or his profit to visit the wood. He knows it is a poor place for hares comparatively with the fields adjoining, especially if there is an escape to uplands through whin-bushes and broom. Puss herself prefers the open to the woodland, making her form under the sky among bracken or long grass. Pheasants are the only true wood game, but they too can be taken beyond its boundaries. Of an October night they may be found by fifties feeding on the stubble-field.

The poacher's activity is little restrained by the popularity of the landlord. It is a simple question of personal proclivity and the game supply, into which consideration of the feelings of the most generous of landlords enters only theoretically. If such consideration ever affect the poacher's practice at all, it can only reveal itself by sparing the fences and making a cleaner—that is, a less evident—abstraction of the game. And in the ordinary intercourse of daily life the poacher has still an ingenuous "hat" for the landlord; it is only in rare cases that hatred of

the landlord gives additional zest to poaching. But the prime instinct which finds delight in circumventing the creatures of the wild may be reinforced by other means. Various collateral inducements operate to produce the poacher. Among these are poverty or want of work; the love of adventure or "the fun of the thing;" the influence of wild companions, or the opinion of the poaching community. In addition to these motives, the craving of palate and pocket must not be overlooked. Successful poaching furnishes the peasant with a very agreeable change in his rather monotonous dietary; and it may supply him on occasion with a little ready money. The conversion of game by the poacher into the resourceful form of coin is now, however, a very risky transaction. Time was when eighteenpence for a hare or a shilling for a pair of rabbits was "found siller" at the dyke-side of a morning. The journeyman wheelwright or apprentice blacksmith had just to take a short "dander" at the breakfast-hour in the direction of a snare he had set overnight. If he knew his art at all, the money was at his feet, or what would be money at the side of the cadger's cart that forenoon. The cadger was just as eager to make the petty disbursement from his "stocking-foot" or leather pouch as the poacher was to take it. There was undisputed division of the value or profit between them—fifty per cent. to each. Seldom or never was there any higgling; that might end in unseemly debate. Neither was the poacher so much at the mercy of the cadger as one might suppose. His refuge from cadger greed was to the competition of the carrier. He would play the

one off against the other without coming to the climax of an articulate difference with either.

While all classes of the working rural population included poachers, the crafts or employments that were pre-eminent some fifty years ago in sending them out were those of the blacksmith, the wright, the saddler, the shoemaker (the tailor belonged to a more timorous class), the roadman—who had special facilities for taking a pheasant or lifting a stray hare—the weaver, the small farmer, the field-worker, the ploughman, and the mason. The last-named was a daring and deadly enemy of the game in winter, when frost resisted the chisel and bound the plaster, and his only choice in spending the day was between idleset and poaching. There were also young lads of seventeen or so, who in winter divided their time between poaching and attending the parish school. There was often little work for such lads about the farms from Martinmas to Candlemas; and their fee as arranged at Candlemas was as big as if they fee'd from Martinmas. Even girls innocently engaged in tending kine could make shift to watch a conveniently-set snare. Poaching was by no means confined to the class of ne'er-do-weels. A douce elder of the Kirk would make no scruple to lift a hare from a "girn;" nor would the minister hesitate to eat it if, as sometimes happened, the carcass of puss found its way—semi-anonymously—to the manse kitchen. There were clever fellows among the poachers—not clever only at poaching, but at the various occupations to which they gave the regular hours of the day. Poaching was their pastime:

it came as a relief to the tedium of lawful industry.

In *Humphrey Clinker*, Smollett, in his own inimitable way, gives expression to the peasant's view of poaching in the correspondence of Squire Bramble. That worthy landlord writes from Clifton on the 17th April to his *fidus Achates* "dear Lewis":—

"As for Higgins, the fellow is a notorious poacher, to be sure, and an impudent rascal to set his snares in my paddock; but I suppose he thought he had some right, especially in my absence, to partake of what Nature seems to have intended for common use: you may threaten him in my name as much as you please; and, if he repeats the offence, let me know it before you have recourse to justice."

On the 20th he writes:—

"I had yesterday a visit from Higgins, who came hither under the terror of your threats, and brought me in a present a brace of hares, which he owned he took in my ground; and I could not persuade the fellow that he did wrong, or that I would ever prosecute him for poaching. I must desire you will wink hard at the practices of this rascalion, otherwise I shall be plagued with his presents, which cost me more than they are worth."

The poacher of fifty years ago might be relegated to one of three classes, according to the means he employed to entrap or take his quarry. He might make use of a dog, trained for the purpose—a collie (commonest of country dogs), or a wicked-eyed terrier, or the deadly lurcher, which to the speed of the greyhound adds the sagacity of terrier or collie,

and does its work without din. Or the poacher might put his trust in snares and nets. Or lastly, he might make service of a gun, kept in some outhouse, or secret place in the wilderness, or carried in three portions under a capacious coat to the scene of execution. Another division of the fraternity might be made into poachers who had no faith in partnership, poachers who hunted in couples, and poaching gangs loosely composed for special occasions. In the case of couples or gangs, one would sometimes be detailed to hold the gamekeeper, whose interference was dreaded, in talk at the crossways or at the alehouse, while his *confrères* were setting or examining the snares. A decayed poaching ne'er-do-weel was never entrusted with this commission; the keeper cold-shouldered such a one at once; but he would talk, not without suspicion, with a respectable lad, of whose intentions he was in some degree of doubt. Dogs and snares were employed to take hares (and rabbits); the gun overreached all kinds of four-footed and winged game. There were lines and leisters for the water. An experienced or well-taught poacher went about his work methodically, and in many instances had no mean knowledge of natural history. His first proceeding was to select a field for his operations. He knew that the hare when startled runs up or across the field. When at her ease, and enjoying the sense of security, Puss "hirples down the fur," as Burns observed one memorable Sunday morning. Gloaming was the usual time for setting snares; they were looked at in the morning; but sometimes, after the snare was quietly set, the dog was sent to scour the selected

field, and Puss was caught while the poachers waited. The snare was set about one yard from the "slap" of the hunting-field, and *outside* the field. A raid on rabbits was commonly conducted on an idle afternoon that favoured the use of dogs. A well-trained terrier, with the delight of sport glowing like a spot of fire in each—it might be in *one*—shaggy-browed eye, would invade the burrows in business-like style, while a "gash" collie hung on the skirts of the furzy knowe, and snapped up the scuttling fugitives. It was a game of hide-and-seek to the dogs, played on the definite principle of a division of labour. To poor Bunny it was something of a more tragic nature. It was the acme of sport to such young rustics as herd-boys, more especially if they were countenanced by the presence of the farmer's son, or the laird's. It was the apprenticeship of poaching. The herd pieced together his knowledge of the habits of game by watching the practice of gamekeepers. From recognised rabbit-killers he learnt the art of snare-setting.

The poacher had a special equipment to avoid detection. Its simplest form was the wearing of dark clothes. Desperate fellows wore a bandage of crape, or "coomed" their faces, or otherwise disguised their appearance. The tools of the night poacher were nets, guns, brass wires for the construction of snares, and a dog. He generally dispensed with a bag. Tying the feet of his quarry together, he flung the furry or plummy burden over his shoulder; or he hid it near his house, probably in a byre, till he satisfied himself that the coast was clear. There were instances of the poacher

marching with his booty into his own house, and finding himself in the presence of "gamie," who had dropped in, troubled with suspicions of the inmates, but ostensibly on a social or even friendly visit. The smell of hair on the poacher fresh from the fields, and, it might be, a trace of hare's wool sticking here and there to his homespun coat, while hardly incriminating evidence, had the natural effect of confirming the gamekeeper's suspicion. Some rough-and-ready badinage would pass between them on the subject, but they would part with the ordinary courtesies at the door, each resolved to watch the other in future with increased circumspection.

To his acquaintance with natural history the practised poacher added the study of meteorology, topography, and of course human nature, as exhibited in his associates and his enemies. He would train his dog to carry a lamp on its forehead for dark nights, and to run up the furrow for partridges, driving the birds before it to his net on the head-rig. No hares were netted, as a rule, on a bright moonlight night. They scampered and played about over the fields like lambs; but on a dark fresh night with a wind blowing they kept their roads and ran into the snares. There was plenty of moonlight poaching with the gun. Watches were always set on moonlight nights. At those times the regular keepers were assisted by the rabbit-killer on the estate. Pheasants, unless well protected, were easily taken. The poacher, stepping warily in the plantation, with a half-muttered curse to some wake-rife cushat, and a long fearful pause when a rotten branch broke at his elbow with the report of

a pistol-shot, would presently come upon a cock, with three or four hens beside him, roosted half-way up an ordinary-sized larch or fir tree. Even on a darkish night, on looking up through the branches, he would make out their forms distinctly outlined against the sky. He had merely to put up his hand and pull them down, tragically stifling all noise with stealthy speed. They were half-tamed, and not soon scared, if their haunt was near the "Big House." The poacher, while he praised their plumpness, had a kind of pitiful contempt for their stupidity. If he was perilously near the Big House, and not many yards even from the bedroom window and lug of the laird, he might try to stupefy them, especially if high roosted, with the fumes of brimstone—"smeek them like bees," as he would say. But this had its own peril: they might only cough, and sneeze, and shift their perch in rather an alarming way. If the laird's window flew up, and a dog came crashing through the brushwood, there followed an exciting time for the baffled poacher.

The instinct of the true sportsman was sometimes shown by the poacher in his free distribution of his night's plunder. We knew an inveterate poacher, a most companionable rascal in many ways, who as often bestowed the fish, which he had painfully poached at midnight, among his poor neighbours, as bartered them with the cadger for brandy or a bladder of unexcised whisky. He would never take money, and would almost have starved rather than eaten fish. He discouraged poaching among the young, and would have no associate. His ordinary gift to a

master tradesman at New Year was a small sackful of fish, accompanied with a copy of the Shorter Catechism for each of his three apprentices. The gift was supposed to be anonymous, but it was an open secret that "Auld John" was the donor. He never went to Church, except at the summer sacrament time, when he took his seat in a front pew of the gallery, and looked down with pagan interest upon the mystery of the Communion as celebrated in the "laigh kirk." He showed his respect for religion by regularly doffing to the minister; and he was supposed to be the sender of an occasional very large fish, which mysteriously found its way by night to the manse porch, wrapped in the jacket of a cheap sporting newspaper. It was the newspaper—of which he was the only reader in the little community—that was believed to have betrayed him.

There was not wanting to the life of the poacher a strong dash of poetry. He had necessarily observant eyes, and a sensitiveness of perception which not seldom touched and stirred his feelings. Who of the denizens of the everyday realistic world had his opportunities of spying the wild shy graces of retiring Nature, surprising her in her hours of private abandon, or feeling her close presence in the chamber of midnight woods or cloud-curtained moors? Her dread beauty solemnised him for the moment. He was half daunted by the temerity of his own intrusion. He felt, as indeed he was, in a new world—lifted from the common world of daylight with its three conventional aspects of morning, noon, and evening, such as the respectable people of his hamlet knew

and believed to be exhaustive of Nature and the limit of her resources. How little they knew of the lofty majesty of moon-lighted heaven as seen, nay, as *felt*, from the dark depth of woods that swayed over him, and moaned with the oppression of sweet dreams! How little of the vocal gladness at rising morn of the leafy world of birds, that made him, with the savage leister in his hand, uncover where he stood waist-deep in the water, overpowered and overawed into something like pagan devotion by the clamorous praise of the plantation near him! "The wud was just *roarin'* wi' birds: I bude (*behoved*) to lift my bonnet to them," was the confession of a romantic poacher whose acquaintance in youth I dearly prized. And what did the non-poaching villagers know of the passion of wailing winds which was shrieked into the night wanderer's very heart, or of the despondency of rain-drenched hills whose gloom entered his soul, and was not to be dispelled by a backful of game or by many succeeding suns? They sat by their fireside comforts, and shut their doors and their eyes upon one (and the more impressive) half, the night half, of the world of Nature. In this world of natural poetry, to which he was passive but not insensible, the poacher was a ranger. But it was also to him a world of action, adventure, danger, and not seldom conflict with his fellow-men. It was thus fraught with the elements of both natural and human poetry. The poacher, however, kept his experiences of poetical thought, feeling, and situation to himself, or for favoured listeners in the evening of his life. His confessions, when made, were brief, almost half-

articulate. He never thought of elaboration, and was guiltless of the arts of metre and rhyme.

The gamekeeper's world was not quite the same as the poacher's. He too, doubtless, was familiar with the nocturnal aspects of rural and savage scenery, and maintained what might be called social relations with thought-suggestive solitude, but not under the same conditions, nor with the same degree of intimacy. Black summer storms of thunder, and the white terror of winter tempest, which invited the poacher, kept him for the most part within doors, or only drew him forth with reluctance. And in his case the element of personal danger, which gives vitality to feeling, and quickens the imagination, was comparatively a-wanting. The gamekeeper ran little risk, except in collision with desperate poachers. On his side was the sense of security arising from the discharge of legal duty. He had nothing to win; his task was to preserve. He acted on the defensive. It was his duty, rather than love of the work, which sent him out to danger or to storm. And he was himself under the surveillance of the laird, who laid little schemes to test his attentiveness and fidelity. The laird would discharge a pistol at a late hour in some nook of his preserves, as if playing at being poacher, and would await the result, or interrogate the keeper next morning as to his whereabouts at the time of the report.

The humours of poaching have never been related, and would fill a book. These could not flourish in all circumstances. They require for their growth a humanity or softness of heart on the laird's part, and the absence of malice on the poacher's. The mutual

relations were almost friendly. They were tacitly maintained on the principle that he might take who had the skill, and he should keep who could. It was a game, rigorously conducted within certain limits, in which laird and poacher set themselves to outwit each other. Admiration was frankly expressed by the baffled party when the one stole a march on the other. Tam Mackinlay's testimony may be quoted here. Poaching was a passion with Tam. Poesy was not more a passion with Goldsmith. And, like the poet, Tam indulged it for its own sake, reckless of personal or domestic consequences. He made the same regretful confession as Goldsmith, and almost in the same words—

“It found him poor at first, and kept him so.”

On one occasion the gamekeeper rose from behind a bush as Tam was lifting a hare. “Ye’ve grippit me this time, Patie?” “Will ye tak’ wi’ ’t, then?” asked the keeper. “I maun,” said Tam, and walked off home disconsolately. On the way to his cottage he acquainted the blacksmith with his misfortune. “Up to the laird at aince!” counselled Burn-the-win, “afore the keeper gets word o’ him.” “It’s a sair punishment, whatever way,” said Tam; “but it’s maybe the best plan.” Tam washed his face, and tying a black silk neckerchief round his bare throat to show his respect for the laird, walked in his rags—he had no choice between them and nudity—up to the house, and gravely informed the laird that he was ‘grippit.’ The laird eyed him severely, but was

secretly touched at the sight of Tam's rags. He read him a stern lecture, in the course of which he referred to the evil example he was setting his family. "And you have a large family, I hear?" "Seeven," said Tam. The laird expressed indignation. "Do you know," demanded the laird, to whom the estate had come late, and much burdened with debt; "Do you know that *I* must be a bachelor?" "Weel, laird," said Tam demurely, "I'm sure it's no' the women's faut!" The remark seemed to please the laird. He wound up by asking Tam if he would be a game-keeper. Tam refused, vouchsafing no reason but that "he dootit he couldna." The laird thought him diffident of his own ability for the post. "You know the estate, and you know the game, and you know what your duties would be." "A' true," said Tam thoughtfully; "an' as for the estate—I ken it, maybe, better than yersel, laird! But I canna see my way to be a keeper. Na, I canna do 't!" Whereupon the laird dismissed him "for a blind stirk," but with a pardon, the last he would get, and—a terrible warning. Within a couple of months Tam was again taken red-handed. He tried the same tactics of an interview with the laird previous to the report of the keeper. To his astonishment the laird subjected him to a shorter and less severe scolding than on the previous occasion, and let him go! Long afterwards, when age and rheumatics combined to curb Tam's poaching impulses, and he had removed to a distant parish, it transpired that his refusal of the laird's offer was like the Provost of Dumfermline's when he was obliged to decline an invitation to banquet with the

Lord Mayor of London—it was owing to his “want o’ claes!” “I had naething but the rags I wrocht in,” said the simple fellow; “I wudda (*should have*) been a disgrace to the laird’s toun.”

Nick Peetrie was another poaching humorist, not of the broad, genial, almost boyish type to which Tam Mackinlay belonged, but dry, tart, and taciturn. Tam was really large-hearted, with a giant’s strength and a big body to house it; Nick, on the other hand, was short and shrivelled, close-minded, and, if his heart was sound at the kernel, it was only known to the few who managed to get to it. He walked with stooping shoulders and shambling legs, had a peculiar habit of sniffing at short intervals, and peered rather than looked from under the shadow of bushy grey eyebrows. He was a crofter, or small farmer, with about thirty acres on his hand, and lived in a thatched hut like a bee-hive on a lonely brae-side. The brae was rough with furze and stunted birch, and, nearer his homestead, a bush of boor-tree, as a defence from witches; while a bickering burn stirred tall green dockens and floury meadow-sweet at the brae-foot. Nick was known to be a smuggler of whisky of his own distilling, and was shrewdly suspected of relieving his more regular employment with a little poaching. As a smuggler he had made acquaintance with the county jail, but he was never convicted of poaching. He was by his own account nearly caught several times: once in the dusk of a summer evening, when his eldest son, a boy of thirteen, was with him. On that occasion, giving his son hurried instructions to “keep sooth” (south), he boldly cut across country,

making northward for a distant wood, and was long but ineffectually followed by the gamekeeper. At the fair of the county town, about a week afterwards, Nick met his enemy, and asked "Whether he had gotten his wind again?" The keeper stared in some bewilderment. "I heard ye had lost it," said Nick, sniffing, and passing on with the air of a man who had been misinformed.

Watty Tod was another humorist of the class, but his humour, like that of ancient Æsop, played round the beasts of the field. He used to report colloquies with the hare, in which there was revealed an eye for dramatic situation, as well as such a characterisation of the creature as indicated a perfect knowledge of its ways and its nature. But the charm of those colloquies lay in Watty's recital. He anticipated by a quarter of a century Uncle Remus's amusing narratives of "Brer" rabbit and his kinsfolk.

Dave Johnson's humour arose from his relations with the jailer. Dave was one of the most persistent and unlucky of poachers. Scarcely a season passed but he was convicted and imprisoned. His experiences of jail-life were disclosed with the utmost frankness. What he most dreaded in imprisonment was the scanty fare of the jail. One of his disclosed secrets was the dinner menu; every urchin in the village knew it: "Two ounce of beef, or four ounce of a marry-bone!" Dave regarded poaching as the most natural thing in the world. "I wad advise ye a', lads," he would say to a knot of sympathising weavers, "no' to find faut wi' the jailer about your breakfast. If ye anger him, he stirs the parritch a' owre the pat-bottom

afore cowpin' them, an' what doesna fa' at ance is carried aff i' the pat. There's no a spunefu' on your plate—an' ye've gotten your allo'ance!"

Poaching had its tragic side. Every district had its tale of manslaughter, and there were even instances of downright premeditated murder. These, of course, got into the public prints, and townspeople with little knowledge of the country formed their ideas of poachers from the newspaper record of poaching. They regarded all poachers as professional criminals of the most dangerous type. They were believed to be to the country what burglars and garroters were to the cities. There can be no doubt that in too many instances poaching, commenced in frolic by careless country lads fond of adventure, ended in a life of crime. It was often but a step from the pheasant-preserves to the hen-roost. The man that was at first content with a hare was occasionally found to covet a sheep. Poaching, especially when accompanied with a sense of lost reputation, and—which was usually the case—influenced by the allurements of the alehouse, placed the moral principle in deadly peril. It ruined many a young ardent life. It began by unsettling the habits of early home-training; it produced unsteadiness at regular employment; it sometimes required flight from the locality to avoid a conviction that would bring, not merely personal, but family disgrace. If the young apprentice or journeyman stayed to face and answer an accusation, it was to brazen out his conduct, to lose his good name with the law-abiding community, to drop into evil company, to vex or ruin the hopes of sister or sweetheart; then, with lost

character, came recklessness and a red coat. In some instances the army reformed him, and he returned to rural life respectable and respected. The character of Adam Mercer in Norman Macleod's famous story of "The Starling" is drawn with sympathetic knowledge of this class of poacher; it might have been—it probably was—drawn from the life. Black Ned, as drawn by Scott with the pencil of Crabbe, furnishes the contrast:—

"Approach, and through the unlatticed window peep—
 Nay, shrink not back, the inmate is asleep;
 Yes, stupefied by toil and drugged by gin,
 The body sleeps: the restless guest within
 Now plies in wood and wild his lawless trade,
 Now in the fangs of justice wakes dismay'd!
 Was that wild start of terror and despair,
 Those bursting eyeballs and that 'wilder'd air,
 Signs of compunction for a murdered hare?
 Do the locks bristle and the eyebrows arch
 For grouse or partridge massacred in March?"

"Wild howled the wind the forest glades along,
 And oft the owl renewed her dismal song,
 The wading moon with storm-presaging gleam
 Now gave and now withheld her doubtful beam,
 The old oak stooped his arms, then flung them high,
 Bellowing and groaning to the troubled sky:
 'Twas then that, couched among the brushwood sere,
 In Malwood-walk young Mansel watched the deer;
 The fattest buck received his deadly shot,—
 The wakeful keeper heard, and sought the spot;
 Stout were their hearts, and stubborn was their strife;
 O'erpowered, at length the outlaw drew his knife!
 Next morn a corpse was found upon the fell—
 The rest his waking agony may tell."

The chance of such a fate, if tradition be "an honest woman of her word," was at one time young Will Shakespeare's. Thank heaven! he ran off to London, and became a play-actor.