

CURLEW AND PLOVER SHOOTING.



HERE is an old sporting saying in the North that seven curlews are enough for a lifetime. From my own experience I cannot well believe that, for I must say I have killed over the fourteen, and do not feel at all like giving up the ghost. That the curlew is a very difficult bird to approach everyone who has been out after wild fowl on the seashore, or amongst marsh land on the edge of the moorlands, must admit ; indeed, the whaup, as he is termed in Scotland, is one of the most wary of birds. That birds have no power of scent has been ably argued by American sportsmen, but if the whaup has no scent he must have the very best of hearing, for he will rise and fly away long before you can get within gun-shot, and that, too, at times when he has not the slightest possible chance of seeing you. In frosty weather, when the ground is hard, and you should be trying to stalk him as he is feeding, if you dump your gun stock on the ground you will be sure to rise him at a hundred yards, and everything with him, for he never flies off without his peculiar warning note, which no wild fowl within hearing ever fails to observe. Many and many a time when creeping up a meadow edge to get a couple of barrels at a flock of golden plover have I had cause to anathematise the long-billed grey bird, which stole away from amongst the rushes, with his infernal scream setting them all up and so spoiling an hour's patient stalking. Disappointments of this kind always made me thirst for vengeance, and possibly that is the reason that I have killed more than my allotted share.

Though the whaup is not entirely a Scotch bird, it is possibly to be found in the North in greater numbers than in the South, being indeed, a frequenter of all moorlands in lowlands and highlands. It is frequently alluded to in old Scotch songs, and in the ballad of Kate Dalrymple, the dwelling-house of the fair maid who had a wriggle in her walk, and a snivel in her talk, is described as being in a place where whaups and plovers cry eerie. Mr. William Black has a "whaup" as a character in the "Daughter of Heth," and if I mistake not there is a "whaup" too in one of the "Tales

from Blackwood," I forget which: Everyone in the South, too, must be familiar with the curlews which Tennyson describes as calling across Locksley Hall.

However, these are matters of little interest. There was very little poetry in my enterprise last week, and they might have indeed called just as they pleased, so long as I thought I could get within range. The golden plover had been piping for some time on the long shallows of the sea coast of Ayrshire, having been recruiting after coming down from the moor edges, and were in that nice plump condition, hard of plumage, and swift of pinion, that makes one long to get within forty yards of them. Mixed with flocks of lapwings they were in hundreds in the fields along the shore, but it was not easy getting close up to them, and when once started they would fly round in circles high up in the air and then go off with a sixty-mile-an-hour dash for some far-away field where you dare not follow. The great obstacles to getting near them were the whaups, of which there were two or three different sets about the ground, always trying to pick up what they could get at the roots of rash bunches on the edges of little mossy hollows. There they were from grey morning till dusk, shifting at times from one moss patch to another, but never going far away, and seeming to be always on the outlook for you. "From bird to bird the signal flew," to slightly alter Sir Walter Scott, as each time we tried to get up, the peewits beginning to start their little mewling calls, which they give on preparing to take wing, the golden plovers commencing to run and pipe a little, and then all up and off, Master Whaup, the cause of all the mischief, shifting to fresh feeding-ground.

Determined to have fair good sport at everything that rose, from a jack snipe to a barnacle goose, I loaded a mixed lot of cartridges, some with No. 8, some with No. 6 for plover, and some with No. 4 for my particular friends the curlews, giving them all three drachms of powder. Marking the contents on the outside carefully, I arranged them in different pockets of my shooting coat and started on my expedition, accompanied only by a bare-legged plough-lad, who was to be bag-carrier, assistant-stalker, and guide. With a slight touch of autumn frost in the air, the atmosphere was crisp and bracing, but the stillness was not at all in favour of my getting close to the wary customers,

which were rising and settling time after time away down in the marsh lands beyond. Some snipe, too, had come in about the bogs, but they did not tempt me, as I was more bent on securing some of the golden plover, almost as fine in their season as good November partridges, and of knocking down their curlew policemen. Getting close in to an old "fell" or turf-dyke, I followed its course for a time, the lad crawling behind bare-headed, with his bonnet in his mouth, as if afraid any part of it would be detected, and apparently most anxious to see the sport. When we got right opposite to where the plovers were sitting, we could see that they were feeding away from us, and that, being fully eighty yards off already, there was little chance of my getting a shot at them from that direction. What was to be done? Cross the field in their view I dared not, and to get to the other side meant a circuit of a mile and a half through dirty, slushy moss and water, which would have spoiled every stitch of clothes I had on. The clothes would have been sacrificed, however, had I not thought that my old friends, the whaups, would get up and defeat me.

"Look here, my lad," I said, looking round to the urchin, who was as curly-haired as an Irish water-spaniel, and quite as eager for the fun. "You cross the burn, then creep through the rushes into the hollow beyond them, then come crawling forward in this direction, slowly, so as to get them to come this way. Don't be in a hurry, I'll lie here and get a shot at them on the wing."

Away went the boy, bonnet in mouth, and soon I saw him cross the burn and disappear amongst the long rushes in the meadow. His progress I marked by two jack snipes which he flushed, and then I saw him crawl out on to the more open ground fully 300 yards on the other side of the flock. For a time they were so busily engaged running to and fro feeding, that they did not observe his approach, but a little piping from the leading birds showed that he was detected. Still he approached slowly, and they did not rise, but rather altered their direction, and began feeding towards the place where I lay. The minutes passed slowly, for I was getting very anxious, knowing that some of my old Scotch-grey friends would jump up and take the lot with them. The chambers of my gun lay open for a time as I hesitated between putting in the No. 6 cartridges or

the No. 4; thinking the latter the better for curlews, which take a good strong shot, while I should have to rake the former as they passed on the wing.

The old "pneo, pneo" signal at once showed me that the whaups were up, and in five seconds after the whole of the plovers. Two No. 4's went in at once, and scarcely had the barrels re-locked than, as fortune would have it, two unsuspecting curlews came right down and across me. The first one got the contents of the right barrel in his breast just as he had in a manner jumped back surprised; and the second, as he bent away with a warning call to his mates, got the left athwart his right wing, both coming down "slick." As the plovers were now circling round, I loaded quickly with No. 6, and waited my chances. The flock had divided, some were crying round and round high over head; and the rest—the sound of a hundred wings let me know where the rest were, for, wheeling, I just caught the leading bird of the flock, which was flying low, and in time to send the second barrel in again as they steadied from their swerve. Five birds dashed down dead, one almost knocking its head off, so great is the velocity with which these birds fly. Three others I picked up on the line of their flight, so that, with the curlews, I had every reason to be proud of my stalk.

Rejoining me, the lad had the cheering information that some "wee-jucks" were in the burn, and that he had watched and seen that they had not risen when I fired; I gave him sixpence as a reward for having done his duty well, and asked him to lead the way to the spot. This he did so exactly that when the bunch of teal rose I had one to each barrel. The remainder did not, however, settle again as I had expected, but held away seaward. As there seemed to be a good many snipe amongst the marshes, and as the curlews and plovers had no doubt gone off out of harm's way for a time, we beat them up, and were rewarded with two and a half couple, together with one of those exceedingly rare birds, a water-rail. Scarcely had we searched the whole of the rushes, than was heard the crack of two or three guns away over in the direction in which the plovers had disappeared, and, looking back, I saw them circling in large numbers. Getting back to my old point by the turf wall, I made the lad lie down in the meadow,

with instructions to act as usual if the birds should settle out of distance. After the sound of two more shots, down they came, but high—high overhead and wary. After two wide circles they lowered full twenty feet, but still were out of gun range. At last the pilot bird swooped down close to the ground, and they began to circle round the field as if looking for a likely piece to alight. As the afternoon was far gone, and it was more than likely that they would make off for the shoals on the shore, I determined to give them the contents of both barrels, if they came indeed within anything like range at all.

Fortunately for me a stray bird came past and gave his call, the result being that it was returned, and the circling flight came round. As they rose to clear the slope, going hard at forty yards off, I sent both the barrels off almost simultaneously, and well enough ahead as I thought to catch the leaders, though I found I had missed them, and bowled over several of the birds in their wake, so fast had they been going. I picked up four, and, as dusk was falling, gave the bag to the lad to carry home-wards, after bowling over as a present a rabbit he pointed out to me nestling at the foot of a rash bunch. This finished a very good day's sport of a kind which gives far more pleasure than a week's battue.



THE CHITTYWEE.



HEY may talk full hard of their big bombard,
 And their Alexandrian wonders,
 And boast full long of their iron ships strong,
 Of their Temeraires and Condors.
 But there's one wee yacht that's named for a cat,
 That is *the* great ship of the sea,
 'Tis the little sea Kit that a bonnie wee chit
 Calls the wee, wee, wee, Chittywee.

Down, down to the rail does she bend to the sail,
 While the scuppers loud are roaring,
 Blow, blow, does the breeze, till the big green seas
 From her stem to her stern are pouring.
 And tack, tack, tack, she comes beating back,
 As the cry goes "Helms a-lee!"
 Round does she fling, and off again spring,
 The wee, wee, wee, Chittywee.

Laying low her side she streams through the tide
 And takes the seas o'er her shoulder,
 There are boats big, big, but no matter the rig,
 There have ne'er been boats yet bolder.
 Some try to pass on her weather, but alas!
 They are glad to get through her lee,
 For to every puff does luff, luff, luff,
 The wee, wee, wee, Chittywee.

Now on one wee boat from every yacht,
 Full strained each sailor's eye is,
 And its hip, hip, hip, hooray for the ship,
 Full loud each sailor's cry is.
 A smarter craft, from fore to aft,
 Has ne'er yet sailed the sea,
 Than the little sea Kit, that a bonnie wee chit
 Calls the wee, wee, wee, Chittywee.