



Vol. XVIII.—No. 911.]

JUNE 12, 1897.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

PEACOCKS.

WHO has not heard of a peacock? and repeated the idea that they greatly injure a garden; and thought such a creature only admissible in the shape of quaint cut box bushes; others know the real article and have admired their beautiful feathers, and perhaps uttered the old saying, that they are unlucky in a room.

We cannot agree with either supposition, though the first certainly has more grains of truth in it than the second.

Peafowls have been kept in our grounds as long as I remember, and we have learned by experience the art of keeping both them and the many gay beds of flowers and bright borders. It is true that the latter are much protected by a certain ancient red-brick wall which bounds that portion of the garden mostly devoted to the flowers, while the peafowl are carefully fed only on the other side of it, and which side they happily are content to consider as head-quarters; but as they are the most roving of creatures, they invariably make a circuit of the whole place once, and in the long summer hours twice, in the course of the day: their great natural inquisitiveness directly discovers a new plant or some fresh alteration, however slight.

Our great success in keeping peafowl and flowers lies in the fact, that we let them examine the new object, and even peck it, after which they will soon pass on to continue their tour of inspection; but if anyone is unwise enough to frighten them off, they are there again as soon as the person is gone, and are sure to vent their displeasure on the luckless plant, which is immediately plucked to pieces, apparently from a determined idea of expressing their rights, or the same instinct that makes an Arab destroy some ancient monument which is being examined by an European *savant*.

I grant, however, that it is much more difficult, when they discover a bare place in some warm spot, and elect to bathe in the dust. If they do this, it is well to walk in a leisurely manner in that direction to keep them moving, but care must be taken that the birds do not suppose that it is they which are being interfered with.

Ours spend a great deal of their time in a wood beyond their feeding-place, and very beautiful it is to see the party, which usually numbers a dozen or more, walking about under the trees or running races in the green paths, the bright plumage of the cocks looking lovely as they constantly change in the light and shade as the sunlight flickers through the thick branches.

All rights reserved.]



ON THE TERRACE.

Peafowls have very marked characters, and are not only intensely inquisitive but sadly jealous, easily taking offence with each other, or waging war on the other denizens of the poultry yard.

I well remember a certain feud which continued many years between an ancient peacock and whole generations of turkeys; the former spent hours and days worrying the latter, till one summer day the tables were turned. He had been at his usual pastime, and had so aggravated a certain old turkey hen that she became perfectly stupefied, and at last both stood still, being nearly worn out, when the turkey's large brood of poults with a happy inspiration, suddenly all jumped on the peacock's long tail, which insult was so unlooked for and surprising that he quickly retreated, entirely vanquished.

It is well known how proud a peacock is of his gorgeous train, and only lately did we hear of the extreme vexation a long broken feather caused to its owner, and very ludicrous was the description of the bird's repeated attempts to pluck it out, trample on it, or in any way get rid of so obnoxious a plume.

The peafowls become much attached to their own perches, and it is curious to note, considering their Indian ancestry, that they prefer the most exposed position on the trees. One of our young cocks sleeps some sixty feet up, on a fine fir, and it is a beautiful sight to see him sail down from his high roost for his breakfast, which is often very late, as he is often fashionably late in beginning the day.

Beside keeping some of the ordinary kind of peafowl, we have had several generations

of the pure white, very pretty in their way, and particularly graceful-looking, but not to compare to the splendid colouring of the



VANITY.

well-known common sort, or that rare variety called the Black-shouldered, in which the male is richer in colouring than the ordinary peacock, and has the wing covering a glossy deep blue-green, instead of the usual freckled brown-white; on the other hand the females have much less colour, being a pale grey, with dark grey tips to the wings and tails.

These "Black-shouldered" peafowls are a great interest to naturalists, appearing suddenly as they do in some flocks, and yet breeding perfectly true, with, I believe, no variation at all, and are therefore thought by many to be a separate species, and are dignified under the title of *Pavo Cristatus primas*, or *Pavo Nigripennis*; but the strange fact remains that they are not known in a wild state, but it is quite possible their relations may yet be discovered in the little known lands north of Siam.

Our flock seem rather subject to asthma and rheumatism. One white peahen lost the use of both feet, but careful nursing over the kitchen fire soon got one right, but the other being very helpless, had to be put in a cardboard boot, or rather a clog till strength came again.

These birds much dislike confinement, and appear to suffer from it, yet it seems absolutely needful to coop the hens when they have chicks, otherwise the majority of young ones are sure to succumb to the incessant long tours of inspection their parents delight in; not that we can complain of them as short-lived when the perils of youth are passed, as we have had several live to close upon twenty years.

RICHARD GURNEY, F.Z.S.

THE CALLING OF THE WEIR.

By FREDERICK LANGBRIDGE, Author of "Miss Honoria," "The Dreams of Dania," "Sent Back by the Angels," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Edgar had come to that unselfish determination to devote himself to furthering the matrimonial happiness of his sisters, he supplemented it by a determination not to let the grass grow under his feet. Of Hildegard's prospects he was very sanguine. Even his brotherly eye could not but be struck by her singular charm of face and figure, and he estimated, with great satisfaction, that in the family of the McQuaides she was well placed for the display of her personal advantages. In particular he had learned that the brother of Mrs. McQuaide, Mr. Havelock Grubb, was an opulent widower in search of consolation.

If it lay in energy and fine tact to bring such a consummation about, he determined that it should be his sister's privilege to administer that consolation.

Concerning Mary's powers of attraction Edgar felt less assurance. He reflected, however, with a good deal of self-applause, that thanks to his own judicious generosity, Mary had now been forwarded to a *bon marché* where quite moderate charms might be modestly confident of a chapman.

"Funerals make funerals, and weddings make weddings," said Edgar, enlarging his aphorism. "Molly's in the right shop, anyhow. I hope she'll have the sense when the carriage goes away to cling to the bride and bellow. A real good bellow always brings down the house." And then it was borne in

upon Edgar's mind that by running over to the spot himself he could kill two birds with one stone. He could inspect the dresses and insure his sister's making the most of the garden seats and the very serviceable moonlight, as well as of the last embrace. It also struck him as a piquant recommendation of his plan, that Docker, in whose confusion the trip was planned, had been made to supply the necessary funds.

Before, however, Edgar went forth in the character of ministering brother, there were duties to be performed at home. Docker must be deposed from his position of tame cat at Weir Bend. Edgar set himself to work to devise some plan for effectually pshooing him off the premises.

Hovering about the tiny demesne in his capacity of good fairy, Edgar beheld the afternoon postman, leaning over a neighbouring bridge, watching a friend who was fishing. With some impatience, Edgar—who like so many others, cherished a permanent conviction that he was expecting important letters—observed this unofficial conduct.

When, however, he saw that the postman had laid down his budget and had taken the rod from his friend's hand, Edgar determined to break in upon the inopportune Arcadian scene. He crept along the turf that edged the river path, making no more noise than a cat, till he stood almost at the shoulder of the erring official.

Then upon the wretch caught thus red-handed he loosed one blighting question.

"Is this the way you spend your afternoon?" he asked.

"No, thin," answered the serene angler. "I wouldn't know when I last had the rod in the hand."

But Edgar was resolute that scorn should not glance harmless off the man's indurated conscience.

"This," he said, fixing his eyes upon the letters, "is a nice way of taking them out."

"It is," answered the postman; "there's nothing beats a clean red wurrum; I wouldn't give twopence for a fly." And he dropped softly in just beyond a little waterbreak.

Then Edgar determined to call the delinquent back to duty with one plain inquiry. He would ask for his letters.

"How many have you got?" he asked.

The postman put his hand into his pocket and brought forth a small red-speckled trout.

"Only the one," he said, "but when you come up I was just after missing a grand fish entirely. Take the rod, Johnny," he added, with a sigh, "or they'll be for thinking I was lost altogether."

Then, observing Edgar for the first time with the eyes of speculation, "I think," he said, "I have one for yourself, troth have I—a thick one from Miss Mary." And he untied his packet