

THE CENTURY MAGAZINE.

VOL. XXXVI.

OCTOBER, 1888.

No. 6.



HERE is an old park wall which follows the highway in all its turns with such fidelity of curve that for some two miles it seems as if the road had been fitted to the wall. Against it hawthorn bushes have grown up at intervals, and in the course of years their trunks have become almost timber. Ivy has risen round some of these, and, connecting them with the wall, gives them at a distance the appearance of green bastions. Large stems of ivy, too, have flattened themselves upon the wall, as if with arched back they were striving like athletes

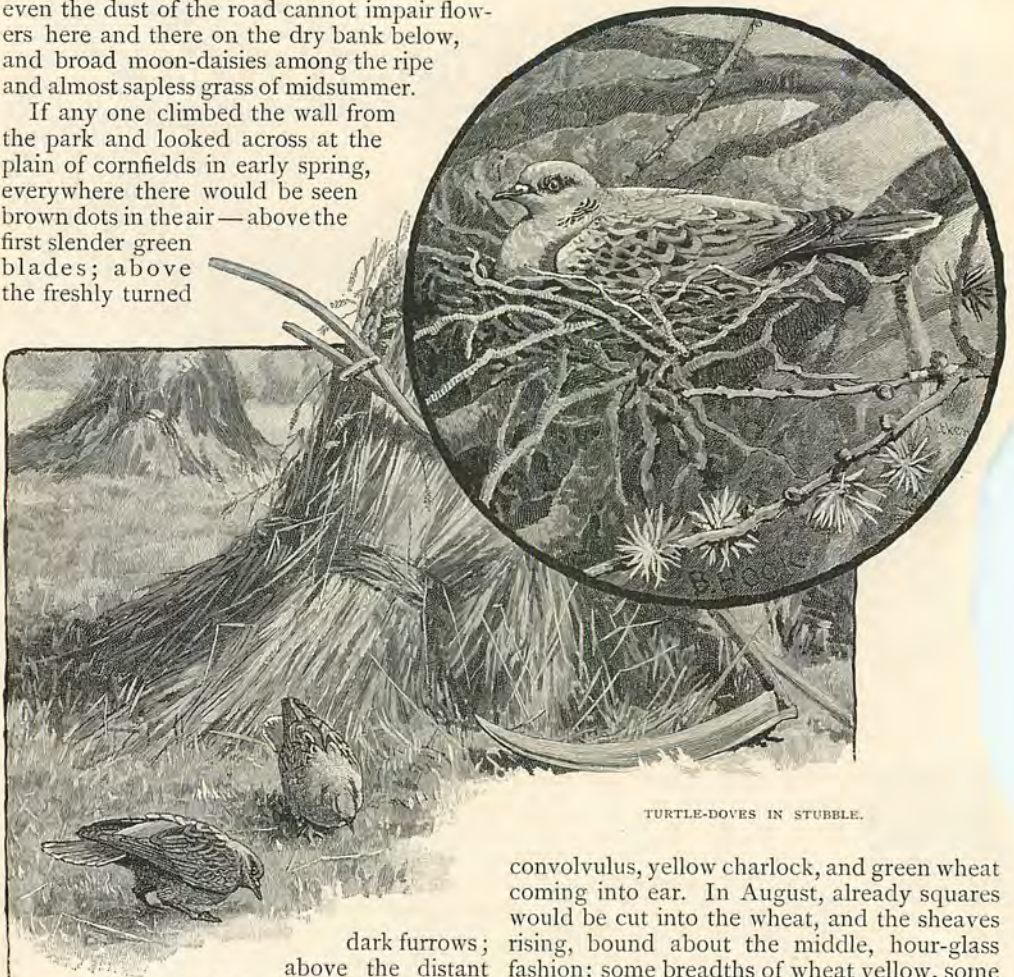
to overthrow it. Mosses, brown in summer, soft green in winter, cover it where there is shadow, and if pulled up take with them some of the substance of the stone or mortar like a crust. A dry, dusty fern may perhaps be found now and then on the low bank at the foot—a fern that would rather be within the park than thus open to the heated south with the wall reflecting the sunshine behind. On the other side of the road, over the thin hedge, there is a broad plain of cornfields. Coming from these the laborers have found out, or made, notches in the wall; so that, by putting their iron-plated toes of their boots in, and holding to the ivy, they

can scale it and shorten their long trudge home to the village. In the spring the larks, passing from the green corn to the pasture within, fluttering over with gently vibrating wings and singing as they daintily go, sometimes settle on the top. There too the yellow-hammers stay. In the crevices bluetits build deep inside passages that abruptly turn, and baffle egg-stealers. Partridges come over with a whirl, but just clearing the top, gliding on extended wings, which to the eye look like a slight brown crescent. The wagoners who go by know that the great hawthorn bastions are favorite resorts of wood-pigeons and missel-thrushes. The haws are ripe in autumn and the ivy berries in spring, so that the bastions yield a double crop. A mallow the mauve petals of which even the dust of the road cannot impair flowers here and there on the dry bank below, and broad moon-daisies among the ripe and almost sapless grass of midsummer.

If any one climbed the wall from the park and looked across at the plain of cornfields in early spring, everywhere there would be seen brown dots in the air — above the first slender green blades; above the freshly turned

all unable to set forth their joy. Swift as is the vibration of their throats, they cannot pour the notes fast enough to express their eager welcome. As a shower falls from the sky, so falls the song of the larks. There is no end to them; they are everywhere; over every acre away across the plain to the downs, and up on the highest hill. Every crust of English bread has been sung over at its birth in the green blade by a lark.

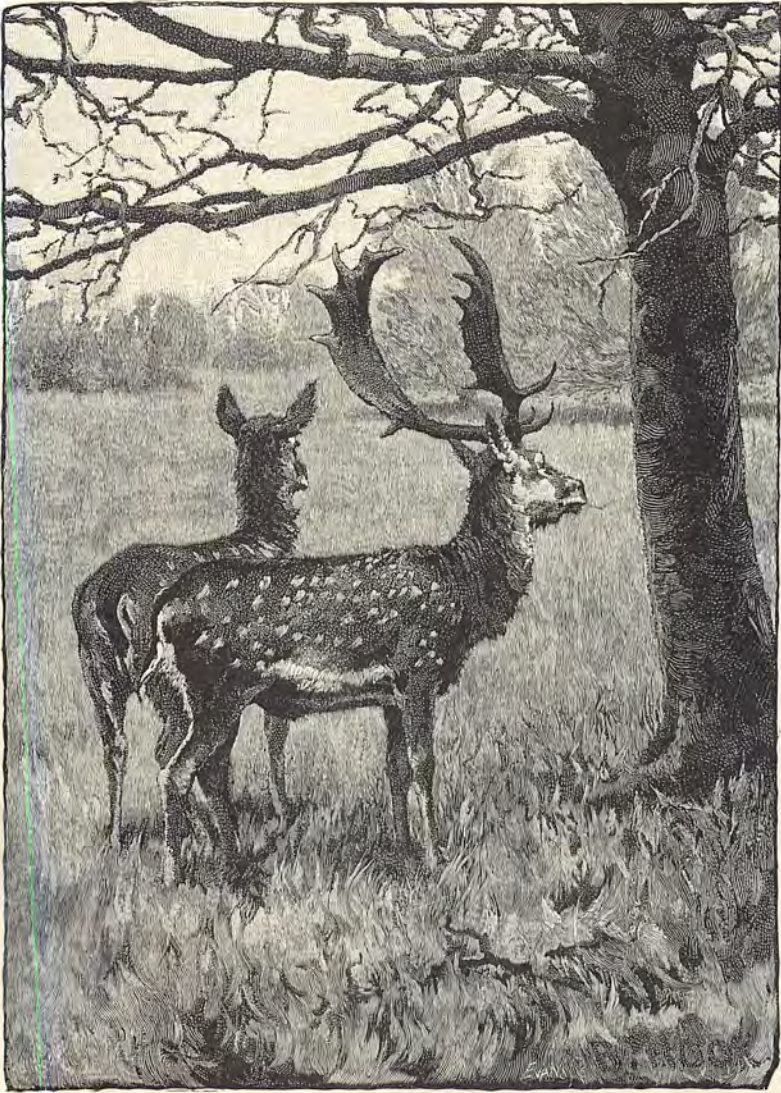
If one looked again in June, the clover itself, a treasure of beauty and sweetness, would be out, and the south wind would come over acres of flower — acres of clover, beans, tares, purple trifolium, far-away crimson saintfoin (brightest of all on the hills), scarlet poppies, pink



TURTLE-DOVES IN STUBBLE.

dark furrows;
above the distant
plow, the share of which,
polished like a silver mirror by friction with the clods, reflects the sunshine, flashing a heliograph message of plenty from the earth; everywhere brown dots, and each a breathing creature — larks ceaselessly singing, and

convolvulus, yellow charlock, and green wheat coming into ear. In August, already squares would be cut into the wheat, and the sheaves rising, bound about the middle, hour-glass fashion; some breadths of wheat yellow, some golden-bronze; beside these, white barley and oats, and beans blackening. Turtle-doves would be in the stubble, for they love to be near the sheaves. The hills after or during rain look green and near; on sunny days, a far and faint blue. Sometimes the sunset is caught



FALLOW DEER.

in the haze on them and lingers like a purple veil about the ridges. In the dusk hares come heedlessly along; the elder-bushes gleam white with creamy petals through the night.

Sparrows and partridges alike dust themselves in the white dust, an inch deep, of mid-summer, in the road between the wall and the corn—a pitiless Sahara road to traverse at noonday in July, when the air is still and you walk in a hollow way, the yellow wheat on one side and the wall on the other. There is shade in the park within, but a furnace of sunlight without—weariness to the eyes and feet from glare and dust. The wall winds with the highway and cannot be escaped. It goes up the slight elevations and down the slopes;

it has become settled down and bound with time. But presently there is a steeper dip, and at the bottom, in a narrow valley, a streamlet flows out from the wheat into the park. A spring rises at the foot of the down a mile away, and the channel it has formed winds across the plain. It is narrow and shallow; nothing but a larger furrow, filled in winter by the rains rushing off the fields, and in summer a rill scarce half an inch deep. The wheat hides the channel completely, and as the wind blows, the tall ears bend over it. At the edge of the bank pink convolvulus twines round the stalks and the green flowered buckwheat gathers several together. The sunlight cannot reach the stream, which runs in shadow, deep down below the wheat ears, over which butterflies

wander. Forget-me-nots flower under the banks; grasses lean on the surface; willow herbs, tall and stiff, stand up; but out from the tangled and interlaced fibers the water flows as clear as it rose by the hill. There is a culvert under the road, and on the opposite side the wall admits the stream by an arch jealously guarded by bars. In this valley the wall is lower and thicker and less covered at the top with ivy, so that where the road rises over the

another part of the park nearer the village, with a façade visible from the highway. The old manor-house is occupied by the land-steward, or, as he prefers to be called, the deputy-forester, who is also the oldest and largest tenant on the estate. It is he who rules the park. The laborers and keepers call him the "squire."

Now the old squire's favorite resort is the window-seat in the gun-room, because thence



ROOKS REPAIRING A NEST.

culvert you can see into the park. The stream goes rounding away through the sward, bending somewhat to the right, where the ground gradually descends. On the left side, at some distance, stands a row of full-grown limes, and through these there is a glimpse of the old manor-house. It is called the old house because the requirements of modern days have rendered it unsuitable for an establishment. A much larger mansion has been erected in

he can see a section of the highway, which, where it crosses the streamlet, comes within half a mile of the house. There the hollow and the lower wall permit any one at this window to obtain a view of the road on one of the sides of the valley. At this declivity it almost faces the house, and whether the passers-by are going to the market-town, or returning to the village, they cannot escape observation. If they come from the town, the steep descent compels them to walk their horses down it; if from the village, they have a hard pull up. So the oaken window-seat in the gun-room

is as polished and smooth as an old saddle; for if the squire is indoors, he is certain to be there. He often rests there after half an hour's work on one or other of the guns in the rack; for, though he seldom uses but one, he likes to take the locks to pieces upon a little bench which he has fitted up, and where he has a vise, tools, a cartridge-loading apparatus, and so forth, from which the room acquired its name. With the naked eye, how-

ever, as the road is half a mile distant, it is not possible to distinguish persons, except in cases of very pronounced individuality. Nevertheless old "Ettles," the keeper, always declared that he could see a hare run up the down from the park, say a mile and a half. This may be true; but in the gun-room there is a field-glass, said to have been used at the siege of Seringapatam, which the squire can bring to bear upon the road in an instant, for from constant use at the same focus there is a rim round the tarnished brass. No time, therefore, need be lost in trials; it can be drawn out to the well-known mark at once. The window itself is large, but there is a casement in it,— a lesser window,— which can be thrown open with a mere twist of the thumb on the button, and as it swings open it catches itself on a hasp. Then the field-glass examines the distant wayfarer.

When people have dwelt for generations in one place they come to know the history of their immediate world. There was not a wagon that went by without a meaning to the squire. One perhaps brought a load of wool from the downs: it was old Hobbes's, whose affairs he had known these forty years. Another, with wheat, was Lambourne's team: he lost heavily in 1879, the wet year. The family and business concerns of every man of any substance were as well known to the squire as if they had been written in a chronicle. So, too, he knew the family tendency, as it were, of the cottagers. So and So's lads were always tall, another's girls always tidy. If you employed a member of this family, you were sure to be well served; if of another, you were sure to be cheated in some way. Men vary like trees: an ash sapling is always straight, the bough of an oak crooked, a fir full of knots. A man, said the squire, should be straight like a gun. This section of the highway gave him the daily news of the village as the daily papers give us the news of the world. About two hundred yards from the window the row of limes began, each tree as tall and large as an elm, having grown to its full natural size. The last of the row came very near obstructing the squire's line of sight, and it once chanced that some projecting branches by degrees stretched out across his field of view. This circumstance caused him much mental trouble; for, having all his life consistently opposed any thinning out or trimming of trees, he did not care to issue an order which would almost confess a mistake. Besides which, why only these particular branches? — the object would be so apparent. The squire, while conversing with Ettles, twice, as if unconsciously, directed his steps beneath these limes, and, striking the offending boughs with his stick, re-

marked that they grew extremely fast. But the keeper, usually so keen to take a hint, only answered that the lime was the quickest wood to grow of which he knew. In his heart he enjoyed the squire's difficulty. Finally the squire, legalizing his foible by recognizing it, fetched a ladder and a hatchet, and chopped off the boughs with his own hands.

It was from the gun-room window that the squire observed the change of the seasons and the flow of time. The larger view he often had on horseback of miles of country did not bring it home to him. The old familiar trees, the sward, the birds, these told him of the advancing or receding sun. As he reclined in the corner of the broad window-seat, his feet up, and drowsy, of a summer afternoon, he heard the languid cawing of an occasional rook, for rooks are idle in the heated hours of the day. He was aware, without conscious observation, of the swift, straight line drawn across the sky by a wood-pigeon. The pigeons were continually to and fro the cornfields outside the wall to the south and the woods to the north, and their shortest route passed directly over the limes. To the limes the bees went when their pale yellow flowers appeared. Not many butterflies floated over the short sward, which was fed too close for flowers. The butterflies went to the old garden, rising over the high wall as if they knew beforehand of the flowers that were within. Under the sun the short grass dried as it stood, and with the sap went its green. There came a golden tint on that part of the wheat-fields which could be seen over the road. A few more days — how few they seemed! — and there was a spot of orange on the beech in a little copse near the limes. The bucks were bellowing in the forest; as the leaves turned color their loves began and the battles for the fair. Again a few days and the snow came, and rendered visible the slope of the ground in the copse between the trunks of the trees: the ground there was at other times indistinct under brambles and withered fern. The squire left the window for his arm-chair by the fire; but if presently, as often happens when frost quickly follows a snow-storm, the sun shone out and a beam fell on the wall, he would get up and look out. Every footstep in the snow contained a shadow cast by the side, and the dazzling white above and the dark within produced a blue tint. Yonder by the limes the rabbits ventured out for a stray bunch of grass not quite covered by the drift, tired, no doubt, of the bitter bark of the ash-rods that they had nibbled in the night. As they scampered, each threw up a white cloud of snow-dust behind him. Yet a few days and the sward grew greener. The pale winter hue, departing as the

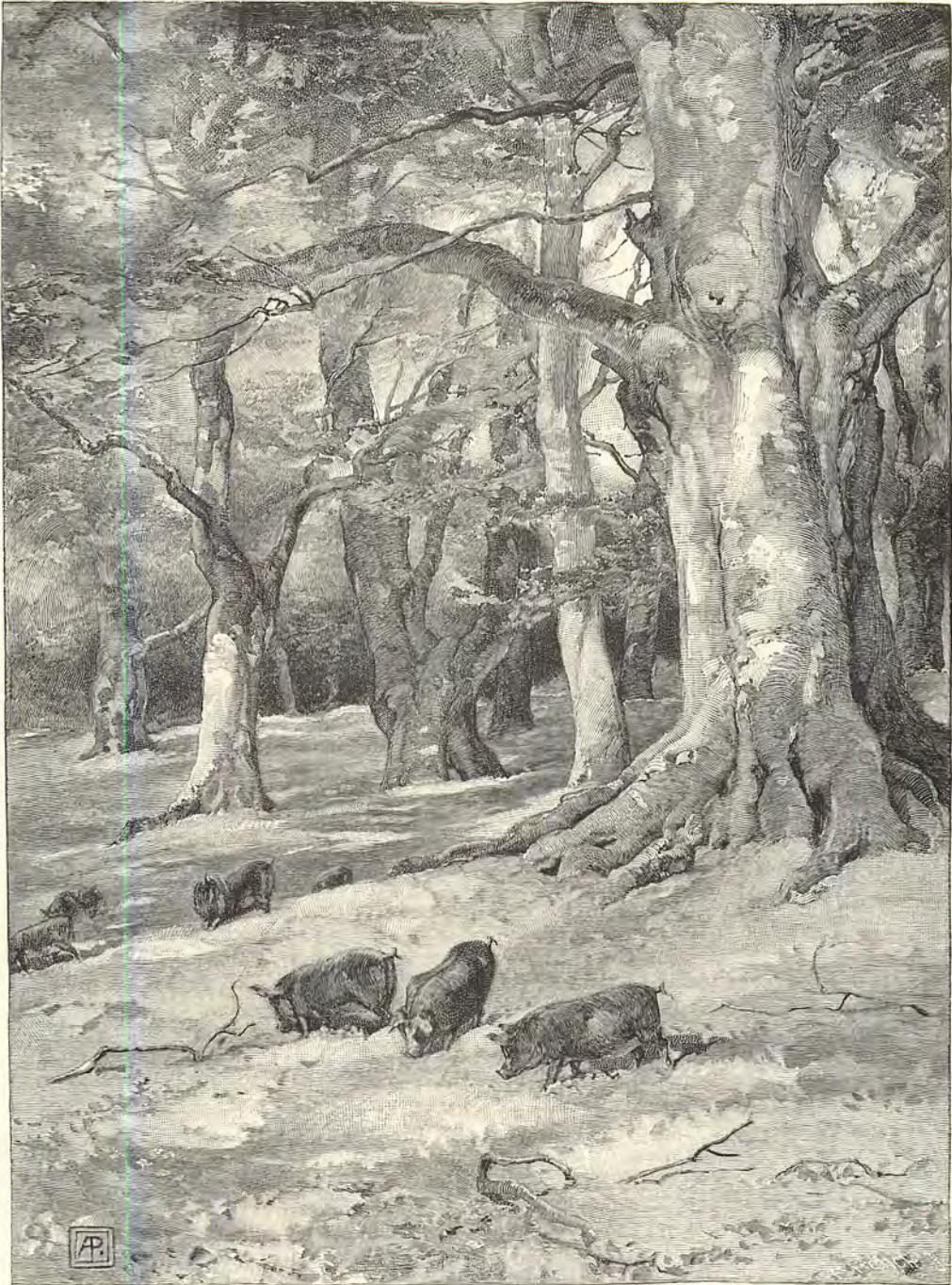
spring mist came trailing over, caught for a while in the copse, and, lingering there, the ruddy buds and twigs of the limes were refreshed. The larks rose a little way to sing in the moist air. A rook, too, perching on the top of a low tree, attempted other notes than his monotonous caw. So absorbed was he in his song that you might have walked under him unnoticed. He uttered four or five distinct sounds that would have formed a chant, but he paused between each as if uncertain of his throat. Then, as the sun shone, with a long drawn "ca-awk" he flew to find his mate, for it would soon be time to repair the nest in the limes. The butterflies came again and the year was completed, yet it seemed but a few days to the squire. Perhaps if he lived for a thousand years, after a while he would wonder at the rapidity with which the centuries slipped by.

By the limes there was a hollow,—the little circular copse was on the slope,—and jays came to it as they worked from tree to tree across the park. Their screeching often echoed through the open casement of the gun-room. A faint mark on the sward trended towards this hollow; it was a trail made by the squire, one of whose favorite strolls was in this direction. This summer morning, taking his gun, he followed the trail once more.

The grass was longer and coarser under the shadow of the limes, and upborne on the branches were numerous little sticks which had dropped from the rookery above. Sometimes there was an overthrown nest like a sack of twigs turned out on the turf, such as the hedgers rake together after fagoting. Looking up into the trees on a summer's day not a bird could be seen, till suddenly there was a quick "jack-jack" above, as a daw started from his hole or from where the great boughs joined the trunk. The squire's path went down the hollow till it deepened into a thinly wooded coomb, through which ran the streamlet coming from the wheat-fields under the road. As the coomb opened, the squire went along a hedge near but not quite to the top. Years ago the coomb had been quarried for chalk, and the pits were only partly concealed by the bushes: the yellow spikes of wild mignonette flourished on the very edge, and even half way down the precipices. From the ledge above, the eye could see into these and into the recesses between the brushwood. The squire's son, Mr. Martin, used to come here with his rook-rifle, for he could always get a shot at a rabbit in the hollow. They could not see him approach; and the ball, if it missed, did no damage, being caught as in a bowl. Rifles in England, even when their range is but a hundred yards or so, are not to be used with-

out caution. Some one may be in the hedge nutting, or a laborer may be eating his luncheon in the shelter; it is never possible to tell who may be behind the screen of brambles through which the bullet slips so easily. Into these hollows Martin could shoot with safety. As for the squire, he did not approve of rifles. He adhered to his double-barrel; and if a buck had to be killed, he depended on his smooth-bore to carry a heavy ball forty yards with fair accuracy. The fawns were knocked over with a wire cartridge unless Mr. Martin was in the way—he liked to try a rifle. Even in summer the old squire generally had his double-barrel with him—perhaps he might come across a weasel, or a stoat, or a crow. That was his excuse; but in fact, without a gun the woods lost half their meaning to him. With it he could stand and watch the buck grazing in the glade, or a troop of fawns—sweet little creatures—so demurely feeding down the grassy slope from the beeches. Already at midsummer the nuts were full formed on the beeches; the green figs, too, he remembered were on the old fig-tree trained against the warm garden wall. The horse-chestnuts showed the little green knobs which would soon enlarge and hang all prickly, like the spiked balls of a holy-water sprinkle, such as was once used in the wars. Of old the folk, having no books, watched every living thing, from the moss to the oak, from the mouse to the deer; and all that we know now of animals and plants is really founded upon their acute and patient observation. How many years it took even to find out a good salad may be seen from ancient writings, wherein half the plants about the hedges are recommended as salad herbs: dire indeed would be our consternation if we had to eat them. As the beech-nuts appear, and the horse-chestnuts enlarge, and the fig swells, the apples turn red and become visible in the leafy branches of the apple-trees. Like horses, deer are fond of apples, and in former times, when deer-stealing was possible, they were often decoyed with them.

There is no tree so much of the forest as the beech. On the verge of woods the oaks are far apart, the ashes thin; the verge is like a wilderness and scrubby, so that the forest does not seem to begin till you have penetrated some distance. Under the beeches the forest begins at once. They stand at the edge of the slope, huge round boles rising from the mossy ground, wide fans of branches—a shadow under them, a greeny darkness beyond. There is depth there—depth to be explored, depth to hide in. If there is a path, it is arched over like a tunnel with boughs; you know not whither it goes. The fawns are sweetest in the sunlight, moving down from



IN THE BEECH WOODS.

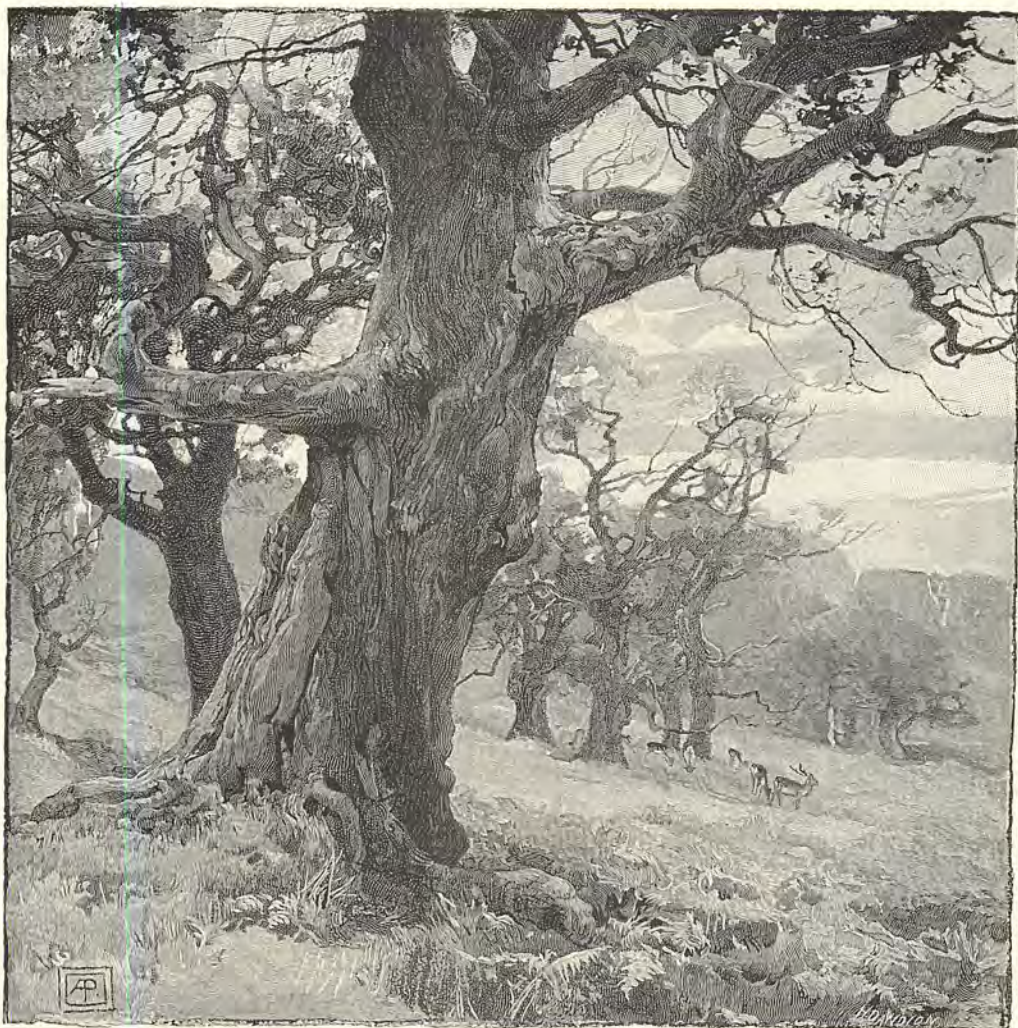
the shadow; the doe best partly in shadow, partly in sun, when the branch of a tree casts its interlaced work, fine as Algerian silver-work, upon the back; the buck best when he stands among the fern, alert, yet not quite alarmed,—for he knows the length of his leap, — his horns up, his neck high, his dark eye bent on you, and every sinew strung to spring away. One spot of sunlight, bright and white, falls through the branches upon his neck, a fatal place, or near it: a guide, that bright white spot, to the deadly bullet, as in old days to the

cross-bow bolt. It was needful even then to be careful of the aim, for the herd, as Shakspeare tells us, at once recognized the sound of a cross-bow: the jar of the string, tight-strained to the notch by the goat's-foot lever, the slight whiz of the missile, were enough to startle them and to cause the rest to swerve and pass out of range. Yet the cross-bow was quiet indeed compared with the gun which took its place. The cross-bow was the beginning of shooting proper, as we now understand it; that is, of taking an aim by the bringing of one point into a line with another. With the long-bow aim indeed was taken, but quite differently, for if the arrow were kept waiting with the string drawn, the eye and the hand would not go true together. The quicker the arrow left the bow the moment that it was full-drawn, the better the result. On the other hand, the arblast was in no haste, but was adjusted deliberately — so deliberately that it gave rise to a proverb, "A fool's bolt is soon shot." This could not apply to the long-bow, with which the arrow was discharged swiftly, while an arblast was slowly brought to the level like a rifle. As it was hard to draw again, that added strength to the saying; but it arose from the deliberation with which a good cross-bowman aimed. To the long-bow the cross-bow was the express rifle. The express delivers its bullet accurately point-blank — the bullet flies straight to its mark up to a certain distance. So the cross-bow bolt flew point-blank, and thus its application to hunting when the deer were really killed for their venison. The hunter stole through the fern, or crept about the thickets, — thickets and fern exactly like those here to-day, — or waited Indian-like in ambush behind an oak as the herd fed that way, and, choosing the finest buck, aimed his bolt so as either to slay at once or to break the fore-leg. Like the hare, if the fore-leg is injured, deer cannot progress; if only the hind-quarter is hit, there is no telling how far they may go. Therefore the cross-bow, as enabling the hunter to choose the exact spot where his bolt should strike, became the weapon of the chase, and by its very perfection began the extermination of the deer. Instead of the hounds and the noisy hunt, any man who could use the cross-bow could kill a buck. The long-bow, of all weapons, requires the most practice, and practice begun in early youth. Some of the extraordinary feats attributed to the outlaws in the woods and to the archers of the ancient English army are quite possible, but must have necessitated the constant use of a bow from childhood, so that it became second nature. But almost any man who has strength to set a cross-bow, with moderate practice, and any idea at all of shooting, could become a fairly good shot with it. From

the cross-bow to a gun was a comparatively easy step, and it was the knowledge of the power of the one that led to the quick introduction of the other. For gunpowder was hardly discovered before hand-guns were thought of, and no discovery ever spread so swiftly. Then the arquebuse swept away the old English chase.

These deer exist by permission. They are protected with jealous care; or rather they have been protected so long that by custom they have grown semi-consecrated, and it is rare for any one to think of touching them. The fawns wander, and a man, if he choose, might often knock one over with his ax as he comes home from his work. The deer browse up to the very skirts of the farm-house below, sometimes even enter the rick-yard, and once now and then, if a gate be left open, walk in and eat the pease in the garden. The bucks are still a little wilder, a little more nervous for their liberty, but there is no difficulty in stalking them to within forty or fifty yards. They have either lost their original delicacy of scent, or else do not respond to it, as the approach of a man does not alarm them, else it would be necessary to study the wind; but you may get thus near them without any thought of the breeze — no nearer; then bounding twice or thrice, lifting himself each time as high as the fern, the buck turns half towards you to see whether his retreat should or should not be continued.

The fawns have come out from the beeches, because there is more grass on the slope and in the hollow, where trees are few. Under the trees in the forest proper there is little food for them. Deer, indeed, seem fonder of half-open places than of the wood itself. Thickets, with fern at the foot and spaces of sward between, are their favorite haunts. Heavily timbered land and impenetrable underwood are not so much resorted to. The deer here like to get away from the retreats which shelter them, to wander in the half-open grounds on that part of the park free to them, or if possible, if they see a chance, out into the fields. Once now and then a buck escapes, and is found eight or ten miles away. If the pale were removed how quickly the deer would leave the close forest which in imagination is so associated with them! It is not their ideal. They would rather wander over the hills and along the river valleys. The forest is, indeed, and always would be their cover, and its shadows their defense; but for enjoyment they would of choice seek the sweet herbage, which does not flourish where the roots of trees and underwood absorb all the richness of the soil. The farther the trees are apart the better the forest pleases them. Those



AMONG THE OAKS.

great instinctive migrations of wild animals which take place annually in America are not possible in England. The deer here cannot escape—solitary individuals getting free of course, now and then; they cannot move in a body, and it is not easy to know whether any such desire remains among them. So far as I am aware, there is no mention of such migrations in the most ancient times; but the omission proves nothing, for before the Normans, before the game laws and parks together came into existence, no one who could write thought enough of the deer to notice their motions. The monks were engaged in chronicling the inroads of the pagans, or writing chronologies of the Roman Empire. On analogical grounds it would seem quite possible that in their original state the English deer did move from part to part of the country with the seasons. Almost all the birds, the only

really free things in this country now, move, even those that do not quit the island; and why not the deer in the old time when all the woods were open to them? England is not a large country, but there are considerable differences in the climate and the time at which vegetation appears, quite sufficient of themselves to induce animals to move from place to place. We have no narrowing buffalo zone to lament, for our buffalo zone disappeared long ago. These parks and woods are islets of the olden time, dotted here and there in the midst of the most modern agricultural scenery. These deer and their ancestors have been confined within the pale for hundreds of years, and though in a sense free, they are in no sense wild. But the old power remains still. See the buck as he starts away, and jumps at every leap as high as the fern. He would give the hounds a long chase yet.

The fern is fully four feet tall, hiding a boy entirely and only showing a man's head. The deer do not go through it unless startled: they prefer to follow a track already made, one of their own trails. It is their natural cover, and when the buckhounds meet near London the buck often takes refuge in one or other of the fern-grown commons of which there are many on the southern side. But fern is inimical to grass, and, while it gives them cover, occupies the place of much more pleasant herbage. As their range is limited, though they have here a forest of some extent as well as the park to roam over, they cannot always obtain enough in winter. In frost, when the grass will not grow, or when snow is on the ground, that which they can find is supplemented with hay. They are, in fact, foddered exactly the same as cattle. In some of the smaller parks they are driven into inclosures and fed altogether. This is not the case here. Perhaps it was through the foggers, as the laborers are called who fodder cattle and carry out the hay in the morning and evening, that deer poachers of old discovered that they could approach the deer by carrying a bundle of sweet-smelling hay, which overcame the scent of the body and baffled the buck's keen nostrils till the thief was within shot. The foggers, being about so very early in the morning,—they are out at the dawn,—have found out a good many game secrets in their time. If the deer were outside the forest at any hour it was sure to be when the dew was on the grass, and thus they noticed that with the hay truss on their heads they could walk up quite close occasionally. Foggers know all the game on the places where they work: there is not a hare or a rabbit, a pheasant or a partridge, whose ways are not plain to them. There are no stories now of stags a century old (three would go back to Queen Elizabeth); they have gone, like other traditions of the forest, before steam and breech-loader. Deer lore is all but extinct, the terms of venery known but to a few; few, indeed, could correctly name the parts of a buck if one were sent them. The deer are a picture only—a picture that lives and moves and is beautiful to look at, but must not be rudely handled. Still, they linger while the marten has disappeared, the pole-cat is practically gone, and the badger becoming rare. It is curious that the badger has lived on through suzerance for three centuries. Nearly three centuries ago a chronicler observed that the badger would have been rooted out before his time had it not been for the parks. There was no great store of badgers then: there is no great store now. Sketches remain in old country-houses of the chase of the marten: you see the hounds all yelping round the foot of a tree, the marten up in it,

and in the middle of the hounds the huntsman in topboots and breeches. You can but smile at it. To Americans it must forcibly recall the treeing of a coon. The deer need keep no watch, there are no wolves to pull them down; and it is quite probable that the absence of any danger of that kind is the reason of their tameness even more than the fact that they are not chased by man. Nothing comes creeping stealthily through the fern, or hunts them through the night. They can slumber in peace. There is no larger beast of prey than a stoat, or a stray cat. But they retain their dislike of dogs, a dislike shared by cattle, as if they too dimly remembered a time when they had been hunted. The list of animals still living within the pale and still wild is short indeed. Besides the deer, which are not wild, there are hares, rabbits, squirrels, two kinds of rat,—the land and the water rat,—stoat, weasel, mole, and mouse. There are more varieties of mouse than of any other animal: these, the weakest of all, have escaped best, though exposed to so many enemies. A few foxes, and still fewer badgers, complete the list, for there are no other animals here. Modern times are fatal to all creatures of prey, whether furred or feathered; and so even the owls are less numerous, both in actual numbers and in variety of species, than they were even fifty years ago.

But the forest is not vacant. It is indeed full of happy life. Every hollow tree—and there are many hollow trees where none are felled—has its nest of starlings, or titmice, or woodpeckers. Woodpeckers are numerous, and amusing to watch. Wood-pigeons and turtle-doves abound, the former in hundreds nesting here. Rooks, of course, and jackdaws,—daws love hollow trees,—jays, and some magpies. The magpie is one of the birds which have partly disappeared from the fields of England. There are broad lands where not one is to be seen. Once looking from the road at two in a field, a gentleman who was riding by stopped his horse and asked, quite interested, "Are those magpies?" I replied that they were. "I have not seen any since I was a boy till now," he said. Magpies are still plentiful in some places, as in old parks in Somersetshire, but they have greatly diminished in the majority of instances. There are some here, and many jays. These are handsome birds, and with the green woodpeckers give color to the trees. Night-jars or fern-owls fly round the outskirts and through the open glades in the summer twilight. These are some of the forest birds. The rest visit the forest or live in it, but are equally common to hedgerow and copse. Woodpeckers, jays, magpies, owls, night-jars, are all distinctly forest and park birds, and are continually with



A FOGGER.

the deer. The lesser birds are the happier that there are fewer hawks and crows. The deer are not torn with the cruel tooth of hound or wolf, nor does the sharp arrow sting them. It is a little piece of olden England without its terror and bloodshed.

The fawns fed away down the slope and presently into one of the broad green open paths

or drives, where the underwood on each side is lined with bramble and with trailing white rose, which loves to cling to bushes scarcely higher than itself. Their runners stretch out at the edges of the drive, so that from the underwood the mound of green falls aslant to the sward. This gradual descent from the trees and ash to the bushes of hawthorn, from the haw-

thorn to the bramble, thence to the rose and the grass, gives to the vista of the broad path a soft, graceful aspect.

After the fawns had disappeared, the squire went on and entered under the beeches from

He crossed several paths leading in various directions, but went on, gradually descending till the gable end of a farm-house became visible through the foliage. The old red tiles were but a few yards distant from the boughs



BADGER AND SQUIRREL.

which they had emerged. He had not gone far before he struck and followed a path which wound between the beech trunks and was entirely arched over by their branches. Squirrels raced away at the sound of his footsteps, darting over the ground and up the stems of the trees in an instant. A slight rustling now and then showed that a rabbit had been startled. Pheasants ran too, but noiselessly, and pigeons rose from the boughs above. The wood-pigeons rose indeed, but they were not much frightened and quickly settled again. So little shot at, they felt safe, and only moved from habit.

of the last beech, and there was nothing between the house and the forest but a shallow trench almost filled with dead brown leaves and edged with fern. Out from that trench, sometimes stealthily slipping between the flattened fern-stalks, came a weasel, and, running through the plantains and fringe-like may-weed or stray pimpinell which covered the neglected ground, made for the straw-rick. Searching about for mice, he was certain to come across a hen's egg in some corner, perhaps in a hay-crib, which the cattle, now being in the meadow, did not use. Or a stronger stoat crept out and attacked anything that he

fancied. Very often there was a rabbit sitting in the long grass which grows round under an old hay-rick. He would sit still and let any one pass who did not know of his presence, but those who were aware used to give the grass a kick if they went that way, when he would carry his white tail swiftly round the corner of the rick. In winter hares came nibbling at everything in the garden, and occasionally in summer, if they fancied an herb: they would have spoiled it altogether if free to stay there without fear of some one suddenly appearing.

Dogs there were in plenty, but all chained, except a few mere puppies which practically lived indoors. It was not safe to have them loose so near the wood, the temptation to wander being so very strong. So that, though there was a continual barking and long, mournful whines for liberty, the wild creatures came in time to understand that there was little danger, and the rabbit actually sat under the hay-rick.

Pheasants mingled with the fowls and, like the fowls, only ran aside out of the way of people. In early summer there were tiny partridge chicks about, which rushed under the coop. The pheasants sometimes came down to the kitchen door, so greedy were they. With the dogs and ponies, the pheasants and rabbits, the weasels and the stoats, and the ferrets in their hutches, the place seemed really to belong more to the animals than to the tenant.

The forest strayed indoors. Bucks' horns, feathers picked up, strange birds shot and stuffed, fossils from the sand-pits, coins and pottery from the line of the ancient Roman road, all the odds and ends of the forest, were scattered about within. To the yard came the cows, which, with bells about their necks, wandered into the fern, and the swine, which searched and rooted about for acorns and beech-mast in autumn. The men who dug in the sand-pits or for gravel came this way in and out to their labor, and so did those who split up the fallen trunks into logs. Now and then a woodpecker came with a rush up from the meadows, where he had been visiting the hedge-grows, and went into the forest with a yell as he entered the trees. The deer fed up to the precincts, and at intervals a buck at the dawn got into the garden. But the flies from the forest teased and terrified the horses, which would have run away with the heavily loaded wagon behind them if not protected with fine netting as if in armor. They did run away sometimes at harrow, tearing across the field like mad things. You could not keep the birds out of the garden, try how you would. They had most of the sowings up. The blackbirds pecked every apple in the orchard. How the dead leaves in

autumn came whirling in thousands through rick-yard and court in showers upon the tiles! Nor was it of much avail to sweep them away; they were there again to-morrow, and until the wind changed. The swallows were now very busy building; there were not many houses for them, and therefore they flocked here. Up from over the meadows came the breeze, drawing into the hollow recesses of the forest behind. It came over the grass and farther away over corn just yellowing, the shadows of the clouds racing with it and instantly lost in the trees. It drew through the pillars of the forest, and away to the hills beyond.

The squire's ale was duly put for him, the particular gossip he liked was ready for him; and having taken both, he looked at his old watch and went on. His path now led for a while just inside the pale, which here divided the forest from the meadows. In the olden time it would have been made of oak, for they built all things then with an eye to endurance; but it was now of fir, pitched, sawn from firs thrown in the copses. For the purpose of keeping the deer in, it was as useful as the pale of oak. Oak is not so plentiful nowadays. The high spars were the especial vaunting-places of the little brown wrens which perched there and sang, in defiance of all that the forest might hold. Rabbits crept under, but the hares waited till evening and went round by the gates. Presently the path turned and the squire passed a pond partly dried up, from the margin of which several pigeons rose up, clattering their wings. They are fond of the neighborhood of water, and are sure to be there sometime during the day. The path went upwards, but the ascent was scarcely perceptible through hazel bushes, which became farther apart and thinner as the elevation increased, and the soil was less rich. Some hawthorn bushes succeeded, and from among these he stepped out into the open park. Nothing could be seen of the manor-house here. It was hidden by the roll of the ground and the groups of trees. The close sward was already a little brown — the trampling of hoofs as well as the heat causes the brownish hue of fed sward, as if it were bruised. He went out into the park, bearing somewhat to the right and passing many hawthorns, round the trunks of which the grass was cut away in a ring by the hoofs of animals seeking shadow. Far away on a rising knoll a herd of deer were lying under some elms. In front were the downs, a mile or so distant; to the right, meadows and cornfields, towards which he went. There was no house nor any habitation in view; in the early part of the year, the lambing-time, there was a shepherd's hut on

wheels in the fields, but it had been drawn away.

According to tradition, there is no forest in England in which a king has not hunted. A king, they say, hunted here in the old days of the cross-bow; but happily the place escaped notice in that artificial era when half the parks and woods were spoiled to make the engraver's ideal landscape of straight vistas, broad in the foreground and narrowing up to nothing. Wide, straight roads — you can call them nothing else — were cut through the finest woods, so that upon looking from a certain window, or standing at a certain spot in the grounds, you might see a church tower at the end of the cutting. In some parks there are half a dozen such horrors shown to you as a great curiosity; some have a monument or pillar at the end. These hideous disfigurements of beautiful scenery should surely be wiped out in our day. The stiff, straight cutting could soon be filled up by planting, and after a time the woods would resume their natural condition. Many common highway roads are really delightful, winding through trees and hedge-rows, with glimpses of hills and distant villages. But these planned, straight vistas, radiating from a central spot as if done with ruler and pen, at once destroy the pleasant illusion of primeval forest. You may be dreaming under the oaks of the chase or of *Rosalind*: the moment you enter such a vista all becomes commonplace. Happily this park escaped, and it is beautiful. Our English landscape wants no gardening: it *cannot* be gardened. The least interference kills it. The beauty of English woodland and country is in its detail. There is nothing empty and unclothed. If the clods are left a little while undisturbed in the fields, weeds spring up and wild-flowers bloom upon them. Is the hedge cut and trimmed, lo! the blue-bells flower the more and a yet fresher green buds forth upon the twigs. Never was there a garden like the meadow: there is not an inch

of the meadow in early summer without a flower. Old walls, as we saw just now, are not left without a fringe; on the top of the hardest brick wall, on the sapless tiles, on slates, stoncrop takes hold and becomes a cushion of yellow bloom. Nature is a miniature painter and handles a delicate brush, the tip of which touches the tiniest spot and leaves something living. The park has indeed its larger lines, its broad open sweep, and gradual slope, to which the eye accustomed to small inclosures requires time to adjust itself. These left to themselves are beautiful; they are the surface of the earth, which is always true to itself and needs no banks nor artificial hollows. The earth is right and the tree is right: trim either and all is wrong. The deer will not fit to them then.

The squire came near enough to the corn-field to see that the wheat-ears were beginning to turn yellow and that the barley had the silky appearance caused by the beard, the delicate lines of which divide the light and reflect it like gossamer. At some distance a man was approaching; he saw him, and sat down on the grass under an oak to await the coming of *Ettles* the keeper. *Ettles* had been his rounds and had visited the outlying copses, which are the especial haunts of pheasants. Like the deer, pheasants, if they can, will get away from the main wood. He was now returning, and the squire, well knowing that he would pass this way, had purposely crossed his path to meet him. The dogs ran to the squire and at once made friends with him. *Ettles*, whose cheek was the color of the oak apples in spring, was more respectful: he stood till the squire motioned him to sit down. The dogs rolled on the sward, but, though in the shadow, they could not extend themselves sufficiently nor pant fast enough. Yonder the breeze that came up over the forest on its way to the downs drew through the group of trees on the knoll, cooling the deer as it passed.

Richard Jefferies.

