

HIGHLAND DEER-STALKING.

By ROCKWOOD.

An Account of Scotland's Most Famous Sport.

“WHENEVER a person kills a deer he is like a dog killing a sheep—he can never keep away from it again.” This was the remark made by the late Captain Horatio Ross, undoubtedly *the* deer-stalker of the expiring century, on one occasion when explaining how a gentleman had commissioned him to rent a forest after having shot his first stag. The comparison is undoubtedly a very apt one, as those who have spent much life with Highland shepherds will well know; and in the early days of stalking, Captain Ross, it may be remembered, was wont to take over the “hirsle,” as a sheep stock is termed in the North, in order to have full and undisturbed sporting rights on the holding. To no one was the story of the prodigal collie, which mayhap had fallen in with bad company at fairs or trysts, more familiar: how, hypocrite-like, it would not take as much as a mouthful of wool from a wedder’s fleece in the day-time, yet at night, knowing the snores of real from feigned slumber, would slip from its hard couch on the hearthstone to the lone sheep-fank, or sheltering corrie, there, with others, to worry and kill the members of its master’s flock with all the ferocity and blood-thirstiness of the wolf. A shot from the nearest keeper’s fowling-piece was the only cure for the dog: for the stalker, nothing would do but unlimited opportunities of shooting with the rifle. And so deer forests have, in the Highlands, gone on increasing till now something like £35 a stag, or £150,000 a year, is realised by Highland lairds for deer-stalking privileges alone. As this involves an expenditure of close upon £100,000 in foresters’ and gillies’ wages, it will be readily understood that the outlay in this direction forms a very important item in the annual sporting harvest bill of Scotland, which draws more than another quarter of a million for the rights of grouse-shooting and salmon-fishing.

In regard to foresters, it has to be said that a great many of the modern Highland foresters were originally gamekeepers, retained on the ground after it had been converted from grouse land or sheep pasture into deer land. Not a few, however, were originally shepherds—notably, old Archibald Campbell, who began life on the celebrated Blackmount Forest, on the Marquis of Breadalbane’s Argyllshire properties, as a herd laddie. Blackmount, for which a few years back the late Lord Dudley paid a rental of £5000 a year, was almost entirely under sheep at that time (1820), but was shortly afterwards afforested. In 1853 he went to Invermark to act as forester to Lord Dalhousie, and while there amassed enough to rent a large sheep-farm. An office-bearer of the Free Kirk of Scotland, and subsequently member of the local School Board, when asked by Lord Elcho, in examination under the Royal Commission on Deer Forests in 1873, “Do you find any great moral change in yourself since you were promoted from a shepherd to a forester?” Archie replied, with a dump of his stick on the floor-end, with an emphatic “No.” The oldest and most noted family of foresters in Scotland are the Crerars, who have been in the service of the Athole family for years. Hunters of venison for close upon four centuries, they would no more own to sheep than a good foxhound to hare, but possibly would admit to a few Sassenachs in the troublous Highland times of 1715 and 1745. On one occasion old John Crerar was overheard by one of the guests asking the noted old deer-stalking Duke of Athole his orders for the day. So-and-So was to go out after grouse; another was to have a try after salmon; and the particular gentleman was to go to the hill after deer with himself. “And is it to be a stalk or a walk, your Grace?” was the further interrogatory. “Oh, just a walk,” was the reply. Not relishing a “walk” with John



AN INTERVAL OF PEACE.—By ARCHIBALD THORNTON

Crerar for nothing, the guest took an early departure for home.

"And is deer-stalking worth all you pay for it?" someone asks. How shall we answer the question? We have been out for two long days; starting for the hill before sunrise and getting home to the lodge long after sunset, and have not as yet pulled a trigger. Were our stay not limited there would be sound reason in our guide's parting remark each night that

seemed difficult and dangerous, the result, no doubt, of our sporting blood having been chilled by disappointment. At last, at the close of the third day, we have, after great patience, got within range of a stag which carries a grand head of ten points. But we must be careful, or we may never see him again to our knowledge. One last reconnoitre by Donald, and he quickly slips off the covers from the rifles. With bared head, yet feeling



A RACE FOR A SHOT.

we were "two days nearer success, at any rate." Crawled have we at times over treacherously green lichen-clad "flow-moss," into which we would sink if we dared to stand up on our feet, and this until the sentence of thirty days upon a tread-mill would come as a note of relief. When we were privileged to erect ourselves it was under a linn, the frothy brown contents of which broke round our necks like running water in a mill-race. Narrow scarped faces did not deter us when a slip meant dissolution among ragged boulders two hundred feet below; but on a détour to avoid giving the deer our wind, they

we could count every single hair therein, we struggle into position. The barrels go over the edge inch by inch, and we creep on to the heel of the stock with our shoulder. There is a boulder stone at the toe of our right foot which is loose, we can feel, and it must not be forced downhill. We draw up our knee again, get our cheek close, and find our stag is in the most favourable position we could desire. He sniffs the air for a moment; that sniff of suspicion is his last. Is it worth it? Yes. As we see Donald throw off his coat and take out his knife to "gralloch" the best stag of the year, we say, Yes, it is worth it all.