



## THE QUAIL.



THE quail is known in almost all the countries of the world, with the exception, it is said, of America, where it has not hitherto been discovered. Their numbers on the continent of Europe are very great: much more so than in England, Wales, and Scotland. They are often met with in Ireland in large quantities.

It is a migratory bird, and though many attempts have been made to naturalize them in this country, the instinctive desire to migrate has hitherto frustrated all such enterprises. They have engaged the attention of the naturalist and the sportsman from the earliest times. Pliny says, "They alight in such numbers on ships (and which is always in the night), by their settling on the masts, sails, etc., as to bear down barks and small vessels, and finally sink them, and on that account the sailors have a great dread of them, when they approach near to land." In the

autumn there are immense flocks of these birds found crossing the Mediterranean from Italy to Africa, taking on their route, both in going and returning, the various islands of the Archipelago as their resting-places. They are often in such prodigious numbers as to absolutely cover the entire face of the country. In Alexandria they are so common, that they can be readily bought for a farthing each. It has been known that crews of merchant vessels have been so much confined to feeding on them, that certain diseases have been induced from their frequent use, and that complaints have formerly been made on the subject to the British consul at Alexandria.

These birds assemble in autumn on the northern shores to emigrate southward; and it has been often noticed that they delay their departure until the north wind arises, when towards sunset the entire body take wing, and display such swiftness as to traverse fifty leagues by break of day. In Italy, Sicily, and

most of the Greek islands, they arrive at a stated season in vast numbers, and with singular punctuality, not differing, in the average of years, above a day or two at the utmost. One hundred thousand have been known to be caught at one time. They are run after during the night, and great numbers perish in the chase. In Sicily there is quite a sensation produced when they arrive. Crowds are assembled of all ages and stations of life to witness the sight. The number of boats is likewise astonishing; and their passengers all carry guns and pistols, to try their luck at the feathered strangers. They were so abundant on the island of Capri, at the entrance of the Gulf of Naples, that they constituted the chief source of revenue of the bishops of the place. There were one hundred and sixty thousand captured in one season. In China, and in many of the islands in the eastern seas, they are often so numerous as to obscure the sun in their flights.

The quail has been long famous for his pugnacious habits. He fights keenly and hard. The Greeks and Romans were great fighters of this bird; and the conqueror in a regular pitched battle was highly prized. Indeed, in such estimation was he held, that we are told that Augustus put a prefect of Egypt to death for having brought a conqueror to the table to be eaten. We find some of the middle age writers speaking of the combats with this bird, and comparing them to those between cocks. Henry III., King of Castile, employed much of his time in catching quails for the purpose of matching them in fights; and the Castilians generally hunted them morning and evening, and had regular combats with them at places adapted for the purpose. Scaliger tells us that the Italians have gardens purposely laid out to hunt them in; and which are fitted up in a very costly manner, and where, with the quail-pipes, they pursue the bird as a great amusement.

In his "Travels in Bokhara," Burnes tells us that "he arrived at the season of the quails, when every one who could escape from his other avocations was engaged in hawking, netting, or fighting these courageous little birds. Every Tuesday morning the chief had a meeting in his courtyard to encourage this sport. He used to send for us to witness it; it is by no means destitute of amusement, whether we regard the men or the birds; for chief, servant, and subject were here on an equality, the quails being the heroes, not the men. They are carried about in bags, and enticed to fight with each other for grain which is sprinkled between them. When the quail once runs, he is worthless, and immediately slain; but they seldom made a precipitate retreat. Nothing can exceed the passion of the Afghans for this kind of sport; almost every boy in the street may be seen with a quail in his hand, and crowds assemble in all parts of the city to witness their game battles."

These birds are also very abundant in India, and they are entrapped by various devices, and in great quantities, both for food and for fighting purposes. The Hindoos equip themselves with a frame-work of split bamboos, resembling the frame of a paper kite, the shape of the top of a coffin, and the height of a man, to which green bushes are fastened, leaving two loop-holes to see through, and one lower down for their rod to be inserted through. This frame-work, which is very light, they fasten before them, when they are in the act of catching birds, by which means they have both the hands at liberty, and are completely concealed from the view of the birds. The rod which they use is about twenty-four feet long, resembling a fishing-rod; the parts are inserted within one another, and the whole contained within a walking-stick. They also carry with them horse-hair nooses of different sizes and strength, which they fasten to the rod;

likewise bird-lime, and a variety of calls for the different kinds of birds, with which they imitate them to the greatest nicety. They take with them likewise two lines, to which horse-hair nooses are attached for catching larger birds, and a bag or net to carry their game. Thus equipped, they sally forth; and as they proceed through the different covers they use calls for such birds as generally resort there, which from constant practice is well known to them, and, if birds answer their call, they prepare accordingly for catching them. Supposing it to be a bevy of quails, they continue calling them, until they get quite close; they then arm the top of their rod with a feather smeared with bird-lime, and pass it through the loop-hole in their frame of ambush, and to which they continue adding other parts, until they have five or six out, which they use with great dexterity, and touch one of the quails with a feather which adheres to them: they then withdraw the rod, arm it again, and touch three or four more in the same manner, before they attempt to snare any of them.

The quail lays more eggs in some countries than in others. In Italy and France, from fifteen to twenty is the average number; but in hotter sections of the Asiatic and African continents, twenty-five and thirty are sometimes found in one nest. This large number of eggs accounts in some measure for their great numbers. Some sportsmen maintain that they hatch twice a year; but this does not seem to be a well-established fact. Where a second bevy of quails may have been met with, it has, perhaps, been the result of accident, and not fairly ascribable to any general law of increase.

An old writer says:—"The Isle of Thanet was formerly so famous for them, either from its vicinity to the French shore, or the quantity of grain which is cultivated, that people come from great distances for the express

purpose of quail shooting; of late years, however, their numbers have considerably decreased, but still the sportsmen in the beginning of September may commonly kill from two to three brace a day. Along the banks of the Thames, below Purfleet, several farmers and sportsmen have assured me that about the beginning of November, a time at which the departure of the main body has taken place, a small number of quails make their appearance, and continue during the winter always at a short distance from the river's edge; these are evidently the young birds of the second bevy, who, for some reason, seek that particular situation after the migration of the rest of their species."

Quail shooting is chiefly confined in Britain to some particular sections of it: to the counties of Essex, Kent, Cambridge-shire, Suffolk, and Norfolk. The bevies seldom exceed ten in number, and are generally under that figure. They are to be found in the evenings feeding in corn-fields, and sometimes they lie remarkably still, and may readily be approached, and at other times they are as wild as possible.

A writer of travels in the East says:—"In Egypt, when these birds arrive in the month of September, I have more than once seen the Arabs killing and laming them by throwing short sticks at them. During the time that the Capitani Bey blockaded the harbour of Alexandria with his Turkish squadron, one of the Greek sailors of his ship had caught two or three which had perched on the rigging. The Mussulman rewarded him generously, and desirous of varying the hard fare which a blockading squadron has usually to sustain, by a more ample supply of such a delicate rarity, promised a piastre for every quail that should be brought to him. In a few days, the riggings, sails, and yards, were covered with flocks of quails; great numbers were caught, of course, and every one was brought into the cabin, as the price

had been so liberally fixed. To escape the dilemma of either ruining his purse or breaking his promise, the Capitani Bey resorted to the alternative of standing out to sea, as by removing from the coast he got rid of the visits of these expensive strangers."

The partridge is too well known to require minute description: it appears to be confined within the boundaries of Europe, everywhere frequenting cultivated districts and rich corn-lands; hence its increase is encouraged by the conversion of heath, moorland, and wood, into fields of waving grain. The pairing-time of these birds is about the beginning of February, at which season the males engage in desperate conflicts; and as they are more numerous than the females, the successful combatant in one battle has often to renew the strife with other rivals. The female produces her eggs about the latter part of May or beginning of June, depositing them in a rough nest or shallow depression of the ground, in a corn-field or clover-field, under a tuft of grass in a meadow, or amongst whin bushes. They vary from twelve to twenty in number, and are of a greenish ash colour. So close does the female sit, and so unmoved is she by

apprehension of danger, that she frequently falls a victim to the mower's scythe while brooding over her nest. The young, after three weeks' incubation, are hatched in June, or from the beginning to the middle of July; and the male immediately joins his mate in the care of the young brood. From the earliest times the partridge has been celebrated for the various artifices employed to draw off the attention of men and dogs from the young, which, at the warning call of their parents, have dispersed, and lie cowering in the grass or amidst the standing corn; nor is this all—they will fight resolutely in defence of their brood, and have been known to engage in combat with the kite and the crow, and accomplish their object. The feeding-time of the partridge occupies two or three hours after sunrise, and again in the evening before sunset. The interval they employ in basking and dusting their plumage in sunny places, in preening their feathers, and in taking short flights from one spot to another. They roost at night upon the ground, near the centre of a field, in a bare spot, and at sunset may be heard calling to each other, till the covey, which sits crowded together, is complete.



THE PARTRIDGE.