

MY FIRST STAG.



do not envy the man who does not look back with feelings of energy and delight to the day, the hour, and the wild scene, when he killed unaided his first stag. Of course, I refer only to those who have the same love of wild sport, and the same enjoyment in the romantic solitude and scenery of the mountain and glen that I have myself; shooting tame partridges and hares from the back of a well-trained shooting-pony in a stubble-field does not, in my eyes, constitute a sportsman, though there is a certain interest attached even to this kind of pursuit, arising more from observing the clever-

ness and instinct of the dogs employed than in killing the birds. But far different is the enjoyment derived from stalking the red deer in his native mountain, where every energy of the sportsman must be called into active use before he can command success.

Well do I remember the mountain side where I shot my first stag, and though many years have since passed by, I could now, were I to pass through that wild and lovely glen, lay my hand on the very rock under which he fell.

Though a good rifle-shot—indeed few were much better—there seemed a charm against my killing a deer. On two occasions, eagerness and fear of missing shook my hand when I ought to have killed a fine stag. The second that I ever shot at came in my way in a very singular manner. I had been looking during the chief part of the day for deer, and had, according to appointment, met an attendant with my gun and pointers at a particular spring in the

hills, meaning to shoot my way home. This spring was situated in the midst of a small green spot, like an oasis in the desert, surrounded on all sides by a long stretch of broken black ground. The well itself was in a little round hollow, surrounded by high banks.

I was resting here, having met my gillie, and was consoling myself for my want of success by smoking a cigar, when, at the same moment, a kind of shadow came across me, and the pointers, who were coupled at my feet, pricked up their ears and growled, with their eyes fixed on some object behind me. My keeper, who had been out with me all day, was stretched on his back, in a half slumber, and the gillie was kneeling down taking a long draught at the cool well, with the enjoyment of one who had had a long toiling walk on a hot August day. Turning my head lazily to see what had roused the dogs and had cast its shadow across me, instead of a shepherd, as I expected—could I believe my eyes!—there stood a magnificent stag, with the fine-shaped horns peculiar to those of the Sutherland forests. He was standing on the bank immediately behind me, and not above fifty yards off, looking with astonishment at the group before him, who had taken possession of the very spot where he had intended to slake his thirst. The deer seemed too much astonished to move, and for a moment I was in the same dilemma. The rifle was on the ground just behind the slumbering Donald. I was afraid the deer would be off out of sight if I got up to take it, or if I called loud enough to awake Donald. So I was driven to the necessity of giving him a pretty severe kick, which had the effect of making him turn on his side and open his eyes with a grunt. "The rifle, Donald, the rifle," I whispered, holding out my hand. Scarcely knowing what he was at, he instinctively stretched out his hand to feel for it and held it out to me. All

this takes some time to describe, but did not occupy a quarter of a minute. At the same instant that I got the rifle, the gillie lifted up his head from the water, and half turning saw the stag, and also saw that I was about to shoot at him. With a presence of mind worthy of being better seconded, he did not raise himself from his knees, but remained motionless, with his eyes fixed on the deer. As I said before, I had never killed a deer, and my hand shook and my heart beat. I fired, however, with, as I thought, a good aim at his shoulder. The deer at the instant turned round. After firing my shot, we all (including Donald, who by this time comprehended what was going on) ran to the top of the bank to see what had happened, as the deer disappeared the instant I fired. I had, I believe, missed him altogether, though he looked as large as an ox, and we saw him going at a steady gallop over the wide flat. Donald had out the glass immediately, and took a steady sight at him, but having watched the noble animal, as he galloped up the opposite slope and stood for two or three minutes on the summit, looking back intently at us, he shut the telescope with a jerk that threatened to break every glass, and giving a grunt vastly expressive of disgust, returned to the well, where he took a long draught. His only remark at the time was, "There's no the like of that stag in the country; weel do I mind seeing him last year when shooting ptarmigan up yonder, and not a bullet had I. The deil's in the rifle, that she did na kill him; and he'll cross the river before he stops." It required some time and some whisky also to restore Donald to his usual equanimity.

This was Saturday. On the Monday following, at a very early hour, Donald appeared, and after his morning salute of "It's a fine day sir," he added, "There will be some deer about the west shoulder of the hill above Alt-na-

cahr. Whenever the wind is in the air it is now, they feed about the burn there." We agreed to walk across to that part of the ground, and were soon *en route*. Bran galloped round us baying joyously, as if he expected we should have good luck. We had not gone half a mile from the house when we met one of the prettiest girls in the country, tripping along the narrow path, humming a Gaelic air, and looking bright and fresh as the morning. "How are you all at home, Nanny, and how is your father getting on? Does he see any deer on the hill?" said I. Her father was a shepherd not far from the house, and she was then going down on some errand to my servants. "We are all no' that bad thank you, sir, except mother, who still has the trouble on her. Father says that he saw some hinds and a fine stag yesterday as he crossed the hill to the kirk; they were feeding on the top of Alt-na-cahr, and did na mind him a bit."

Donald looked at me, with a look full of importance, at this confirmation of his prophecy. "'Deed, sir, that's a bonnie lass, and as gude as she is bonnie. It's just gude luck our meeting her; if we had met that auld witch, her mother, not a beast would we have seen the day." I have heard of Donald turning home again if he met an old woman when starting on any deer-stalking excursion. The young pretty girl, however, was a good omen in his eyes. We passed through the woods, seeing here and there a roebuck standing gazing at us, as we crossed some grassy glade where he was feeding. On the rocks, near the top of the woods, Donald took me to look at a trap he had set, and in it we found a beautiful marten cat, which we killed, and hid amongst the stones—another good omen in Donald's eyes.

On we went, taking a careful survey of the ground here and there. At a loch whose Gaelic name I do not remember, we saw a vast number of wild ducks, and at the farther extremity

of it a hind and calf feeding. We waited here for some time, and I amused myself with watching the two deer as they fed, unconscious of our neighbourhood, and from time to time drank at the burn which supplied the loch. We then passed over a long, dreary tract of brown and broken ground, till we came to the picturesque-looking place where we expected to find the deer—a high conical hill, rising out of rather flat ground, which gave it an appearance of being of a greater height than it really was. We took a most careful survey of the slope on which Donald expected to see the deer. Below was an extensive level piece of heather, with a burn running through it in an endless variety of windings, and fringed with green rushes and grass, which formed a strong contrast to the dark-coloured moor through which it made its way, till it emptied itself into a long narrow loch, beyond which rose Bar Cleebriach and some more of the highest mountains in Scotland. In vain we looked and looked, and Donald at last shut up his telescope in despair. "They are no' here the day," was his remark. "But what is that, Donald?" said I, pointing to some bluish-looking object I saw at some distance from us rising out of the heather. The glass was turned towards it, and after having been kept motionless for some time, he pronounced it to be the head and neck of a hind. I took the glass, and while I was looking at it, I saw a fine stag rise suddenly from some small hollow near her, stretch himself, and lie down again. Presently six more hinds and a two-year-old stag got up, and after walking about for a few minutes, they, one by one, lay down again, but every one seemed to take up a position commanding a view of the whole country. We crept back a few paces, and then getting into the course of the burn, got within three hundred yards of the deer, but by no means whatever could we get nearer. The stag was a

splendid fellow with ten points, and regular and fine-shaped horns. Bran winded them, and watched us most earnestly, as if to ask why we did not try to get at them. The sensible dog, however, kept quite quiet, as if aware of the importance of not being seen or heard. Donald asked me what o'clock it was; I told him that it was just two. "Well, well, sir, we just wait here till three o'clock, when the deer will get up to feed, and most likely the brutes will travel towards the burn. The Lord save us, but yon's a muckle beast." Trusting to his experience, I waited patiently, employing myself in attempting to dry my hose by wringing them, and placing them in the sun. Donald took snuff and watched the deer, and Bran laid his head on his paws as if asleep, but his sharp ear and eye, pricked up on the slightest movement, showed that he was ready for action at a moment's warning. As nearly as possible at three o'clock they did get up and feed: first the hinds rose and cropped a few mouthfuls of the coarse grass near them, looking at and waiting for their lord and master, who, however, seemed lazily inclined, and would not move; the young stag fed steadily on towards us.

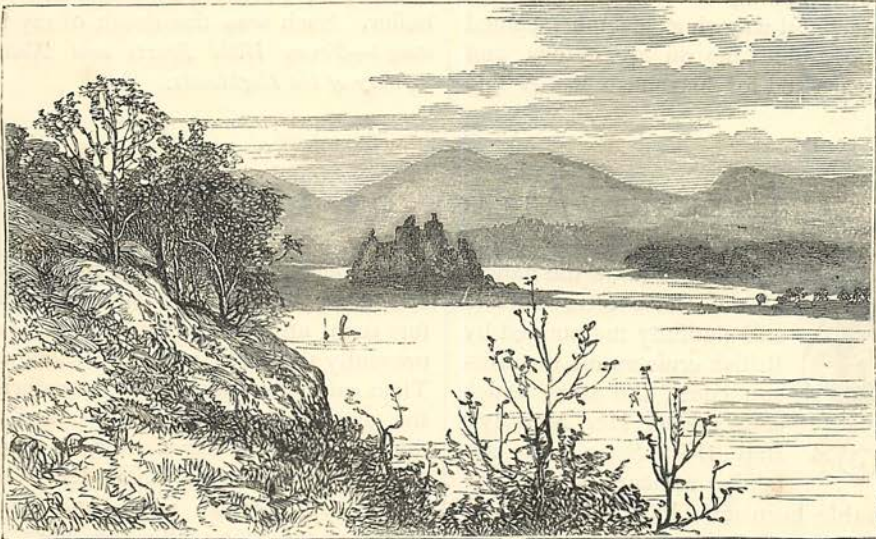
Frequently the hinds stopped and turned back to their leader, who remained quite motionless, excepting that now and then he scratched a fly off his flank with his horn, or turned his head towards the hillside when a grouse crowed or a plover whistled. The young stag was feeding quietly within a hundred and fifty yards of us, and we had to lie flat on the ground now and then to escape his observation. The evening air had already begun to feel chill, when suddenly the object of our pursuit jumped up, stretched himself, and began feeding. Not liking the pasture close to him, he trotted at once down into the flat ground right away from us. Donald uttered a Gaelic oath, and I fear I added an English one.

The stag which had been feeding so near us stood for a minute to watch the others, who were all now several hundred yards away, grazing steadily. I aimed at him, but just as I was about to fire he turned away, leaving nothing but his haunch in view, and went after the rest. Donald applauded me for not shooting at him, but told me that our case was hopeless, and that we had better make our way home and attempt no more, as they were feeding in so open a place that it was impossible to get at them; even Bran yawned and rose as if he too had given up all hope. "I will have one try, Donald; so hold the dog." "You need na fash yourself, sir; they are clean out of all hope and reason." I determined to make an effort before it became dusk; so leaving Donald, I set off down the burn, looking for some hollow place that might favour my getting up to them, but I could find none; at last it struck me that I might by chance get up with a long shot by keeping a small hillock, which was in the middle of the plain, between me and the deer. The hillock was not two feet high, and all depended on the animals keeping together and not outflanking me. On I went, not on my hands and knees, but crawling like a snake, and never rising even to my knee. I could see their hind quarters as they walked away, feeding, however, most eagerly, and when they looked up I lay still flatter on the ground, with my face buried in the heather. They appeared, however, not to suspect danger in the open plain, but often looked anxiously towards the burn or the rocky-side of the mountain. One old long-legged hind kept me in a constant state of alarm, as she frequently looked in my direction, turning her ears as if to catch some suspicious sound. As for the stag, he never looked about him once, leaving that to the hinds. I at last got within about a hundred yards of the whole of them; as they fed in a group, turned

away from me, I could not get a shot at anything but their hind quarters, and I did not wish to shoot unless I could get a fair broadside towards me.

While waiting for an opportunity, still flat on the ground, a grouse-cock walked out of the heather close to me, and strutted on with head erect, and his bright eyes fixed on me till he came to a little hillock, where he stopped and began to utter a note of alarm. Instantly every deer left off eating. I saw that no time was to be lost, and raised myself on my elbow, and with cocked

play after the hinds, who were galloping up a gentle slope of the hill. The poor beast was evidently moving with the greatest difficulty and pain; sometimes coming to his knees and then recovering himself with a strong effort, he still managed to keep not far behind them. I sat down in utter despair; looking round, too, for Donald and Bran, I could see nothing of them. Between anxiety and vexation I did not know what to do. All at once I saw the hinds dash away in different directions, and the next moment my gallant Bran ap-



A HIGHLAND LOCH.

rifle waited for the hinds to move, that I might get at the stag, who was in the midst of them. The hinds soon saw me and began to trot away, but their leader seemed determined to see what the danger was, and before he started, turned round to look towards the spot where the grouse was, giving me a good standing shot at his shoulder. I immediately touched the trigger, feeling at the same time sure of my aim. The ball went true, and down he fell. I began reloading, but before I had half done the stag was up again and making

peared in the midst of them. I shouted with joy. On came the dog, taking no notice of the hinds, but making straight for the stag, who stood still for an instant, and then rushed with apparently full vigour down the hill. Down they came towards the burn, the dog not five yards behind the stag, but unable to reach his shoulder (the place where he always struck his game). In a few minutes deer and hound went headlong and seemingly both together into the burn. Donald appeared running like a lunatic; with good judgment he had,

when I left him, gone to cut off the deer in case I wounded one and it took up the hill.

As good luck would have it, the hinds had led off the stag right up to where Donald and Bran were, notwithstanding his inclination to go the other way. I ran to see what had become of them in the burn, expecting to find the stag at bay. When I got there, however, it was all over. The deer had probably tumbled from weakness, and Bran had got his fangs well into the throat of the poor brute before he could rise again. The gallant dog, when I was up with him, lay down panting, with his fore-paws on the deer, and wagging his tail, seemed to congratulate me on my victory, and to be caressed for his share it. A fine

stag he was, in perfect order, with noble antlers. Donald added to my satisfaction by applauding my manner of getting up to him, adding that he never would have thought it possible to kill a stag on such bare and flat ground. Little did I feel the fatigue of our three hours' walk, two of them in the dark and hard rain. We did not go home, but went to a shepherd's house, whose inhabitants were at evening prayer when we arrived; we did not interrupt them, but afterwards the wife prepared us a capital supper of eggs and fresh trout, which we devoured with vast relish before the peat fire, our wet clothes steaming all the time like a boiler. Such was the death of my first stag!—From *Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands*.

GALLANT ATTACK ON A SHARK.



So those who know the nature of the chase after slavers still dutifully maintained by British cruisers off the African coast, the story which comes from Her Majesty's ship *Wild Swan* will certainly appear one of remarkable heroism. In the seas which wash that torrid shore abound almost every kind of sharks, together with many a monster without a name—and woe to the unfortunate individual who chances to fall in amongst them! With a greedy haste that affords little time for escape, he is bitten in pieces, divided amidst the predatory herd, and disappears as completely as though he were the merest lobworm. Such an incident as this was the cause of the following brave deed.

Lying off the dreary coast of Mozambique, the look-out on the *Wild Swan* espied a slave dhow, and chase was immediately given. In vain the piratical craft cracked on canvas, and

endeavoured to escape; the British man-of-war was too swift and too well handled for such an attempt to succeed, and presently the dhow was safe alongside. Then came the process of transferring the slaves which were on board the doomed vessel to her captor, an operation often of some difficulty in the treacherous African seas; and thus it came about that while the work was going on a little slave boy slipped from the ship's side, and fell into the water. It was but a moment, yet already the chance of a morsel had been marked, and one of the sharks which had closely followed the dhow in hope of assisting at some such disaster instantly darted upon the poor lad, and with one snap of the jaws bit off the right leg at the knee. As the blood tinged the water, the attention of other monsters of the same swarm was attracted, and one of these, arriving on the scene, severed the other leg of the boy. Just then an English sailor on the *Wild Swan*, fully aware of all the peril he encountered, sprang