

Pruning the Great Hedge of Meikleour.

BY ALLAN BLAIR.

Illustrations from Photographs by the Author.



AMERICA boasts of its big trees, but "puir auld Scotland" is the locale of the Beech Hedge, the highest hedge known, one of the arboreal wonders of the world.

The hedge is situated about four miles from the popular summer resort of Blairgowrie, and near by Meikleour, one of the prettiest little villages in Scotland. Bordering the grounds of Meikleour House, the property of the Marquis of Lansdowne, and presently tenanted by the Duke of Bedford, the hedge extends along the side of the Perth Road for nearly half a mile, and attains a height of 100ft. It is believed to have been planted in 1745, and it is stated that men working at the wall, or dyke, in front of it hurried off to take their part in the last struggle of

Prince Charlie at Culloden, in 1746. The hedge is situated in a most lovely locality, and approaching it from Blairgowrie the visitor traverses a roadway bordered by magnificent trees, a fit preparation for the sylvan triumph waiting at his journey's end.

Our first photograph shows the hedge in its midsummer glory. Standing at the top of the Craw Law, as the hill beside the hedge is called, one sees before him a beautiful

wall of greenery, solid in texture, and varied in the delicate colourings of the beech. The first feeling is one of astonishment at the size of the hedge, and this is succeeded by an admiration for the proprietors of the estate who, through all these years, by judicious and systematic pruning, have retained the characteristics of a hedge in the massive specimen now before us.

The hedge is pruned to a height of 80ft., and, as can easily be imagined, this is a work of no mean magnitude, and not to be undertaken lightly. It is ten years since it was last done, and the writer was fortunate in securing several photographs at the pruning operations in April of this year. The pruning, which lasts about three weeks, is performed by the men on the estate, under the superintendence of Mr. D. Matheson, the land steward.

Three men are usually employed on the work—two at the actual work of pruning, while the third remains on the road to see that no damage is caused by the falling branches; but on the occasion of our visit only two were engaged on the work. Naturally, the foresters' clothes do not receive the tenderest treatment, and they are each presented with a pair of new trousers on the completion of the work.



THE HEDGE IN ITS GLORY.



CUTTING THE UNDERGROWTH.

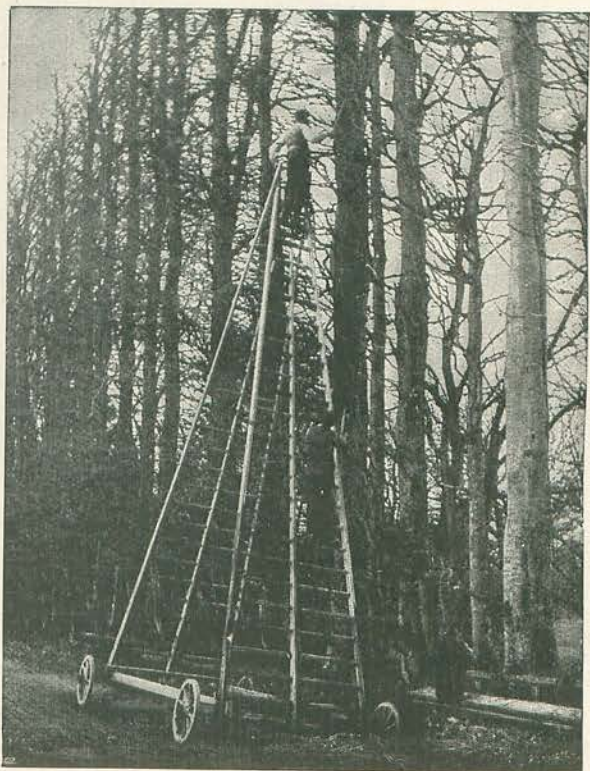
Arriving at the hedge in the early morning we were in time to get a snap-shot of the foresters' advent on the scene of their labours. The photograph at the end of this article shows clearly the height to which the hedge is pruned from the special ladder, seen in the distance; above that the pruning is carried on by the foresters climbing the main trunks and cutting the branches with pruning-hooks. The first part of the trimming is the cutting of the undergrowth as high as the men can reach. The photograph above showing the men at this stage of the work also gives a good representation of the old, moss-grown dyke, built by the heroes of Culloden before they left for that closing scene of "the '45"—we dare hardly call it the rebellion of '45.

The next photograph shows the men at work on the ladder specially constructed for this operation. The ladder is made after the manner of the portable "steps" used in warehouses, but, of course, on a much larger scale. It is a little over 30ft. high, and as a ladder of this size is rather unwieldy, it is mounted on four wheels, by means of which it is possible for the men to shift it as they advance with their labours.

The roadway slopes down towards the hedge; this gives the ladder an inclination to the hedge, so that it is not easily overturned; still, during a heavy wind the men find it impossible to continue at their work, owing to the oscillation of the ladder and the danger involved.

After the men have pruned to the full extent of the ladder there is still about 50ft. to be pruned. To accomplish this the men climb the trees forming the hedge, and from this dizzy height lop off the extending branches. The next photograph depicts them at this hazardous task. High

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USING THE LADDER.

up, silhouetted against the sky, is "Dougal" wielding his pruning-hook; while lower down, in the neighbouring tree, is his companion, poised on an outstanding branch, contributing his quota to the work of preserving the symmetry of this monument of Nature's handiwork. A small saw at the end of a pole is used to lop off the branches that cannot otherwise be reached. This is found preferable to the averruncator, as the worker can use it with one hand, while with the other he steadies himself on his elevated perch; both hands are necessary to work the averruncator, and, as might be supposed, both hands cannot be spared for this purpose.

In climbing, the men are not roped to the hedge in any way; and, dangerous though the work may appear to the casual observer, the men take it as part of the "day's darg," and no accident has ever happened. Each man carries in his pocket a piece of string, so that should he chance to drop his pruning-hook, he lowers the string, his companion on the road ties it to the pruning-hook, and the workman, pulling in the string, recovers his tool without the necessity of leaving his position. Both men shown in the photograph were employed on this same job ten years ago, a fact that speaks well for employer and employed.



THE PRUNERS ALOFT.