

THE MYSTERIES OF GAME-REARING.

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It is well known amongst renters of Scottish shootings that whilst a live grouse is valued at ten shillings a dead bird is rarely worth more than a crown in the Leadenhall Market. This to many seems a somewhat strange reversal of the old adage, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The reason of course lies in the great charm attaching to moorland sport, scenic surroundings, etc., and to wild fashion possibly not a little. Between the pheasant alive and the pheasant dead the misproportion is even greater perhaps; but on account of a variety of different circumstances—variation in soil, climate, temperature and surrounding population, the mining districts not being favourable—the figures cannot very well be worked out.

Not being in the position of the jaded writer of a leading article for a morning daily on October 1, we will leave out the history of the "glorious bird of Colchis," from the banks of the river Phasis, and go round with the keeper to see how it is brought into existence, in anything like Asiatic splendour, by a common barn-door fowl. Tristram Shandy's first chapter opened in the egg; so does that of the bird we wish to describe.

The anxious keeper, wishing to show a good head of birds to his master and guests when coverts come to be shot in December or January, will first set in order his hatching boxes, seeing that they are waterproof, well ventilated and well lined with dry sand at the bottom, though on dry sandy soils—as with the partridge or the green plover—Mother Earth will prove the best

sole for the nest. The boxes ready, he will require for a first hatching some 500 eggs, all of which should be the first laid of the season and guaranteed perfectly fresh. These pheasant eggs may have been procured from poachers, but most of them will arrive carefully packed in moss from men engaged in the business, and who keep the hen pheasant, whose arithmetic is not of the best, going on laying long after she has formed a full nest or *nide* by abstracting one daily with a pronged stick when she is off feeding. To hatch out these eggs—fifteen to seventeen eggs being allowed to each—some three

dozen hens will be required, Dorkings, or half-breeds between Dorkings and game, being preferred. All of them must be good steady cluckers, warranted not to rise, but to sit still and keep close to their charge under any circumstances. Herein comes the first difficulty of



THE HATCHING BOXES: SPRINKLING THE EGGS WITH WARM WATER.

pheasant rearing. Pheasant eggs being each worth more than a dozen of hen eggs, the foster-mothers are given a trial for four or five days on the latter. If they show a disposition to stay at home and do their duties, their charge will be duly assigned them; if the inclination however is to go "gadding about" they will be quickly returned to the farms from which they came. The terror of the keeper however is the cunning gipsy which will assume all the airs of a devoted mother, sit close to her eggs for a time, then when the round of inspection is over get up complacently, first on one leg and then on the other, and survey the still surroundings. At the end of the hatching season these false boarders will not show one single chick towards their keep, let alone the

value of the eggs with which they were entrusted. Some of them have been possibly nursing their wrath, like Tam O'Shanter's dame, to keep it warm, but the eggs have in the meantime grown as cold as marble.



AMONG THE COOPS.

The morning parade for feeding, which lasts about ten minutes, is always interesting, each old dowager, with a piece of string tied to her leg to prevent her from straying away from her particular saucer of water, showing many airs of comic dignity. Advantage is taken when the hens are off the nest to water the eggs, care being taken that the applied water and the eggs are, at this period of hatching, exactly of the same temperature. In regard to this it may be noted that should, by mistake, a bird taken from one nest be changed to the nest or box of another after the feeding parade, the chances are that the eggs will not hatch, and a double loss be thus entailed.

About the twenty-third or twenty-fourth day, sometimes indeed as early as the twenty-second, the young birds arrive and bring with them fresh troubles. Whether tormented by parasites or not, or thinking that in her long confinement the place has not been properly swept out, she commences a regular spring cleaning, shaking mats vigorously with wings, and tearing up the carpets of moss and sand with her claws. When this cleaning fit is on she is apt to destroy one or two of her young chicks, but the watchful keeper always removes a few till she has fairly settled down again.

The old hens are now taken out in the

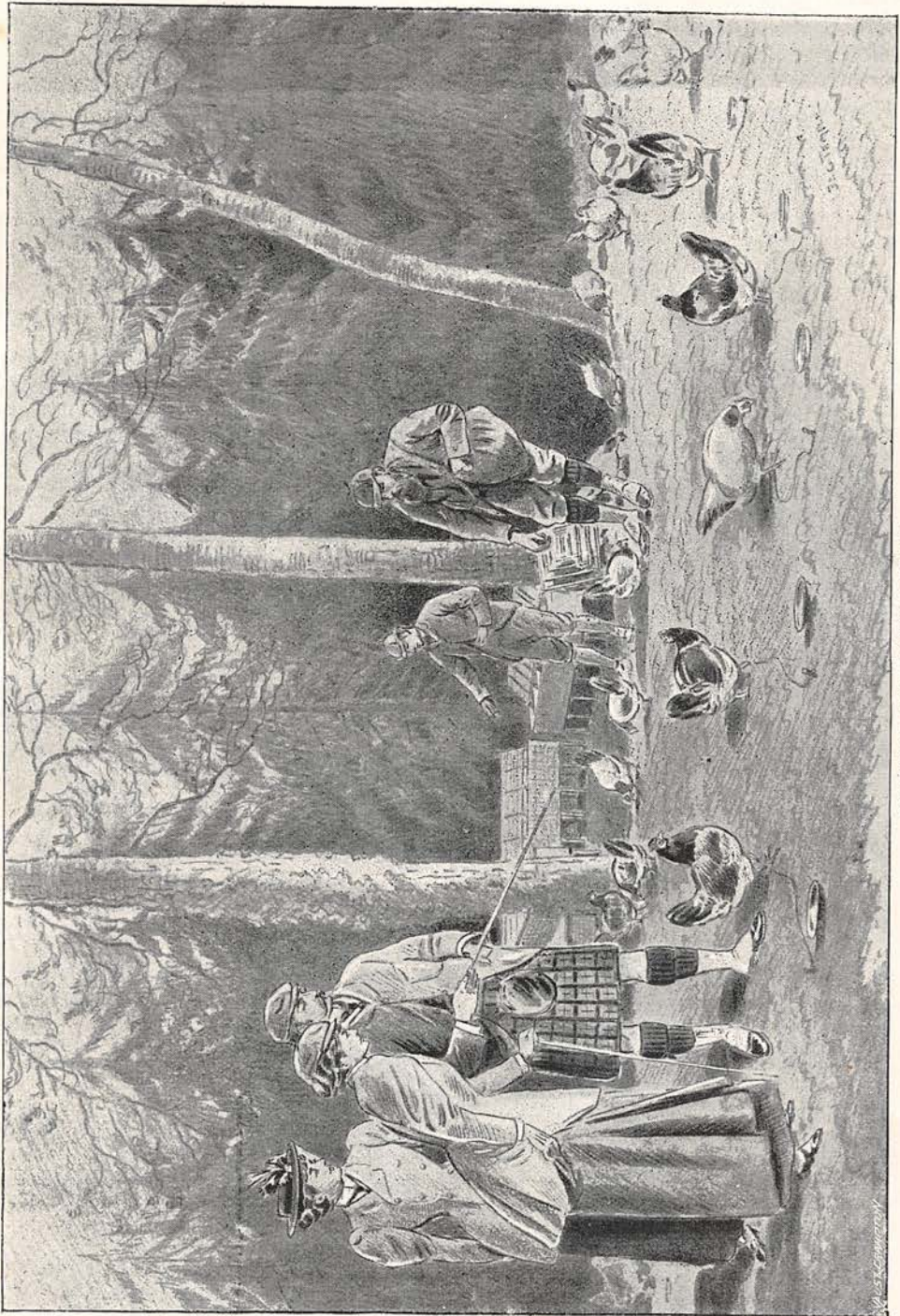
coops to some sheltered piece of ground, and if there are any ant heaps about so much the better. The young pheasant, be he sluggard or not, considers well the ways of the ant and gets fat, ants in his native Asia being indeed his natural food. Hawks, weasels, hedgehogs and cats now evince a great appetite for pheasant, and they have to be very carefully guarded against. The cat is possibly the most dangerous marauder of the lot, and is shown no mercy if found in the vicinity, in fact his very presence is considered ample proof of his guilt; indeed the keeper's own cat would stand very small chance of a reprieve. Sandy, the coop-minder at the Marquis of Breadalbane's magnificent pheasant-rearing establishments, was very sore against grimalkin in any form. "But," was asked of him, "what would you do, Sandy, if it should be one of the Taymouth Castle cats?" "That would mak' no difference," was the reply. "Not even the Marchioness's own cat?" "Ah weel," he said, "that would be a verra awkward case; but cats are so much alike one can be allowed to make mistakes about them." A cunning twinkle in his gray eye showed that the mistake would not be found out till Judge Lynch had done his duty.

The feeding of a head of artificially-reared pheasants is attended with as much cost, nay, in many cases a great deal more, than a goodly-sized herd of cows, as, whether the birds are luxurious in their tastes or not, they are from first to last literally fed like fighting cocks, the heroes of the cock-pits—



AN AFTERNOON REST.

before cocking was relegated to the list of inhumane British sports—after the style of the Newcastle collier's pup, having given them more delicacies than "our t'owd dawg could

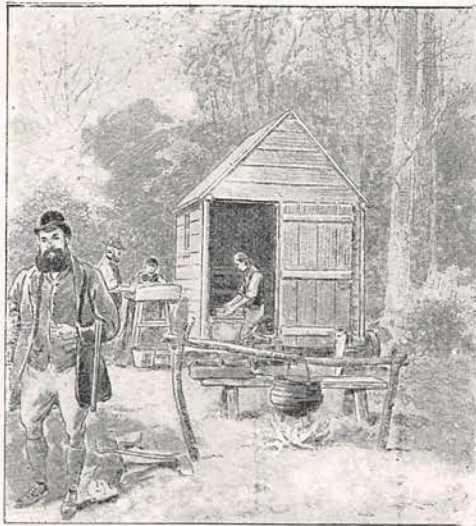


FEEDING THE BROOD HENS.

ever *think o' himsen.*" In the infant stage a custard, prepared in the proportion of fourteen eggs to a quart of milk broken into a pail and beaten up with a stick, recommends that eminent sportsman and authority, Mr. Lloyd Price, "this to be followed by Spratt's Crissel, or the flesh of rabbits boiled and passed through a sausage machine." To prepare the food a huge boiler is necessary; also a large square board upon which the hundreds of hard-boiled eggs required may be chopped up and mixed with maize, rice, barley, and numerous other grains, seeds and condiments.

When the constitutions of the young birds have been made strong enough to withstand the usual diseases of pheasant poulthood—which are many—upon custard, rice and meal, they will be given much more sumptuous fare, in order that they may gather weight, and so eventually gain power on the wing. As a morning feed the birds show great partiality for Spratt's Patent Game Meal. The more sporting the character of the young pheasant and the less like his barn-door mother, the greater the value from a shooting point of view. For the first

three or four weeks its daily fare will run in the style of the menu of a Transatlantic liner, something like as follows:—*Breakfast:* Custard, crushed wheat, millet seed, chopped lettuce, bruised hemp, and chopped potatoes. *Dinner:* The same, with possibly boiled rice and chopped artichoke. *Supper:* Custard, oatmeal, groats, buckwheat, dry dough and rape seed. From about six weeks to six months old the birds will be given abundance of oats, maize, and also a liberal supply of green foods, such as they would get in the fields. The keepers will also search out for them all the ant heaps they can find, ants being, as already remarked, their greatest luxury. In some parts of Norfolk and Suffolk the ant heaps are so common that the coops are shifted in the manner of sheep on pastures, the young birds finding out the dainties themselves. Eventually the birds are turned into the woodlands. Then is a fresh period of anxiety to the keeper, two-legged enemies being feared. The mustering of a large house party, a banging of guns, a smell of powder, a load of mangled birds hurried off in the game cart, and the keeper's cares are over for another year.



PREPARING FOOD FOR YOUNG PHEASANTS.