

ever object to a bit of poaching; and as to informing about it, where can you find anybody so beggarly mean as to inform of a fellow for a bit of sport?"

"Here," said a voice, and a man sprang upon the wall close beside the Purdees. The sudden appearance of the last comer startled all the young men, for not a sound had been heard until his sudden answer and movement revealed to them Wyatt, the most notable game-keeper in the country.

This man was hated and feared by all the poaching fraternity; and he knew it, and seemed to glory in the fact. Personally he seemed to be destitute of a perception of danger, although times and again he had received threatening letters, and many a scowl and growling menace, which plainly and unmistakably told him, that his life was in danger. Yet in the darkest night and the loneliest places he never hesitated. Many were the conflicts in which he had been personally engaged; but strange to say beyond a few trifling scratches and bruises, he had escaped unhurt. Some of the more superstitious, believed that he was aided by supernatural powers, and strange rumours were current which the simple-minded, credulous class swallowed with all accompanying exaggerations of strange sights, and sounds and the most marvellous performances, in which he had been the principal actor. No wonder that the soundless sudden appearance of such a man, at such a time, startled and disconcerted even the two Purdees. Surveying the two Crooks with a meaning malicious grin, he said—"Why Dan, you are quite philosophic on the subject of poaching; it will be quite a treat for the Squire to-morrow, to hear your liberal and enlightened views. If you persevere in your studies you will become quite celebrated; perhaps he made president of the "Game Stealer's Association;" you see I call things by the right name. I heard sometime ago that you were taking lessons in the art, but I did not know where you practiced. Very good idea coming here to Purdee's place. I did not think of watching here."

"Oh!" said Ben, "the Purdees told you." Just what I thought," said Dan, "I thought they had put him up to it as

soon as he made his appearance. But never mind, it will be our turn some day."

"No, no," said Wyatt, "the Purdees have never spoken to me about you or your poaching."

"No, nor any one else," said David. "We have seen tracks of poaching, now and then, but we never spoke about it to anybody."

"Oh," said Wyatt, "I want nobody to tell me. I get all my information another way."

Then turning to the Purdees he said, "I am sorry, lads, to have to ask you as witnesses."

"Could you not manage without us?" enquired Samuel.

"I can if the Crooks will come forward in a manly way, but if not why I must make them. Now Crooks if you will come down in the morning by ten o'clock. I'll go with you to the Squire; and we'll try to settle this business as easily as possible. "Mind no dodging." Without waiting for their answer, he leapt from the wall and strode rapidly away. Early next morning the elder Crooks was up at Purdees when he found father and sons in their workshop. At the first he spoke in something like his ordinary way, but his features were evidently working with suppressed passion. He made enquiries respecting the night before, which were answered in a straightforward manner. He next suggested a method by which the gamekeeper might be outwitted; but to this suggestion there was no response for some time.

Then he pressed them on the score of neighbourship—then upbraided them with want of sincerity, and finally losing temper, became quite violent in his language. At length Mr. Purdee laid down his work and said.

"Neighbour Crooks, I never quarrel with anybody, and you know it, well enough; but I will not permit either you, or any other person to abuse my boys; and I tell you plainly, that you must either speak in a becoming manner, or leave the shop." Samuel and David Purdee were astonished at their father's sternness of manner, but their astonishment did not equal that of Crooks; he was speechless; apparently at a loss to frame an answer;