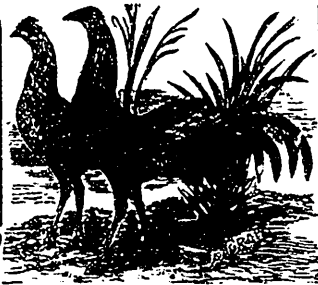




# DOMINION



# BAZAR



## AMATEUR'S AND

## FANCIER'S GUIDE

### TO PROFIT, AMUSEMENT, PET STOCK AND HOME INTERESTS.

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#### BIRDS IN THE SNOW.

BY OUIDA.

The day wore on slowly, a snowy, blustering, boisterous day, dark and dreary. When twilight fell the vicar had not come back. "There's reason in roosting eggs," thought Keziah. "I must let 'em out now. I'll tell him as they've been in all day, and he knows as me ain't a one to fib."

So she let them out. Rob rushed with a bound and shrank down the passage. Ray came with a slow step, wondering if letting them out would get a nurse into trouble.

"Master a rare late," said the man who did odd jobs. "If happen he'll sleep at aquire's!"

"Ay, I shouldn't wonder that he do," answered Keziah.

The squire's was the biggest house at Tamsleigh, the village where the furze cutter, Job Stevens, lay on his death-bed.

"Sure, he's staying at aquire's, and a more natural thing than what he often do," she thought, as she slid the bolts and bars and shut the shutters, and told the odd man that he had better sleep upon the premises, as master was away.

No one felt anxious. The vicar had gone to Tamsleigh and seeing how bitter and wild the day was, had said to sleep at his old friend's. What more likely?

The children had a merry time while the snow fell and the winds blew. Keziah was a merry soul by nature, and had all kinds of funny stories, and saying it was next but one to Christmas day, roasted apples for them and sucked the apples full of cloves and set them bobbing in a bowl of currant wine in the old game that Ben Johnson stings of in his carol.

It was quite late—quite 8 o'clock—when the children went to bed.

"And, please God take care of the birds out in the snow," Amen, said Ray at the close of his bedside prayers.

"Amen," said Rob, winking and sleepy.

No one was anxious at all that night, but when the morning came, and the noon passed, and that father had not returned, an alarm spread itself from the servants to the children.

The weather had become terrible. The snow fell perpetually, the air was very dark and the winds very rough, such a day had not been seen in Devon for over twenty years, and away where the seas was, ships and barks were tossing in the snow storm in some or all.

"Where can the master be?" remarked Keziah in great perplexity. It would be impossible to stay at the squire's at Tamsleigh, for the morning was Christmas day and there would be church by without its church service!

The parish was a very scattered one, a few farms, a few cottages, with miles between each, spread over the moorland, and about the vicarage and church itself there were only a few poor houses, the only house of any importance was the squire's over at Tamsleigh. The few people, however, who did live near, came—dropping in as the short day wore itself on, and each had some darker suggestion, some ghastlier remembrance than the last to offer in consolation.

Ray stood listening with big startled eyes. He was happy because his nurse had given him a sieve full of grain for 3 o

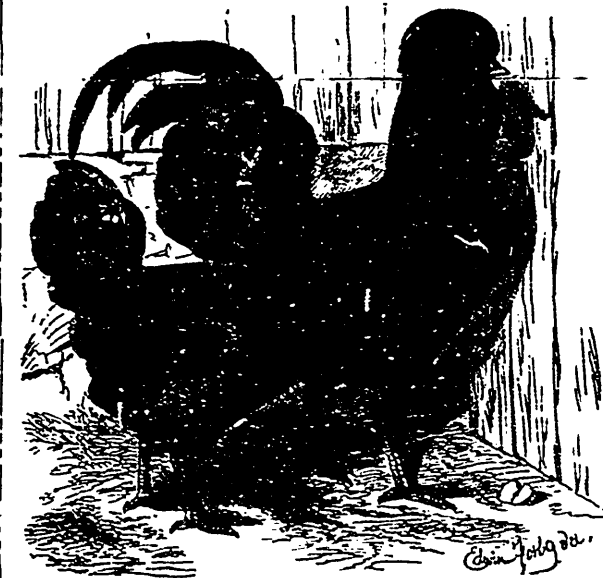
birds, yet he felt a dull sense of something dreadful being near. Rob sang, and reeled and shouted, and played at his pleasure, the terrible snow storm had no terrors for him.

"Is passing strange," said Keziah anxiously, and knew not what to do, for it was not weather to send man or beast over the moor, and the vicar might only scold if she did send, supposing he was safe and well at Tamsleigh, a great man, he always hated a "fuss."

She did not know what to do.

But at twilight, or rather just as the black day was merging into the yet darker night and the mounds of snow were rising higher and higher against windows and door, there came a poor old pedlar who had struggled through the storm with his pack on his back and was half frozen, and begged shelter.

He was a man well known in the district.



CREVECOGURS.

They had him in and set him in the chimney corner, and gave him melted ware and the promise of a bed, but scarce had he come to his full senses out of his cold and a fight than he asked for the vicar, and when he heard that as yet the master of the house was not at home he got upon his agitation, though his limbs were all stiff as a statue, with rheumatism.

But I passed his residence yesterday, are coming on home about Tamsleigh, he abouted. The Lord save us! the Lord save us. Sure as I be a living soul, he's lost on the moor.

The few neighbors who were gathered in the kitchen screamed aloud, and the children listened green pale.

"Art sure 'twas master?" cried Keziah. "Lord bless us, I be sure," reiterated the pedlar. "He gev me good even, and

said as how he'd be here long afore me, but I struck aside to take some books and eyes and thread to Dame Carew as she'd ordered of me, and so we part'd company; and I slep' at Carew's hut and come on in the morning. Lord save us! he's a great man!"

In the bustle and outcry that succeeded, no one noticed the children for a few moments, till Rob shrieked out.

"Raddie's dead, too!"

It was then seen that Ray had fainted. In a little while he was brought round, and opened his eyes bewilderedly.

Father wouldn't help the birds," he murmured, and shuddered and wept.

Keziah, with more grief on her shoulders than she felt it right for one lone woman to have to bear, carried Ray up to his little bed, and bidding him not to fret, as because there was always hope, ran down stairs, stormed at the pedlar for having been such a fool as to speak so be-

hind as how he'd be here long afore me, but I struck aside to take some books and eyes and thread to Dame Carew as she'd ordered of me, and so we part'd company; and I slep' at Carew's hut and come on in the morning. Lord save us! he's a great man!"

The woman sat over the fire, and sipped spiced wine, and told each other horrible tales, a thing their fathers and forefathers had done or shown, with many a "He says, says he," occurring in their narrative.

Keziah sat up by the bedside of Ray and Rob, Rob slept, but Ray lay wide awake, and ever and again he shivered and moaned. "Papa wouldn't help the birds, he wouldn't, and I know God was angry."

The long night wore away, the winds never ceasing to howl, the snow ever ceasing to fall. At daybreak the men returned, having found nothing. They said they had searched all the moor for eight miles, but in real truth, though they did not know it, they had scarcely been a mile from home, having only gone round and round in a circle, not seeing where they were in the darkness. The morning broke gray and dreary; the snow still fell, but the winds dropped. Keziah chose the youngest and strongest of the men, and bade him strive to get across to Tamsleigh. It was hard to do, and an errand of danger, for the paths were all obliterated, and communication of every kind stopped; but the man was a bold young fellow and promised to do his best. "Thou'g as for that," he muttered, "his reverence is a dead man if he's out all this freezin' night." The other men went up to the church tower and set the bells tolling, the wind had fallen, and it was possible that in the more distant houses they might be heard and some help or some news come.

It was now 11 o'clock in the morning, the hour at which the service of Christmas day should have begun. The church was a little dark, dismal place, here and there it had been brightened with a bit of holly or a bough of bear-berry tree, the vicar did not approve of such follies, and there was little done to relieve the bare stone walls: the square box of a pulpit, the tin, chancel, a small and dark as a dungeon. As the sea there cleared a little the women dropped in, in their red cloaks, and made a glow in the darkness, but they did not stay, for the church was very cold, and it seemed more cold and terrible having no prayer there on Christ's morn, and the pastor, maybe frozen dead in some snowdrift.

At the vicarage Keziah tried in vain to read the morning service to the children by the kitchen fire, her voice failed and their attention wandered. They were all grave and frightened, even the twin babies, and Ray sat in the window seat with his face pressed against the glass, quite silent.

The look of the boy frightened his nurse almost more than the loss of her master.

"He do take things to heart so," she said to herself, with a sigh.

It was of no use to try and read; she closed the log black prayer-book, and let the startled parsonage-comes in. Some of them had paddled many miles over the snow not to miss the blessing of the Christmas prayer, and they found the church empty and the vicar absent. All were sure that he was dead—sure yet, when a man, at great risk to himself, came over from Tamsleigh great house to say the squire trusted that his reverence had reached home safely.

"Didn't I tell ye truth ye unbelievin' Jews?" said the pedlar, who enjoyed his own importance as a sharer in this terrible history.

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