

*Natural History.*

## THE MUSK DEER.

BY A LADY SUBSCRIBER.

*Concluded.*

In searching for further information on the subject of the Musk, I have found that Sir Charles Linne has it described in the first volume of his "System of Nature," (the English edition is dated 1806.) His description is interesting, as it accords more than any other with Mountaineer's account of the Musk Deer, and he alone gives the size of the animal, which is about two and a half feet long. This is what Linne says of it: "*Moschus*. Horns 0: fore-teeth, lower, 8: tusks, upper solitary, projecting. *Moschus moschiferus*. A follicle near the navel; tail short. Inhabits Alpine mountains of Asia, Tonquin, and Siberia; lives solitary among the snowy peaks of rocks; gentle timid, not easily tamed; expert in leaping, running, climbing and swimming; flesh of the young good; about 2½ feet long. Head handsome, like the roe; fur soft, smooth, lax, varying by age and season, chiefly blackish brown above, beneath hoary, the younger animals marked with streaks or spots; near the prepuce is an oval bag, flat on one side, gibbous on the other, with a small orifice; in young animals empty; in the adult containing 1-2 drachms of oily, friable, brown matter, which is the true Musk; upper jaw longer.

I beg to apologize for interrupting the reader in the middle of a pleasant ramble among the Himalayan Mountains with his friend the hunter; but having now got all the information that is written upon the Musk Deer within my reach from the mouldy old authors, (who are by the reading public voted as bores,) I will promise to be done with this subject, and bid farewell to the little Musk Deer, not indeed without being grateful for the pleasure it has afforded me during some gloomy hours of winter. I now resign my situation, as "quill driver," to our "Mutual Friend."

I have often wondered whether the stories we read of, more particularly in tales of American forest life, of men living for months together solely on the produce of the rifle, be literally true or not. I have tried when away from the villages to do a little in that way myself and get my men to do it, but am obliged to confess with but indifferent success. The men were certainly the worst hands, and insisted it was impossible to subsist long without some farinaceous addition to the stock of flesh, plentiful and varied as it generally was, consisting of musk-deer and other venison, and wild mutton, and moonalls, snow pheasants and chuckers, in the way of feathered game. When inclined to be lazy, the want of a sufficient quantity of atta or rice was on these occasions a standing, and, to their minds, an unanswerable excuse.

When on full diet the customary daily ration for each man was one seer of grain of some kind or other; and they would never own this might be considerably reduced without any privation while the larder was supplied with flesh.

With our late breakfast and a comfortable smoke afterwards, it is well on in the afternoon ere we start again. What shall we do, for we are now at the verge of the forest. That slope so thickly covered with bush rhododendrons is a very likely place to hold two or three musk-deer; but it is useless you forcing your way through it, for if there were twenty you might not see one. When fairly in the thick of it you cannot see many yards, and it is most laborious work too, stepping from stem to stem of the rhododendrons, treading on that to force it down, lifting this up to pass under, and clambering over another which admits of neither. It is pretty hard work walking up to the knees in light sand, or uphill in deep snow, but either is child's play compared to walking through a thick bush rhododendron copse on a hill-side. You had best walk up the hill a little, and go round to that knoll above the forest, and seat yourself in a comfortable position where you can see well on both sides, and I will take the three men down below and beat up through the rhododendron. You pick out a spot and seating yourself, wait patiently for whatever may come, while we are beating the bushes and whistling and shouting below. This is hill shooting made easy. For a long time you see nothing, but at last a musk-deer steps out of the bushes below you on to the grass, and after standing a little while, as if listening to the row we are making below, it comes right up towards you, standing now and then, and sometimes looking back. Be quite still, and if you want to have a very close shot it will come within twenty paces of you. You cannot miss it then, and when we get up to your post we congratulate you on having bagged No. 3. Others may have gone out in some other direction unseen either by us or you, for one gun and four beaters cannot expect much.

It is time now for us to think of turning our faces towards home. We have four miles to walk down the hill without a path, and if we don't mind we shall be in the dark,—no very pleasant thing in the hills, though it is almost worth while trying it for once, if only to realize what queer hill-sides a cragsman may safely clamber up or down when he cannot see ten yards before him—places which fifteen men out of twenty would not venture over in broad daylight. There is no time to look for musk-deer on our way home, and what with walking so much faster, and being less careful in looking over the ground which is the natural consequence, one seldom gets many shots going down hill; so you must be content with the sport you have had—a fair average of musk-deer shooting in the Gangootree forests twenty years ago. Nothing particular, as four, five, or half-a-dozen, was no very unusual bag, with now and then a burrell or two, or a brown bear. The sun is getting very low, but no fear, we shall get over the ground fast enough down hill, only you must be careful on the slippery grass, and still more slippery dry fir leaves, or your head will be where your heels only ought to be before you can say lemons. Our men you see have to take off their shoes before they can walk at all. Ours fortunately are well nailed, and give firmer footing.

We have been so taken up with our sport, that the scenery has been little noticed. Yet we might wander a long way without finding grander views of nature's handiwork. The play of light and shadow in the still silent forest, the varied tints of the autumnal foliage, the bright yellow of the birch, the brown and red and purple of other leaf-shedding trees, the dark black green of the morinda pine, and lighter shades of the other evergreens, with rock and crag to fill up the picture, and the white untrodden snowy peaks towering above all. If any great misfortune overtake me, I cannot think of a better composing draught than a ramble amongst the great works of nature. It is there we best realize the littleness of mere worldly matters. But I must hasten with you down the hill, leaving you to think of these things on the way. We will just take one last look at these glorious mountains:—

While the golden hues of sunset  
Faded in twilight cold and grey,  
As our youth's fond dreams still vanish  
'Neath the world's cold frown away:

See, the roseate tints still linger  
On those virgin peaks of snow  
The last warm beams their forms caressing,  
While the night steals on below.

Here we are at your tent, just as it gets dark. At and after supper we talk of the day's sport, and the habits of the musk-deer. You have seen they were not then at all shy, or wary, or very much afraid of mankind, and could not fail to notice the habit of voiding their droppings in one spot till these formed large heaps. My own experience only adds to what you have observed. It was nothing unusual to fire half-a-dozen shots at one before it was killed or went off at last unscathed.

A few hundred yards from our bivouac was a small patch of forest, stunted pines and birch, with an undergrowth of bushes. Amongst the latter were some black currants, the fruit of which was ripe. I had been picking the ripest, sauntering from bush to bush, and was about proceeding on; when within thirty yards, what should I see but a musk-deer seated quietly on its form, and, as they always seem to be when so discovered, apparently intently looking at me. I stood for some moments returning the compliment, for the rifle was having a rest too, and was reposing against the trunk of an old pine tree at our bivouac. The musk-deer did not seem inclined to move, so I drew gently backward, and, having got out of sight, hastened home for the rifle. On my return, there was the musk-deer just as before, and it moved not till the fatal bullet passed through its body, and it rolled over to move no more. I have sometimes thought in such cases the deer were fast asleep, but they have their eyes wide open, and it is more probable this strange disregard of the vicinity of a human being proceeded from sheer reluctance to get up. At another time I came across one under somewhat similar circumstances, at least so far similar that I had no weapon and had to go and fetch the rifle. In this case the deer jumped up and stood looking at me, and I took off my hat and placed it on my walking-stick planted in the ground for the musk-deer to look at till my return. The charin was successful, for when I got back, hat and stick and musk-deer were just as I had left them.

No wonder in those days the bag at the