

"Sport, sport!" was Mercer's reply. "Ye ken, John, I'm a shoemaker, and it's a dull trade, and squeezing the clams against the wame is ill, they tell me, for digestion; and when that fails, ane's speerits fail, and the warld gets black and dull; and when things wad be thus gaun wrang wi' me, I couldna flee to drink: but I thocht o' the moors that I kent sae weel when my faither was a keeper to Murray o' Cultrain. Ye mind my faither was he no a han' at a gun!"

"He was that—the verra best," said John.

"Aweel", continued Adam, "I used, when doon in the mouth and dowie, to ponder ower the braw days o' health and iie I had when carrying his bag, and getting a shot noo and then as a reward; and it's a truth I tell ye, that the whirr kick-ic-ic o' a covey o' muirfowl aye pits my bluid in a tingle. It's a sort o' madness that I canna accoot for; but I think I'm no responsible for't. Paitricks are maist as bad, though turrips and stubble are no to be compared wi' the heather, nor walkin' amang them like the far-aff braes, the win'y taps o' the hills, or the lown glens. Mony a time I hae promised to drap the gun and stick to the last, but when I'm no'weel and wauken and see the gun glintin', and think o' the wide bleak muirs, and the fresh caller air o' the hill, wi' the scent o' the braes, and hear the whirrin' cratures—man, I canna help it! I spring up and grasp the gun, and I'm aff!"

The reformed poacher and keeper listened with a poorly-concealed smile, and said, "Nae doot, nae doot, Adam; it's a' natural—I'm no' denying that: it's a glorious business; in fac' it's jist pairt o' every man that has a steady han' and a guid e'e and a feelin' heart. Ay ay. But, Adamè were ye no frightened?"

"For what?"

"For the keepers!"

"The keepers! Eh, John, that's half the sport! The thocht o' dodgin' keepers, jinkin' them roon hills, and doon glens, and lvin' amang the muir-hags, and nickin' a brace or twa, and then fleein' like mad doon ae brae and up anither: and keekin' here and creepin' there, and cowerin' alang a fai' dyke, and scuddin' thro' the wood—that's mair than half the life o't. John! I'm no sure if I could shoot the birds if they were a' in my ain kail-yaird, and my ain property, and if I paid for them!"

"I faith", said John, taking a snuff and handing the box to Adam, "it's human natur'! But, ye ken, human natur' wicked, desperately wicked! and afore I was a keeper my natur' was fully as wicked as yours,—fully. Adam, if no waur. But I hae repented ever since, I was made keeper; and I wadna like to hinder your repentance. Na, na. We mauna be ower prood! Sae