

yet," said Wardle to the tall gamekeeper. "Live and learn you know. They'll be good shots one of these days. I beg my friend's pardon though; he has had some practice."

Mr. Winkle smiled feebly over his blue neckerchief in acknowledgment of the compliment, and in his modest confusion, got himself so mysteriously entangled with his gun, that if the piece had been loaded, he must inevitably have shot himself dead on the spot.

"You mutsn't handle your piece in that ere way, when you come to have a charge in it, sir," said the tall gamekeeper gruffly, "or, I'm damned, if you won't make cold meat of some of us."

Mr. Winkle thus admonished, abruptly altered its position, and, in so doing, contrived to bring the barrel of his gun into pretty sharp contact with Mr. Weller's head.

"Hello!" said Sam, picking up his hat which had been knocked off, and rubbing his temple, "hello, sir! if you comes in this way, you'll fill one of them bags, and something to spare, at one fire."

Henceforth Mr. Wardle and Mr. Winkle proceeded quietly on ahead, for the dogs were pointing. Very gently indeed would they have advanced if Mr. Winkle, in the performance of some very intricate evolutions with his gun, had not accidentally, at the most critical moment, fired over the boy's head, exactly in the very spot where the tall man's brain would have been, had he been there instead.

"Why, what on earth did you do that for?" said old Wardle, as the birds flew unharmed away.

"I never saw such a gun in my life," replied Mr. Winkle, looking at the lock, as if that would do any good, "it goes off of its own accord. It will do it."

"I wish it would kill something of its own accord," snapped the irritated Wardle.

Meanwhile, on they continued, Mr. Winkle flashing, and blazing and smoking away without producing any material results worthy of being noted, sometimes expending his charge in mid-air, and, at others, sending it skimming along so near the surface of the ground as to place the lives of the two dogs on a rather uncertain and precarious tenure.