

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

A RELIC OF A DECAYED INDUSTRY

Of the many decayed and decaying industries that quietly pass away into oblivion—unnoticed and uncared for—there is one that most powerfully appeals to the innermost sentiments of the true sportsman. We refer to that old-time sporting method of wild-fowling, that interesting and not unexciting calling of the decoyman who earned his livelihood by the duck-decoy.

Each succeeding decade this once legitimate sport—if sport it could be called—falls more and more into desuetude, and by the end of this present century will doubtless be altogether numbered amongst the things of the dim past, never more to be resurrected.

Most probably, in these days of countless sportsmen, so deeply attached to the gun, the dismantling of the duck-decoy is a matter not to be deplored. For although there is no reason to fear the extinction of the wild-fowl, there is evidence that their numbers have become sadly decreased—in some places at all events—during the past few years, and we could not afford to have their ranks further depleted by such heavy tolls as was the case in the "good old days," when the decoys were in full working order, and the army of gunners but few compared with today.

It is on record that so many as two and three hundred fowl have been netted in a single day on one decoy alone, and that thousands of duck, widgeon and teal—to say nothing of rarer birds—were sent up to the markets in a season from the decoys of the Lincolnshire fens, where in those days the wildfowl simply swarmed in legions.

It is obvious that a continual drain like this on the gunners' resources would be most disastrous in these degenerate times (degenerate as regards quantities of fowl). And though now the wildfowler would not for a moment tolerate with joy the existence of such serious inroads upon his sport, yet the genuine sportsman cannot but give a lingering thought to the ingenious contrivance by which such vast numbers were caught at one fell swoop. And there must, too, have been something of a kindred spirit in the decoyman, living his life among the wild and solitary places of the country, and knowing intimately, as he did, the many different species of wildfowl and other feathered tribes. His calling could hardly be termed a sport in the true sense of the word, since it had a certain measure of that excitement and luck directly connected therewith, and must have held as great a fascination for those who took part in it.

But the 'coy-man's occupation is gone, and doubtless a less romantic and more uninteresting employment now claims him.

It was with a feeling of gratitude and pleasure that we were recently privileged to visit the site of a ruined duck-decoy, and a few words anent it may not be unappreciated. Down in a deep valley, far from the busy haunts of man, is clustered a thick, tangled larch wood. The curling films of mists linger long in its deep shades, for the sun needs to be well up in the heavens ere his generous heat is sufficient to make itself felt through the dense leaf-canopy.

Adjoining the wood is a small but picturesque lake, gleaming like a sheet of silver washed with gold where the sunlight glitters on its rippling wavelets, and beyond stately old oaks and graceful silver birches form a charming background to the view. Infinite solitude—a brooding calm that enamates a potent and far-reaching spell—reigns over the whole. Here, indeed, can the Nature-lover commune wholly and entirely with his Mistress, and be quite undisturbed by outside interferences. There is a subtle enchantment about the lonely spot that is well-nigh irresistible, and which appeals directly to the heart of sportsman and naturalist alike. A glamor that lures him unresisting into its tangled fastnesses. And the quietude of this abode of innumerable twittering birds is quite as it should be, for in the heart of this lonesome larch wood—neglected and forgotten—lies a one-time prosperous duck-decoy. It does not take a very vivid imagination to conjure up a mental picture of the decoy in the days of its prosperity, when hundreds of wildfowl came from far and near to the secluded hollow to fall innocent victims to the seductions of the decoyman.

Standing for a moment in the cover of the thick undergrowth one can readily appreciate the wisdom in erecting the decoy in such a wild and solitary place. Once in the depths of the wood one feels indeed "far from the maddening crowd"; and taking into consideration that quiet and peace is most vitally essential if one wishes to keep wild-fowl in any number, the foresight of choosing such propitious surroundings strikes one at once.

A narrow winding stream, rippling merrily on its way through the woodlands, must have proved most invaluable as a feeder for the pond—now but a noozy shallow—and the small lake beyond the wood was a great attraction for the passing fowl.

In gone-by days two principal kinds of decoys were employed for the capture of duck. One kind being the pipe decoy and the other the trap decoy. In the centre of the pond is an island well wooded; and a channel some 8 feet wide by 2 feet deep was cut through the middle thereof. Over this channel were placed angle irons curved to a radius and covered with wire-netting, whilst at either end was a trap-door operated from a hut built into the outer bank of the pond. This hut or sight-house also served the purpose—as the latter name indicates—of watching for the wildfowl, a "peep-

hole" being provided for the 'coy-man to make observations. A few tame ducks were usually kept on the water with the object of attracting their wild brethren, and grain was liberally scattered within the precincts of the trap. There was little enticement needed—especially in severe weather—to lure the unsuspecting duck on to the water. The sight of their tame fellows greedily feeding in such gloriously quiet surroundings, whilst they were going hungry, being sufficient to break their natural wariness, and soon the interior of the trap would be almost filled by the trusting birds, voraciously shovelling up the grain that was strewn so plentifully.

Then would the lonely watcher, in the dark watch-house, be compensated for his somewhat tiring vigil. We can imagine how his heart would be gladdened by the sight and it would be with fingers tingling with excitement and eagerness that he would hasten to lower the trap-doors—a windlass being provided for that purpose—and proceeding across the pond by means of a narrow plank bridge, would enter the trap by a side-door and so remove the wildly-fluttering creatures.

But the clamoring of countless duck is heard no more. The decoy has fallen into disuse and is but a thing of the past, to be relegated into oblivion—and forgotten.

Pushing through the tangled undergrowth of the outer wood, you can hear the soft gurgling of the few mallards that represent the once mighty army of long ago, and the sharp ringing cry of a coot and the querulous note of a green plover breaks the silence, where once the resounding "quacking" of countless wildfowl delighted the ear of the 'coy-man.

Climbing the bank on which the thick cover of larches is planted, you are greeted by a whirring of wings, and the stillness of the surroundings is brought to an abrupt end. The sudden invasion of man produces a general stampede—as it usually does, no matter how good his intentions are—and the mallard, gossling in quiet gurgling a moment before, up-lift themselves on swift pinions over the treetops. A pretty little teal, feeding quietly in the oozy bed, follows suit, and the coots and water-hens skim the shallow water in the effort of putting as great a distance as possible between themselves and the intruder—whilst a king-fisher in gaudy raiment of blue and gold and green flits rapidly through the "dark alleyway" of the trees. Evidently there are toothsome dainties in those pools which darkle under the overhanging branches.

There is a feeling practically akin to sorrow as you gaze on the abandoned site. The pond is now but a few inches in depth, save where a stagnant pool lies glittering amongst the riotous crop of weeds that springs up profusely from the alluvial bed. The curved irons of the decoy-trap stand gaunt and naked amongst the trees on the island, and the wire netting has long ago disappeared. Even the narrow wooden gangway over which the decoyman was wont to travel to procure his spoils has fallen into absolute decay, and the rotten supports stand out of the shallow water with lichens and water-moss clinging to their weather-worn sides. Here, built in the bank-side, is the sight-house; and curiosity tempts you to descend into its sunless atmosphere.

To all appearance, a generation has elapsed since the foot of man disturbed the deposit of dead leaves on the stone steps leading into it, and you leave a clear imprint on the thick carpet that has accumulated during many years. The door, fallen from its rusty hinges, lies athwart the doorway, and as you push it aside and enter, a damp odor of wet earth and mossy places assails you.

There is a spyhole—a narrow slit cut in the stonework and on a level with the trap—and there is the windlass used for raising and lowering the trap-doors. Time has left its indelible traces over all, from the rust-encrusted cogs of the windlass to the crumbling door and the lichen-covered walls. And it is with a deep sigh of regret that you turn your back on its somewhat cheerless aspect.

Truly times have vastly changed since the days when the decoying of wild-fowl was a recognized calling, and it is doubtless due to the encroachment of the railway and the rapid growth of the population and to "modern progress" that the wildfowl have forsaken their once-beloved haunts and emigrated elsewhere to wilder and more desolate places. The old ever gives place to the new, and so the duck-decoy has yielded to the punt-gun and the breech-loader.

Leaving the larch-wood, one feels a keen satisfaction in having seen a most interesting relic of "old-world associations," a fast disappearing link with the "good old times," when the coach horn echoed over the distant valley and hill, and the merry jingle of harness made music with the hoof-beats of the four-in-hands, and you cannot but have an abiding regret for the dismantled and forlorn duck-decoy dying in the hollow of the woodlands—a memorial to the skill and ingenuity of man in circumventing the wariness of that most wary of birds—the wild duck.—Arthur Sharp in Baily's.

THE FISH THAT HAVE BEEN

There is a respectable adage which tells us that we cannot eat our cake and have it too, and a world which loves wisdom in easy tabloid form has got into the habit of assuming that the truth compressed into the words is of universal application. It would scorn all past delights as dead and irrevocable, and would consign the pleasures of memory to the dim

twilight land of poetry, a land which of course nobody enters now. But as a matter of fact there are plenty of things which are beyond the scope of the adage, although they may bear some affinity to cakes. Trout, for instance. You may eat your trout and still have him, and that is because you first caught him. It may be that if you made a superlative cake, and then ate it, you might still have it, or if perchance you stole—but I had better be done with the adage; it is not my business to bolster it up. As I have said, the trout is of marvelous enduring quality. Only the other evening my good friend Ingrove was telling me about his 4½-pounder caught now several long years ago, eaten—no, put in a glass case, but anyhow a dead delight, irrevocable, never to cause a thrill more—so wisdom would assert. Ingrove was quite calm—it was a mere question of restocking that occupied us—and we were discussing the respective merits of yearlings and two-year-olds dispassionately, when I happened to observe that there must be quite a lot of big fish at the bends. "Like my 4½-pounder," said he. I led him on—I will not deny it. Where did he catch it precisely? And was it on a dry fly?

Then the eye of Ingrove brightened as he recalled the circumstances of that great fishing to his mind. And straightway he began his tale. How, marvelous to relate, he found the great fish rising in the morning—no, that was the odd part of it, it was not in the May-fly time—and how—no, there seemed to be no definite hatch of fly of any kind—and how he crept up and looked over and then withdrew into the meadow; and how he cast once, and twice, and yet again, and each time the great fish rose warily and would do no more than inspect the fly. "I am quite sure," he went on, "that he could see me; and that was why he came short!" So the story went on to tell how Ingrove crept cautiously away and spent intervening hours on the lower water, and how he met Ephemeris, who had a 2-pounder, and said gaily to him, "You wait, I shall do better than that." And thus we approached the evening and the great moment. The eye of Ingrove flashed, his form stiffened, his arm took on the motion of one who casts a fly underhand. "I lay down quite flat." For a little Ingrove would have done it again, then and there on the carpet. "And then I got the zulu over him and he took it the moment it fell!"

There followed an animated description of the battle—for a penny Ingrove would have followed the trout across the room, and for two-pence I, holding imaginations, landing net, would have been hard at his heels—and so the story drew to its triumphant conclusion and to the artistic finale in which Ephemeris was reminded that many a word spoken in jest has an earnest result. The adventure was simply re-lived from start to finish. Of course you can catch your trout and have it too.

What is perhaps more remarkable is that you have a trout which you never caught. This was revealed to me also within the last few days. We were seated at tea, and conversation, since Caradoc was there, had the Penydwdwr for its starting point, its middle and its end. He is quite passionately addicted to the Penydwdwr; from which we catch extremely small quantities of extremely small trout every spring, and so am I. Several years ago there was a really nice warm day there, and he filled his basket. Therefore we go each year now in the hope of another. This, however, is a digression, and so was Caradoc's dream about being back at Eton, which he told at great length. I merely mention it because it evoked reminiscence of a dream from the third member of the company, who also joins in the annual expedition. This dream was much more pertinent, for in it the dreamer had actually been beside the Penydwdwr, captured a fish—no, in reply to Caradoc, not a "breakfast" fish, but quite a good one—and was engaged in subjugating another of great size when the dream ended. I have related the dream very badly, but there was much more finish in the original version, passages about how the fish jumped, and how it weighed three-quarters of a pound, (this elicited from Caradoc a complacent remark that he had once caught a trout there which "really" weighed three-quarters of a pound; we whittled it down to 1½oz. after a little argument), and how annoyed the dreamer was on waking up too soon. I cannot hope to convey a just impression of the animated manner in which it was all described, so I shall not try. But the narrative clearly showed that the fish was just as real to the dreamer as an actual fish would have been. It will be remembered as vividly as an actual fish, and will be added to the store of experiences in the happy valley. This, then, proves my second point. You can have a trout which you never caught. Other proofs could be adduced, but it might be invidious to enlarge on the theme of that too vivid imagination which ultimately leads to complete faith in its creations. There may really be a man here and there who has invented some large fish which which to entertain his friends, and has done it so thoroughly that he now believes that it was so. I am all for charitable interpretations.

IN MEMORY OF OLD GROUSE.

(The Companion of Captain Cottingham, of Red Deer, Alberta.)

He's dead, He's gone, Red Deer will mourn
The finest dog, that e'er was born.
The Captain low, his head will bend,
In sorrow to his faithful friend.
The Captain lo'd him, like a brither,
Ye ne'er saw one, without the ither.
Baith was his friend, sae staunch and true,
Baith guid and bad luck saw him through.
The muckle clumsy, towsie tyke,
I'm sure there never was his like;
For nae Retriever, Pointer, Setter,
Could dae a thing, Grouse couldna better.
Nae wounded duck was ever found,
Tae pine, and dee, when Grouse was round;
Nae bird, that ever cleft the air,
When hit, escaped, if Grouse was there.
Nae mortal thing, wi wings tae fly
Could e'er escape his eagle eye.
The birds in Heaven all got a fricht,
When Grouse arrived the ither nicht.—
L. G. C. in Rod and Gun.

The members of the British Sea Anglers' Society on Wednesday last listened to what the lecturer, Mr. Percy C. Edwards, described as "a chat on the fish and fishing in British Columbia." The son of an old and distinguished member, no mean angler himself, and for some years past a resident in Vancouver and now on a visit to England, the lecturer displayed a full knowledge of his subject. As he is also a very expert photographer the slides illustrating his remarks were of great excellence and interest. At some length he described the commercial fisheries on the coast and in the rivers, but chief interest was taken in his account of the sea angling obtainable south of the Island of Vancouver and the adjacent narrows. Numerous photographs witnessed to the plentiful takes which he declared were common and to the popularity of the sport. So plentiful were the fish that not much need existed for refinement of tackle. Cordial thanks were given to the lecturer for the great pains taken and labor incurred in bringing the subject before the members.—From the Field.

I now come to the last pleasing point in this inquiry. It is possible to have a fish which is no concern of yours at all, which you never even saw, much less caught—which you never even dreamed. That explains and, I hope, excuses my feeling of proprietorship with regard to Ingrove's big trout. He described the incidents of its capture so vividly that I could see myself the protagonist in the drama, getting the short rises, prophesying at tea time, lying prone, running wildly in the wake of the



Sportsman's Calendar

MARCH

Sport for the month:
For the Angler—Trout-fishing from March 25; grilse and spring salmon-fishing.
For the Shooter—Geese and brant, which may be shot on Vancouver Island and islands adjacent thereto—BUT NOT SOLD.
March 25—Trout-fishing legally opens for salt and fresh water.
Spring salmon at their best this month.

A POEM FOR LOVERS OF DOGS

Do you love dogs? If the answer is in the affirmative, the following lines will strike a responsive chord in your heart. Nearly half a century ago they were printed in a weekly paper. The authorship was not given, and today probably cannot be ascertained unless some reader of this magazine holds the secret. It is not necessary to argue that the verses are of high merit; it cannot be controverted that they embody sentiment:

I am only a dog, and I've had my day;
So, idle and dreaming, stretched out I lay
In the welcome warmth of the summer sun,
A poor old hunter whose work is done.

Dream? Yes, indeed; though I am but a dog,
Don't I dream of the partridge I sprung by the
log,
Of the quivering hare and her desperate flight,
Of the nimble squirrel secure in his height,

Far away in the top of the hickory tree,
Looking down safe and saucy at Matthew and
me,
Till the hand true and steady a messenger shot,
And the creature upbanded, and fell, and
was not?

Old Matthew was king of the wood rangers
then;
And the quails in the stubble, the ducks in the
fen,
The hare on the common, the birds on that
bough,
Were afraid. They are safe enough now,
For all we can harm them, old master and I.
We have had our last hunt, the game must go
by,

While Matthew sits fashioning bows in the
door
For a living. We'll never hunt more.
For time, cold, and hardship have stiffened his
knee;
And since little Lottie died, often I see
His hands tremble sorely, and go to his eyes
For the lost baby daughter so pretty and wise.

Oh, it's sad to be old, and to see the blue sky
Look far away to the dim fading eye;
To feel the fleet foot growing weary and sore
That in forest and hamlet shall lag evermore.

I am going—I hear the great wolf on my track;
Already around me his shadow falls black.
One hunting cry more, Oh, master, come nigh,
And lay the white paw in your own as I die!

Oh, come to me, master, the last hedge is
passed—
Our tramps in the wildwood are over at last;
Stoop lower, and lay my head on your knee.
What! Tears for a useless old hunter like me?
You will see little Lottie again by and by.
I sha'n't. They don't have any dogs in the
sky.

Tell her, loving and trusty beside you I died,
And—bury me, master, not far from her side;
For we loved little Lottie so well, you and I.
Ha, master, the shadow! Fire low—it is nigh!
There was never a sound in the still morning
heard,
But the heart of the hunter his old jacket
stirred,
As he flung himself down on the brute's saggy
coat,
And watched the faint life in its quivering
throat
Till it stopped quite at last. The black wolf had
won,
And the death-hunted hound into cover had
run.

But long ere the snow over graves softly fell,
Old Matthew was resting from labor as well;
While the cottage stood empty, yet back from the
hill
The voice of the hound in the morn echoed still.

—Anonymous.