VARIOUS

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Содержание

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ABOUT RABBITS

We all know that the rabbit is an interesting animal, easily kept in hutches on a little clover or dandelion. Boys like to keep rabbits, because they are amusing. In our day, we have kept rabbits, or *kinnins*, as they were called in the local vernacular, such being a corruption of the old well-known legal term, coneys. Our coneys though few in number were an immense source of amusement. We built a house for them with an exterior courtyard, gathered and brought dandelions for them, which it was delightful to see them munching. Finally, we made something of them commercially, which was acceptable in the absence of pocket-money. They did not bring much – eightpence a pair or so; but eightpence was a great thing in the days of yore, and was very serviceable as a means of buying books.

Between the keeping of a few tame rabbits and the liberty enjoyed by rabbits in a wild state, there is a mighty difference. The tame rabbits can be kept within bounds; the wild rabbits increase inordinately, and are apt to do mischief beyond all calculation. Originally a friend to rabbits, we have lived to know that they are the torment of the farmer. It is not so much what they consume, but what they contaminate. Whole fields of hay are ruined by their odious presence. Instances could be given of farmers claiming damage to the amount of a hundred a year from their landlords on account of rabbits; and the best thing the landlords can do is to allow their tenant-farmers to kill all the rabbits they can lay their hands on. Not until then will there be any peace on the score of this intolerable nuisance.

The rapid increase of rabbits once they have got a footing is one of the wonders of nature. We could almost fancy that rabbits were designed to appropriate the whole earth; for, let alone, there will spring from a single pair through successive generations in one year as many as sixty thousand! Of course, at this rate there would soon be no vegetation left for sheep or cattle, and dead rabbits hanging up by the heels would be the only butcher-meat. Fortunately nature adopts means to keep the multiplication of these creatures in check. It sends birds of prey, such as hawks and other kinds of *raptores*, also stoats and weasels, whose function is to make constant war on rabbits and keep their numbers within reasonable bounds. In this way, the balance of nature is kept up. It would almost seem as if nature, while creating in profusion, had facilitated the destruction of rabbits; for so slight is their hold of life, that no quadrupeds, as far as we are aware, are so easily and painlessly killed. Latterly, the beneficent balance of nature has been upset, by the reckless shooting of hawks and other birds of prey, with a view to save the feathered game, and professional warreners have to be introduced to remedy the error. Yet, notwithstanding all that warreners and sportsmen can do, rabbits are apt to become a nuisance.

Considering the enormous trouble which rabbits cause to agriculturists, it seems incomprehensible how any one should have introduced the animal into Australia. The act was one of those unwise things which we see done by heedless though well-meaning people. Some half-mad Scotchman, thinking of the national emblem, introduced the thistle, which with its winged seeds has proved bad enough; but nothing so bad, or so wicked, as has been the introduction of one or two pairs of rabbits. A cry comes from several parts of Australia that such is the propagation of these primary rabbit settlers, that unless terrible measures are adopted, the country will be in a fair way of being eaten up.

A London newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, under date January 26, gives a pitiable account of the rabbit nuisance in Australia. 'At this moment there are hundreds of square miles to the north of the famous Burra-Burra Copper Mine in South Australia, where the coneys swarm to such a degree that they are universally pronounced to be a nuisance, and "Rabbit Destruction Bills" are the order of the day in the two legislative Houses at Adelaide. Similar measures will shortly have to be passed by the legislature of New South Wales, although the ingenuity of the colonists does not appear to have hit upon any effectual device for suppressing or controlling the ubiquitous little pests, which mock the puny efforts hitherto made to thin their numbers. The "Murray scrub" is alive with them, and even Lord Salisbury's park at Hatfield – where more rabbits are perhaps to be seen than anywhere in England, unless it be within the walls of a warren – is left far in the lurch by the long tongue of land to the west of Adelaide, called Yorke Peninsula. As their numbers increase, the area over which they extend their devastating ravages is quickly widened, until the time has arrived when the growers of cereals must either fight their enemy or withdraw from the cultivation of plains which might supply corn for the entire family of man. South Australia has already as many acres of land under cultivation as her two sister colonies, Victoria and New South Wales, can shew in combination, and the wheat exported from Adelaide and other neighbouring ports is of the finest quality, and eagerly bought by the cities upon the western coast of South America. Viewed as an agricultural field, South Australia is indeed the most promising of all the colonies belonging to the Australasian group. She has at present but a population of from two to three hundred thousand souls scattered over her enormous surface, which stretches across the length of the entire continent, and offers verge and room enough for millions of human beings, provided only that they can learn how to cope with the rabbits and make rivers of water run in the dry ground.'

Reading this deplorable statement, Lord Elcho comes out with a suggestion for a cure of the evil: 'I have read in this morning's *Daily Telegraph* an article shewing how man is in danger of being ousted from the Australian world by the fruitful rabbit, unless this "nimble skipping little animal" is kept within bounds. This certainly is an alarming prospect for our colonial fellow-subjects; but in this country, at anyrate, we can as yet secure ourselves in possession against the invader by the use of guns, traps, snares, and above all, wire-netting; and my object in now writing is to point out how this last remedy can be most cheaply and effectively applied. Wire-netting, as generally used for rabbit-fencing, requires to be made to rest upon a tolerably deep foundation of broken stones or concrete; otherwise this "feeble" but cunning "folk" burrow under it. This adds greatly to the cost, and does not, after all, insure the desired protection, as the rabbit will even then burrow under the stone foundation. But if about six or eight inches of the wire-netting at the bottom of the fence are bent back at a right angle to it, laid down, and pegged along the ground, the needful result is attained, as the grass, fallen leaves, &c. soon conceal from view the wire that is thus laid down, and the rabbit vainly scratches upon it when attempting to burrow under the obstruction of the upright fencing which stops his way. His intelligence, great though it be, fails to teach him that his labour is lost, and that he must commence his tunnel further back. It was at Mr Hibbert's, near Uxbridge, that I saw wire-netting thus used, with, as I was assured, the most complete success; and the knowledge of this cannot, I think, fail to be of use to many of your readers.' The advice here tendered is well meant, and may be of use in Great Britain, where arable fields are of a manageable size – twenty acres or so at the utmost. But the vast stretches of land under crop in South Australia put all such appliances out of the question. Just about as well think of surrounding whole counties in England with wire-fencing. No one could entertain the idea. As the saying is, 'The game would not be worth the candle.' The Australian agriculturists will have to try something else. Besides adopting an extensive system of trapping and stamping, shooting with the adjuncts of dog and ferret, must, if possible, be resorted to. Rabbits are so nimble in running into their holes on the approach of danger, that they need to be routed out by a ferret, a variety of weasel, which seems to be their uncompromising enemy. English warreners, though smart in the use of the gun, could do little without the assistance of the ferret, a small and lithe creature, which they

keep for the purpose, letting it loose only when required. As the ferret, on getting into a hole after a rabbit, would probably fasten on and make a prey of the animal, it is usual, we believe, to attach it with a string, one end of which the warrener holds in his hand, or to cover its mouth with a muzzle of some sort before turning it loose. This, as a temporary measure, the ferret does not seem to mind. He goes with great zest after the rabbits, which being frightened out of their dens, are bagged in nets, or fall under the pellets of the sportsman. We should say, let our Australian friends import ferrets – if they can. Whether they could endure the voyage from England will have to be a matter of experiment, under the care of experienced warreners.

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER XII. – UNDER-CURRENTS

The first sight of Fairview was a fresh trial to Marian Reed's philosophy: I saw her colour rise, and heard her murmured 'Good gracious!' as we drove in at the gates and round the sweep to the house. The men-servants were another test of her power of self-command. But on the whole it was wonderful how well she contrived to avoid giving expression to her astonishment. Beyond the first hurried ejaculation and a momentary catching in of the breath now and again, she exhibited no sign of the effect which the Farrar magnificence had upon her.

We turned into the first room we came to, and Lilian bade her sister welcome in her father's name; tenderly and kindly, if a little gravely, hoping that she would feel it was her home. 'O yes; I am sure we shall get on together,' good-naturedly returned Marian. 'What is there to prevent it, you know? I think any one must be hard to please indeed, not to be satisfied here;' looking round the room until her eyes met the reflection of themselves in the chimney-glass, where they complacently rested.

I could not but acknowledge that they were good eyes, and that she was altogether what is called a fine girl, with a handsome face, which to an uneducated taste might perhaps be preferable to Lilian's – but, I insisted to myself, only to an unrefined taste. In truth I was woman enough to admit that much only grudgingly. Though the features were good, they were rather large, and the colouring too vivid; eyes and hair so very black, and complexion so very red and white, made it quite refreshing to me to turn to Lilian's more delicately moulded and tinted loveliness. Marian Reed was tall as well as large, two or three inches taller than Lilian; but the latter was tall enough for grace.

She was attired in the most expensive style of mourning, which was a great deal more be-frilled and be-puffed than Lilian's plain deep black.

There was a few moments' pause on Lilian's side, and then she nervously began: 'Mary, perhaps Miss Reed would like' —

'Oh, you must not call me "Miss Reed" now, you know,' she interrupted: 'sisters ought not to be stiff with each other.'

I saw that the 'sister' was not to be lost sight of for a moment.

'I was going to say that perhaps you would like to see my aunt at once – before going to your room – Marian.'

'Aunt! Have you got an aunt, dear?'

'Yes; my father's sister – my dear aunt lives with me.'

'Oh, indeed!' ejaculated Miss Reed, with a somewhat heightened colour. She had not calculated upon finding any one besides Lilian. 'But,' she presently added, as though it had suddenly occurred to her, 'if she is your aunt, of course she is mine too.'

'Will you come, Marian?'

'Yes; of course I will, dear;' and with a parting glance at the glass, she followed us to the morning-room.

Mrs Tipper rose to receive us with her company manner; and I saw she was very much struck with Marian Reed's appearance. It was a face and figure more attractive to Mrs Tipper than Lilian's. Much as she thought of the quiet loveliness of Lilian, I saw she was quite dazzled by Marian Reed; and being dazzled, did not judge with her usual good sense.

'Delighted to see you, I'm sure. Charming morning, is it not? I hope you have had a pleasant drive;' and so forth; running through all the polite little speeches which belonged to the genteel phase of her life, and then leaving the other to carry on the talk.

Marian prided herself not a little upon her boarding-school manners; and felt, I think, quite in her element as she gave a few fine speeches in return. Seeing that she could keep it up much longer than could the dear little old lady, and that the latter was growing more and more silent and uncomfortable, I put in a word or two, which brought us all to a level again. I am afraid the means which I took to bring Miss Reed down were a little trying to that young lady. I should not have employed them had any but ourselves been present, or had I been able to think of a better way; but I really could not allow her to begin by making my dear old friend afraid of her, as I saw she very quickly would. So I inquired after Mr and Mrs Pratt and the children, hoped business was still flourishing, and so forth; going on to inform Mrs Tipper that Miss Reed's uncle kept a boot-shop at Islington.

Lilian looked not a little surprised at my making such an allusion, and Marian flashed an angry glance from her black eyes towards me. But I saw that this was a young lady who would very soon reign at Fairview, if some one did not keep her a little in order; and as there seemed to be no one else to do it, I undertook the task myself. A more refined way of proceeding would not, I felt sure, have had the desired effect with Miss Reed. My little speech made Mrs Tipper comfortable, to begin with.

'Then you won't mind me, my dear,' she said, with a sigh of relief; 'I've been accustomed to trade all my life, before brother, in his goodness, brought me to live here; and of course my heart's in it.' And straightway she threw off her company manners and became her dear homely self again; fussing about the new-comer with all sorts of hospitable suggestions. 'If you won't take luncheon, say a glass of wine and a biscuit, dear. It is nearly three hours till dinner-time, and you mustn't feel shy with us, you know.'

Miss Reed disclaimed feeling in the least degree shy; afraid, I fancy, of not appearing quite equal to the occasion.

'Shy! O no; not at all;' stiffly.

To help Lilian, who looked timid and shy enough, I suggested that perhaps Miss Reed might like to go to her room, where one of the maids could help her to arrange her wardrobe. She elected so to do; and Lilian and I went with her to the luxurious bed-chamber which had been prepared for her. Her eyes turned at once towards the cheval glass, and I noticed that she was mentally contrasting herself with Lilian, and that the conclusion she arrived at was entirely in her own favour. Then she preferred to be left to see to the unpacking, assuring us that she began to feel quite at home already. Lilian, who had not yet quite recovered her strength, yielded to my persuasions, and went to her own room to rest until dinner-time.

After dilating upon Marian Reed's evident predilection for examining herself in any glass she happened to be near, it is but right to acknowledge my own weakness that afternoon. On entering my room I walked straight to the dressing-glass, and stood gazing at myself; ay, and with some little favour too! I had been so accustomed to contrast myself with Lilian, that I had come to estimate my own looks at something below their value. In contrast with Marian Reed, my brown eyes and pale face and all the rest of it came quite into favour again, and I told myself Philip might have done worse after all. Smiling graciously at myself, I now saw quite another face to that which usually greeted me in the dressing-glass, and the more conscious I became of the fact, the pleasanter I found it.

When Becky, who at my request was appointed to attend to my small requirements, presently entered the room, I think she also noticed a change as I made some smiling remark to her over my shoulder.

'How well you do look this afternoon, Miss! There! I do wish they could see you now – they couldn't call you nothing to look at now!' she ejaculated, gazing approvingly at me. 'Why don't you let your eyes shine like that, as if you was laughing inside, down-stairs?'

'Because I don't often laugh inside, as you term it, down-stairs, I suppose, Becky,' I replied amusedly.

'Then you ought to try to; for it makes you look ever so much prettier,' she gravely returned.

'Well, perhaps I ought.'

'Of course you ought, Miss. I only wish I could make myself prettier, only a-smiling. Tom' (Tom was one of the under-gardeners, of late often quoted by Becky) 'says it's worse when I smiles; though I want bigger eyes, and a straighter nose, and a new skin, and ever so many more things, besides a smaller mouth, before I set up for being good-looking. And they all says I do grin so. I can't help it, because I'm so happy; but of course it must be nicer to look well when you laugh, instead of looking as though your head was only held on by a little bit behind, as they say I do. And I tell them it's all your own hair, though they won't believe even that. Mr Saunders says it can't be; though you manage to hide where it joins better than some of the ladies. But haven't I watched you doing it up many and many a time.'

I had it in my hands, brushing it out as she spoke; and murmured softly to myself, looking graciously down at it: 'It *is* long and thick, and a nice colour too, I think.'

This was something quite new to Becky, who was in the habit of taking me to task for not making the most of myself. I fancy she thought that I was at last becoming alive to the importance of looking well.

'To be sure it is! I call it lovely – the colour of the mahogany chairs. O Miss Haddon dear, do let me run and fetch some flowers to stick in, like Miss Farrar does, and then they'll see!'

But to Becky's astonishment, I did not want them to see. My mood had changed; I hastily put up my hair, and turned away from the glass. 'No; I think I will depend upon the smiling inside, Becky.'

'But you are not smiling. O Miss, I haven't said anything to vex you, have I?'

'You, Becky!' I turned, and kissed the face Tom despised, astounding her still more by the unusual demonstration. 'Foolish Becky!' I added, as with a heightened colour she bent down and kissed the shawl she was folding up, 'to waste a kiss in that improvident fashion!'

'I've often seen you kiss that little locket that hangs to your watch-chain when you thought I wasn't looking,' sharply returned Becky.

An idea suddenly suggested itself to me, and I acted upon it without trying to analyse my reason for so doing.

'Would you like to see what is inside that locket, Becky?'

'Yes; that I should, Miss! I have wondered about it so.' And she added gravely, understanding that it was to be a confidence: 'You may trust me never to tell nobody.'

'Of course I know that I can trust you, Becky,' I said, pressing the spring and disclosing Philip's portrait.

'My! what a nice-looking young gentleman! Who is he?' she asked herself. 'I haven't never seen him, have I? Not a young brother?'

'No.'

Then, hesitatingly: 'The young man you once walked out with, Miss?'

I nodded.

'And – he's dead, isn't he, dear Miss Haddon?'

Involuntarily I uttered a little cry of pain. Why did every one suppose him to be dead? 'No, not dead, Becky.'

'Took to walking out with somebody else, and give you up?'

'No; I have not been given up;' my foolish heart sinking. 'Cannot you think of something else, Becky?' – a little pleadingly.

'Did he do something wrong, Miss, and that made you give *him* up? Though he don't look like that neither;' musingly.

I closed the locket, and found that it was time to go down to dinner.

CHAPTER XIII. – ARTHUR TRAFFORD'S TACTICS

I found Marian Reed in the morning-room with Mrs Tipper, and she had already assumed the *haut-en-bas* tone in talking with the little lady. The latter had innocently thought that the lowliness of their antecedents would be a bond of union between them; but Miss Marian Reed considered that her boarding-school education placed her far above the level of poor people, though she had for a time lived with them. She had not of late associated with her aunt and cousins; and she had no sympathy with one like Mrs Tipper, who was not ashamed to talk about the times when she had lived in a cottage, and done her own washing and scrubbing. She was loftily explaining that she had never soiled her hands with 'menial' work, as I entered the room.

Miss Reed had evidently taken a great deal of pains with her toilet; and I was obliged to acknowledge to myself that she looked very striking, and better in a room than in walking-gear. Moreover, she got through the rather trying ordeal of dining for the first time at a luxurious table, much better than might have been expected. She did not suffer from any doubts about herself; and was consequently free from self-consciousness, as well as being quick to note and imitate the ways of others. In conversation she was quite at ease. The consciousness of an acquaintance with Mrs Markham, French, music, and so forth; and the entire freedom from doubt as to her ability to cope with any question which might arise, imparted an ease and confidence to her tone not usually seen in girls of more perception. Moreover, I could not but acknowledge that she was clever in the way of being quick to seize such ideas as were presented to her. And yet hers was just the kind of cleverness which makes some people shrink from the designation as a reproach – the flippant shallow sharpness which so grates upon the nerves of the mind. She was the kind of girl who would talk a philosopher mute, and not have the slightest misgivings about the cause of his silence. Her bearing towards me had undergone a change, which for a while somewhat puzzled me. I was not a little amused when I discovered the cause. Mrs Tipper had innocently divulged the fact that I was paid for my services at Fairview; and as I had made her a little afraid of me, the relief of finding that I could be displaced at will was great in proportion. She was now loftily condescending towards me, sufficiently marking her sense of the distance between us; though I think somewhat at a loss to account for my cheerfulness under it. In truth I was audacious enough to rather enjoy the fun of the situation, and for the moment did not attempt to hide my amusement.

But when, after dinner, Arthur Trafford made his appearance, the new-comer's attention was very quickly diverted from me. He was waiting for us in the morning-room, and naturally enough curious to see the new-comer. And however great his objection to her coming there, he was gentleman enough to greet her in the right way. Indeed, now that the matter had got beyond his control, he was, I think, desirous to make the *amende* to Lilian for his previous too dictatorial objections. Probably, too, he perceived that he was not likely to carry his point by such means, though he was not hopeless of doing so by another way.

He took great pains to make himself agreeable to Marian Reed; and it was very evident that his little courteous speeches had their full effect. He was doubtless the first gentleman she had conversed with; and I could see that she was a great deal impressed, I think enduing his deferential politeness and earnest tone with a deeper meaning than he intended them to have.

Lilian looked pleasantly on, accepting his courtesy to Marian as a kindness to herself, after what had taken place. She was very triumphant about it to me afterwards, as a proof of his goodness of heart, and so forth. For the present she was content to sit apart, thanking him with an occasional glance.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.