

THURSDAY, JUNE 20, 1901.

CHARLES ST. JOHN.

Charles St. John's Note Books, 1846—1853, *Inververne, Nairn, Elgin*. Edited by Admiral H. C. St. John. Pp. 119. (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1901.) Price 7s. 6d. net.

TO many an elderly man, among whose most cherished possessions in bygone days was a well-thumbed copy of "Wild Sports in the Highlands" and who now from "life's passionless stage" looks fondly back on the imaginations of youth, "St. John" is still a magic name, awakening, like Campbell's wild flowers, forgotten affections. It brings with it a whiff of the smell of fresh trout frizzling in the mountain sheiling, blue with peat smoke, and calls up visions of misty moors and tumbling rivers, of "muckle harts," wild cats and martens, and

"Sweet little islands twice seen in their lakes,"

gardens of the Hesperides of boyish dreams.

The sportsman-naturalist was a great-great-nephew of the namesake to whom Pope dedicated his "Essay on Man," the first Lord Bolingbroke, and began life as a clerk in the Treasury. A single legend only relating to him survives in Whitehall. A warrant of some importance was wanted, and St. John's chief, remembering that not long before it had been given to him to copy, asked him for it.

The warrant was not forthcoming, and St. John, pressed to find it, with a slight stutter, not impossibly increased by a little nervousness, apologised: "I put it into the fire because it b-b-bored me."

The story may be mythical. But as, according to his own account, he "gave notice to quit to prevent a reversal of the process," it is perhaps not uncharitable to assume that he was one of His Majesty's indifferent bargains.

On leaving the Treasury he retired to a shooting property in the north of Scotland, lent him by a cousin, and shortly afterwards married a Scotch lady blessed with enough of this world's goods to enable him to enjoy to the full a life of busy idleness among red deer and salmon.

It was to a chance acquaintance with Mr. Cosmo Innes, then Sheriff of Moray, and an occasional contributor to the *Quarterly Review*, that three generations of boys are mainly indebted for "Natural History and Sport in Moray" and the yet more fascinating "Wild Sports," which has run through at least seven editions. Mr. Innes was spending an autumn holiday on a property adjoining the shooting over which St. John was privileged to wander with rod and gun. He had wounded a brace of partridges and had followed them from the island in the Findhorn where he found them to a turnip field on the opposite bank, and was looking for them when "a tall, gentlemanly man" with a poodle "with a Mephistopheles face," got over the fence and offered to find the birds which he had marked down.

Mr. Innes called in his pointers and the poodle, "with a series of curious jumps on all fours and pauses between to listen," made short work of the birds—and with this introduction a close friendship sprang up between the two men.

It was a few years later, when a day's cover shooting had been spoilt by a Highland downpour, and St. John, wrapped in a coat of sealskin of his own killing, had whiled away a long wet drive home with stories of sport and of the ways of birds and beasts he had watched, that Mr. Innes first suggested the idea that he should publish his experiences.

St. John was modest, and at first scouted the notion that he could write anything worth printing, but he mentioned "some old journals" which might, if ever the attempt were made, be useful.

The book named above contains these journals, which are now published for the first time in the form in which they were originally written, by the writer's son, Admiral St. John.

The cream of the notes was skimmed long ago for the two books which established St. John's fame, and though well worth printing, their chief interest, for those at least who are familiar with them, now lies, perhaps, in the light thrown on the secret of the fascination which—in spite of the amiable egotism which is apt at times to jar a little—those books possess.

Like White of Selborne and, on a broader canvas, Shakespeare, St. John drew direct from nature.

From a hundred pages, in almost every one of which are texts from which a naturalist might preach a sermon, it is not easy to make selections. But one or two little touches, taken almost at random, are enough to illustrate the breezy freshness of his notes.

"The tracks (of otters) which we see," he writes, "are almost invariably going up the river, showing that the animal keeps the course of the stream in her downward course; but, on coming up, frequently leaves the water to go a few yards along the bank."

Fine swimmer as she is the otter is not a salmon, above all such considerations as up stream and down stream. Again, at the same opening (p. 82),

"The bill of the oyster catcher (unlike the highly sensitive bills of ducks, woodcock and curlews, which patter or bore in the mud for small worms, &c., described a few lines earlier) is as hard as ivory at the tip, the bird using it more for breaking open shell-fish than for digging in the mud."

To give only two more quotations (pp. 74 and 86),

"Wild cats are brindled grey, and I have observed that domestic cats of that colour are more inclined to take to the woods and hunt for themselves than others."

"It blew a hurricane to-day from the W.N.W., with cold showers. . . . I saw a seagull caught by the wind in the air and turned over five or six times before it could recover its balance and get its head to windward."

Admiral St. John, before publishing his father's notes, visited again the scenes of his childhood, and has recorded his impressions in a short preface, "Moray Revisited."

Here, too, as everywhere else in the book, is food for thought for a naturalist.

Stone walls had given place to wire fences; but just where six and thirty years before, in 1851, he had found the nest of a "shoveller," a bird "not common in the locality," a shoveller with a brood of five "swam out of the tall rushes into the open water" as he walked down the river. What is the secret of the lasting attraction of certain particular spots for certain birds? The little brown-headed gulls crowd their nests, very inconveniently close together

as it seems to ignorant human beings, in hundreds at one small corner only of a roomy island in Scoulton Mere, and Sheerwaters collect to breed in one only of the hundred and fifty islands of the Scilly archipelago. Guillemots, identified by peculiar egg markings, lay year after year, as Yorkshire cliff climbers agree, "within half an inch" of the same spot on the same narrow ledge.

"Water ouzels," writes St. John (p. 55), "come to the burns near the sea about the beginning of October. The same stones are occupied year after year by these birds."

In a Norfolk cover well known to the present writer, if there was a woodcock in the neighbourhood one was almost always to be found under one particular laurel bush.

Surroundings may completely change without breaking the charm. Thickknees love open spaces, and as a rule nest nowhere else. But Prof. Newton, in the article on migration in his "Dictionary of Birds," tells of their eggs laid in a thick Suffolk cover, in the precise spot where years before, when the ground was still an unplanted heath, birds of the species had been accustomed to breed.

The only thing to be objected to in an otherwise altogether charming book is the paper on which it is printed, which is abominable.

The dazzling glaze which makes reading by candlelight a pain instead of a pleasure is too high a price to pay even for St. John's spirited and witty pen and ink sketches.

If the use of the highly pressed and metallically polished papers which, since the invention of "process blocks," have become fashionable in illustrated magazines is carried much farther—the danger is very real and serious—the eyes of the rising generation will fail them long before their time.

There is something pathetic in the thought of the number of men, younger sons of country gentlemen and sons of officers, clergymen and professional men, born with the deepest-seated of aboriginal instincts—the love of sport—ingrained in their natures and brought up among birds' nests and sticklebacks, who find themselves, during the best years of their life, cut off from all that is most congenial to them and their manhood slipping from them in the close atmosphere of towns.

A writer who, like Charles St. John, can while them away from cramping surroundings and keep alive for a little longer the ever-receding dream of the good time to come some day, is not a man who has lived in vain.

T. DIGBY PIGOTT.

EXERCISES IN HYGIENE.

The Science of Hygiene: a Text-book of Laboratory Practice. By Walter C. C. Pakes, D.Ph. (Camb.), F.C.S. Pp. xv + 380. (London: Methuen and Co., 1900.)

"HITHERTO there has appeared no single text-book dealing with all the practical laboratory work which is now required from the candidate for the Diploma in Public Health." So the author writes in his preface, and the work under review is the result of his attempt to remedy what he considers to be "a great disadvantage."

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When it is pointed out that in this manual some five subjects are dealt with, each of which has furnished the subject-matter of well-known text-books of similar bulk to the present volume, it is evident that Mr. Pakes's effort must partake somewhat of the nature of a cram book.

"The Science of Hygiene," we would point out, is far too pretentious a title for a small manual which at the most affords the student an incomplete digest of a very extensive branch of study. The inadequacy of treatment would be sufficiently apparent if the different kinds of subject-matter were dealt with in good proportion, but this is not so, for we find the difficult subject of vital statistics disposed of in nineteen pages, ten of which are devoted to the construction of a life table, with the result that no mention is made of one of the most important matters dealt with in vital statistics, namely, the rate of infantile mortality; the subject of physics is dismissed without any mention being made of the siphon or of the common pump, the principles of which should certainly be understood by the public health student; and the great and important matter of the chemical examination of food is dealt with in twenty-eight pages. On the other hand, the part of the work dealing with microscopy covers eighty-nine pages and is by far the most complete and best part of the book.

The work is divided into five parts. Part 1 gives an outline of bacteriology; the brief directions here given are generally sufficient if the worker has the advantage of a teacher at hand when he attempts to put them into practice, otherwise he will frequently find them insufficient. Part 2 deals with microscopy; the illustrations are for the most part good, but the representations of the starches are crude and unsatisfactory. No drawing is given of Cyclops or of Gammarus Pulex, two organisms of far more common occurrence than several of those dealt with by the writer.

In mounting the starches for microscopical examination the student is told to use a "sterilised loop" to moisten the starch with, and a further instance of carelessness is the fact that pages illustrating water sediments are headed "Internal Parasites."

Part 3, which deals with chemistry, also contains blemishes. With reference to the physical characters of water it is said that "if there is any yellowish or brownish colour there will be some suspicion of sewage contamination, unless the water happens to have been collected from a peaty soil." We should have been more disposed to warn the student that it is very rare indeed for sewage contamination, even when it is very considerable, to colour water; iron, on the other hand, is one of the more common causes of such coloration.

In the estimation of chlorides the red precipitate of chromate of silver is described as "brown." The method described for the "estimation of calcium" will include magnesium; and the "estimation of magnesium," when performed in accordance with the directions given, will lead to a very serious under-estimation.

Although the author does not offer "more than a few hints to enable those who are not adepts to avoid the many pitfalls which await them," his remarks upon the interpretation of the results of the analyses of water are faulty in places and would not be acceptable to those