

than that of his initiator in woodcraft and field-lure. I have had experience of poisonous practices on the part of more than one professional preceptor of youth, possessed of unexceptionable references; but I cannot recall, in all my constant boyish intercourse with John Pace, a single word or sentiment or act, uttered or done by him, that my mother would have wished me not to hear or see. Many of his sayings and many instances of his example remain undimmed by lapse of years. They may not be worth repeating; but when I see fond parents solicitous to prevent their children associating with servants, and hear them deploring the carelessness of some young mother in allowing her children to do so, I make mental comparison of John Pace's influence upon my character with that of certain pastors and masters to whose care I was entrusted later.

There are noble servants, just as there are ignoble masters; and who may reckon the percentage of nobility in either class? I can but testify that so far as the evil in my life may be traced to intercourse with others, it was contracted from social equals and superiors, and in no single instance from inferiors.

To all dealings with his neighbours, high or low, John applied the invariable test—Is it honourable? He had an obstinate stutter, and pronounced the word "h-o-o-o-n-o-r-a-b-l-e." No prux chivalier ever showed more delicate discrimination in the application of that epithet to the most ordinary affairs. For instance, very few gamekeepers, perhaps not many sportsmen, feel any compunction at shooting along the marches as hard as on any other part of the ground. Can we all disclaim an inclination to punish the vicinity of our neighbour's land a trifle more severely than fields nearer home? Well, that was a practice for which John instilled into me a strong repugnance. "It was not h-o-o-o-n-o-r-a-b-l-e," said he, and his tendency was always to give the match a wide berth.

In matters of smaller ethical moment also he had very decided principles. He deemed it unsportsmanlike

to shoot plover or curlews, an observance which it were well if it were better regarded at the present day. Golden plover, of course, were proper game; but he was fastidious in the matter of water-fowl, among which he only reckoned wild-geese, mallard and teal as creditable trophies; pochards, golden-eyes and tufted ducks, in his opinion, were pretty and useless creatures not to be molested.

Perhaps because, winter in, winter out, they were the first things he saw in the morning—for his house stood on the margin of a bay in a lake that has now been a sanctuary for water-fowl for more than seventy years; and into this bay all wild fowl except widgeon and teal, most nervous of the duck tribe, are accustomed to resort, to gather the crumbs that fall from the table spread for the swans.

As for coots and water-hens, he could not restrain expressing disgust when some over-ardent sportsman flooded them. If it was argued that they were far from bad eating, he would reply, despite his English parentage, "Ay, m-m-maybe thae English'll eat them. Doo! they'll eat anything. They eat eels, ye know!" And he would shake his sides with laughter, as though the statement were wellnigh incredible.

John Pace completed fifty years of active service at Monreith before he retired on well-earned full pay. The last ten years of his life were sorely vexed by a disabling and peculiarly painful disease, which he bore with inflexible stoicism. *Sunt lacrymæ rerum*—it was mournful to see one, once so stalwart and indefatigable, reduced to a cripple's stroll and chair; but he suffered no complaint to vex his visitors, only saying patiently, with a shake of his good grey head, "We must just submit." While life endures, the scent of a velvet coat will always bring back to me the memory of my earliest lessons in angling, when, encircled by John Pace's guiding arms, I let the baited hook swim down the burn, and pulled out trout of a lustre and iridescence unknown in these latter days.

It is a far cry from grey Galloway to brown Caithness; yet is the distance not

so great as to account for the contrast in air, in light, in landscape, in people. It is like passing to a different realm. "Brown Caithness" I have called it; for although the land breaks into blossom at midsummer—golden whin, purple bell-heather, bluebells, stitchwort, fragrant moor orchids, and the like—I know it best before winter has relaxed its grip, when the earliest salmon ascend meandering Thurso. Brown is then the dominant tone in this arctic land.

In this brown setting moves a tall, lithe figure clad in brown homespun, brown-bearded, brown-cheeked, with steady grey eyes—my fishing gillie, Sandy Harper. Sandy was a fine specimen of that excellent blend of races—the Highland Celt and the Norseman—uniting the charming manners and ready speech of the Gael with the more steadfast qualities of the Scandinavian. Needless to remind the reader that the Norseman kept his grasp upon Caithness and Sutherland long after the rest of the Scottish mainland had passed under the sway of native kings.

Not till the very close of the twelfth century were the jarls brought into subjection to the Scottish crown; seven centuries have done little to obliterate racial character—little, save the vernacular has changed since the Commissioners of English Edward halted a night at Halkirk in the autumn of 1290 on their way to receive the ill-starred Maid of Norway as the betrothed of the first Prince of Wales. But though the speech of the people is Saxon, the old Norse names crop up everywhere, designating permanent land features. A brother angler, who had passed the previous summer in Norway, once observed to me what he considered a curious coincidence, that Loch Watten, a sheet of fresh water between Halkirk and Wick, should bear the same name as a lake near his lodge in Norway. Natural enough, quoth I, seeing that *vata* is the Norse word for water.

Sandy Harper was a crofter, occupying a few wind-swept acres near Scots Galter; but the most important part of his vocation was that of gillie to salmon-fishers and grouse-shooters. The croft can have done little but keep him and

his family in meal and milk, bacon and potatoes. He was a splendid specimen of his kind, over six feet high, well knit, with handsome features and a truly commanding presence—a very lord among other gillies. To see him emerge from his low-browed, smoke-stained hovel, such as any sanitary authority in the South would have condemned as unfit for habitation, gave rise to sundry reflections upon the vanity of building regulations.

Corresponding to Sandy's physical development was his mental equipment. Politics and natural history were his favourite subjects; one could discuss them as freely with him as with an equal, though he had seldom been out of his native wilds, and then only on brief visits to some of the sportsmen who employed him on the river or moor.

What struck me as most unusual in one of such restricted experience was the absence of prejudice, and of that intellectual rigidity which binds a man irrevocably to acquired or preconceived opinion. In talking politics, for instance, he was not so eager to air his own views as to learn the opinions of others upon subjects in which he could hardly have been expected to take much interest. "I was bred a Liberal," he said to me one day, "and in many things I'm a Liberal yet; but what converted me to the Conservatives was Lord Salisbury's foreign policy."

Against most gillies one has to record the loss of a fish now and then, but Sandy's hand and eye were unerring. I cannot recall a single instance of his bungling a chance with the gaff.

Skillful and attentive as Sandy was in the capacity of gillie, his value as a companion was greatly enhanced by his conversation, his sense of humour, and his knowledge of local lore. I once asked him whether he had known Robert Dick, the Thurso baker, hottnist and naturalist, whose fine collection of old red sandstone fossils is preserved in the Geological Museum, Jernyn-street, and of whom the late Dr. Smiles wrote such an excellent and sympathetic biography. "Oh, I mind Robert fine," said Sandy.

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