



FALCONS AND FALCONRY.

BY CAPTAIN T. S. BLACKWELL.



LURE.

"Whatever sceptic could inquire for, For every why, he had a wherefore."

SAYS Hudibras, but it would be very hard to give the "wherefore" to the question: "Why has the fine old sport of falconry died out?"

Gone are the days of errantry—of gallant on richly caparisoned and ladies fair on palfreys and all the paraphernalia of this sport; but why so fascinating an amusement should be allowed to become a memory of the past seems unaccountable. An inexpensive sport, as compared with fox-hunting or shooting and fishing, when moors, manors or rivers have to be rented—a sport in which the fair sex can easily take part and one which is devoid of anything approaching cruelty—it is hard to understand why falconry has lost caste with our modern sportsmen. In England,

knight-knights steeds, ambling



of late years, spasmodic attempts to revive falconry have been made, but with poor success. One difficulty may be the procuring of the proper species of hawks and another the training of the

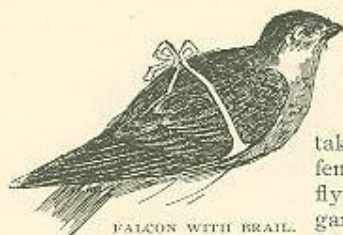
birds; but these are obstacles which would soon be overcome if falconry could be once resuscitated. The peregrine falcon has always taken the premier place in the estimation of the falconer. A handsome, shapely bird, with courage, speed and endurance, the peregrine was used for flying at large game. Like nearly all of the raptorial order, the female bird is much larger and more powerful than the male. This hawk

is found in nearly every country, and from this circumstance, and the long flights it has been known to take, it no doubt acquired the title of *Falco Peregrinus*. The length of the female bird is about eighteen inches, and that of the male bird three or four inches less.

The gerfalcon is



LEASH AND BELLS.



FALCON WITH BRAIL.

con measures about six inches more than the peregrine.

The hobby and the merlin are small but beautiful birds, with great powers of flight and a big share of pluck. They often have been known to fly at and strike birds much larger than themselves. These hawks—the latter especially—were the ladies' favorites in former times when falconry was in its glory.

The kestrel is very common, and has a beautiful and powerful flight, but from its timid nature it is useless for sporting purposes. The short-winged hawks are not true falcons but some of them can be used for the sport. The sparrow hawk and the goshawk are the best adapted, but the buzzard, hen harrier and kite can always be made subservient to the falconer's art. Like that celebrated receipt for hare soup, the primal move in falconry is to get the chief agent in the sport—the falcons.

The merlin or the sparrow hawk can be easily procured, and perhaps the goshawk; but the others, the gerfalcon and the peregrine particularly, can only be obtained with difficulty. But, like everything else, let the demand once

the largest of the falcon tribe, and was considered to take rank with the female peregrine in flying at large game in the olden days. The gerfalcon

spring up, and the supply would soon appear. Hawks are obtained by trapping in nets or are taken from the nest. Those taken in the first way are known as haggards, and are by far the boldest and best birds if they can be trained, but there is a great deal in that little "if." Those taken from the nest are known as branchers and eyases.

The brancher is a bird that is just able to fly, and the eyas is the young bird taken from the nest and reared by hand.

Haggards must, of course, be young birds, for it would be useless to attempt to reclaim an old bird. I suppose His Grace the Duke of Saint Albans, who holds the fine fat sinecure of Hereditary Grand Falconer to Her Majesty of Great Britain, ought to be able to give us hints in the management and reclaiming (to use the technical term) of hawks, but we shall have to do as best we can without him. The rearing of the eyas requires the greatest care. The food must consist of lean beef or mutton cut up small, and fed to it twice a day—morning and evening.

The falconer should always use the same cry to call his young birds to their feed as he will use in training them to come to the lure.

The feeding of hawks in a captive state exacts great attention. A certain amount of feathers or fur mixed with their food seems to be necessary to insure the proper action of the stomach; and if this is not given the birds soon mope and die. As with all the raptorial birds, the fur and feathers are ejected in a hard ball, and are known as the castings. The first stage in training a young hawk is to accustom it to the hood—a leather headpiece which is constantly worn except when the bird is flown at its quarry. There are different methods of bringing a refractory "haggard" to subjection, but, leaving them to more experienced hands, we will confine ourselves to the more amenable



FALCON WITH BRAIL AND HOOD.



CADGER WITH CAGE.

(Engraved by Chapman)



RUFFIER HOOD.

eyas. When familiarized to the hood, the bird must next be accustomed to the bells, jesses and leash. The first mentioned are always kept on the hawk, the bells being attached by slips of leather to the legs; the jesses are light little leather straps with a ring at the end of each. These are fastened to the legs, and a light swivel on the end of the leash can be hooked in the rings. The leash is a thin strap, terminating with a silk cord a few feet in length.



PEREGRINE FALCON.

Accustoming the hawk to the jesses is one of the first lessons to be taught. By petting, and the bestowal of choice tidbits, the bird will in time come to look on the master's fist as a favorite perch. When calling the hawk to the fist the same cry or whistle must always be given. After a time the bird should be allowed to fly the length of its leash and cord, and be brought back to the fist at will.

Of course it must be trained to do this without its hood. The hawk has also to be broken to come at once to the lure, which is usually a bunch of showy feathers of some sort, with a piece of raw meat in the centre and a short cord attached.



LURE.

By feeding the hawk on flesh tied to the lure, it will very soon learn to fly to it at once when it is waved in the air. This will be lesson No. 1 in

flying. The hawk will be taken out hungry by the master, and an assistant at a short distance will swing the lure about. The falconer will allow his pupil to see the lure well, when he will cast the bird off and the probability is that it will strike at the lure, when it should be allowed to feed on the flesh.

The first few lessons, of course, must be given with the leash attached, but when perfectly assured of the pupil's tractability, this and the jesses may be removed. The first flight at live quarry must be at a pigeon or other bird confined by a long, light cord.

By degrees the hawk can at last be safely flown at wild game, when the trainer will be amply rewarded for all the time and care he has bestowed on his feathered pupil's tuition.

Another important part of the training of hawks is teaching them to "wait on." This is training them to follow their master when they are on the wing. To accomplish this, the falcon is let loose in some open space, such as common, heath or down, when she will circle round the falconer looking for the lure. A favorable opportunity must be watched for and a pigeon flown so that she can easily catch it. Having been put through this process two or three times, on being released the falcon will immediately rise above the



HOOD.



KESTREL.