

# AN EIDER DUCK FARM.

It was near Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, that I first made the acquaintance of eider ducks, says Elizabeth Taylor. Fru Zoega, my kind hostess at the little inn arranged for me a trip to one of the eider-duck farms on an island in the harbor, and sent her pretty daughter Valla to keep me company. The day was fine, and far in the distance we could see the snow-capped ranges that line the rugged western coast. Our steamer, the Laura, lay anchored in the fjord, and boats were briskly plying to and fro, unloading the cargo she had brought from Denmark and Scotland. After a stormy six days' voyage from Edinburgh, we had arrived the night before in company with a Danish man-of-war and a French dispatch boat sent to look after the interests of the Breton codfish fleet. Three steamers at once were quite an event for the quiet little town, but not a single salute was fired from shore or on board, and those tourists on the Laura who wished to shoot sea birds were sternly suppressed. Eider ducks, it seems, are birds of importance in Iceland, and as they dislike noise, the firing of guns within a mile of their nests is forbidden, and every means is taken to induce them to frequent the farm lands along the shore.

A half-hour's brisk row brought us to Engey, one of the eider-farm islands. Valla led the way, and we went first to the farm-house to ask permission to visit the nesting grounds. In front of the turf-roofed little buildings on the stony ground, a quantity of down was drying—fluffy masses of brownish-gray, looking as if the first puff of wind would blow them out to sea. But Valla told me that the down was so interwoven with dried blades of dried grass that an ordinary wind would not stir it.

The farmer's wife readily gave her consent, adding that we should find her daughter Gudrun collecting down from the deserted nests. Following a rough trail we soon reached the low pastures near the sea. By the action of frost and damp the surface had been upheaved into hillocks about 18 inches high, and between these the ducks were nesting. I was toiling over the uneven ground, when suddenly a large grayish-brown duck burst like a bomb from almost under my feet, and I balanced to and fro on my hillock, fearing to advance lest I crushed the eggs. Looking carefully about me I soon found them; seven great eggs, as large as those of a goose, peeping out from the down which swelled up around them in a thick roll. A little farther on, I was surrounded by excited, perturbed mothers, some still brooding, and others with ducklings hardly out of the shell. The mottled and low-toned plumage so harmonized with the gray rocks and dead grasses around me that I could hardly distinguish the ducks at a distance of a few paces.

Just then I saw Gudrun coming with her apron packed full of down. Gudrun was on terms of pleasant intimacy with her ducks, and they stayed tranquilly on their eggs at her approach, and even allowed her to stroke their heads and see if the eggs were hatching. Of Valla, too, they seemed to have little fear, though she was a stranger to them.

"Why is it, Gudrun," I asked, "that the ducks are so afraid of me?" Gudrun smiled shyly, and replied: "I think, Froken, that they do not like your hat!"

That was the trouble! Accustomed as they were to the simple kerchief, or the small black "hufa" worn by Icelandic women, with its heavy silk tassels hanging down on one side, they had taken umbrage at my straw traveling hat with its "perky" ribbon bows. However, the ducks were not unreasonable. When they saw that Valla and Gudrun talked amicably with me, they waived their objections to my head gear, and finally permitted me to caress their sleek heads and wings.

Only one drake did I see on the nesting grounds. He was a splendid fellow, weighing fully 7 pounds, and quite different in plumage from his soberly dressed spouse. His back, sides of his head and neck, and upper part of the breast were white, the latter tinged with a little brownish-yellow; the bill was yellow, changing to dull green at the tip; the crown, forehead, wings and lower part of the body were a rich velvety black, and on the sides of the head was a streak of light green. The drakes, it seems, help the ducks to make the nests, and then, when incubation has fairly begun, they go off in little bands of four or five, and lead a care-free existence out at sea. You can see them rising and falling on the great swells just ahead of the breakers their soft "ah-oo! ah-oo!" sounding like the cooing of wood-pigeons.

All the accounts I have read about eider ducks say that nests are robbed of their down twice, the duck supplying it each time from her own body the third time the drake gives his white down, and this is allowed to remain. But I was told by farmers in Iceland that now they never take the down until the little ones are hatched. It has been found that the birds thrive better and increase faster when they are allowed to live as nature meant them to do. So now the poor mother are no longer obliged to strip them

selves of all their down to refurbish their despoiled nests. Sometimes, if the quantity is very great, a little may be taken, but enough must be left to cover the eggs when the duck leaves her nest for food.

Eider ducks are found along the seacoast of Arctic America and Siberia, Greenland, Norway, Sweden, Lapland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Spitzbergen and Nova Zembla. On some of the northern coasts of Great Britain also they are still found in small numbers, but the down is of inferior quality in these more southern districts. Lieut. Greely saw them as far north as 83 degrees. They are true ocean birds living during the winter out at sea, and diving for their food, which consists of small fish, shellfish and crabs. In April they begin to gather in little groups near the shores. Often one bird will visit the nesting grounds, and if his report is favorable, his companions soon return to their old haunts, and nest-building begins. Both ducks and drakes work together, laying a foundation of seaweed or coarse grasses, and upon this the bed of down is arranged, and heaped up around the margin. About May 20 the ducks begin to lay, six or seven eggs being the usual clutch, although ten are sometimes seen. A few of these are taken by the farmer for his own use, but the sale of eggs is forbidden. Often two ducks will lay side by side in one nest, each furnishing her own quota of down, and doing her part in the hatching and rearing of the double family.

Eider ducks, though often very tame, can hardly be classed with domestic birds. They live in a wild state in every part of Iceland where they can find suitable breeding places. Often a prosperous "varpet," as the nesting grounds are called, can be formed by the farmers whose land possesses the proper attractions. A small island that slopes to the sea is the best place, but a cape, or neck of land, is often chosen. If the land has many hillocks there is no need of making artificial nests, otherwise the turf must be cut in blocks and set up on end to form small oblong compartments. These are often roofed over with pieces of turf or wood. Sometimes the nests are made of stones, but in this case, as the stones are cold, the bottom must be well covered with plenty of crumbled turf or coarse grass. Eider ducks have their fancies about the situation of their nest, some preferring one that overlooks the neighborhood and others choosing a sheltered nook in a hollow. Everything must be in readiness before it is time for the birds to come from the sea. The ducks seem to like some life or movement on the neighboring farm lands, as they probably feel more secure from their natural enemies, foxes and ravens; but on the varpet itself all must be peace and serenity. If the new varpet must be visited, it is best to go when the weather is fine and the sea at high tide. The approach should be made always from the same direction, and the farmer should not look about him too curiously, or the birds will become troubled and suspicious. Any object that shines or has color and certain sounds are very attractive to the birds. So the would-be owner of a varpet often sets up at intervals small sticks to which colored rags are tied, or he puts on pieces of wire, mussel shells, which rattle in the wind. A little bell rung by the wind also seems to please them.

Another way of inducing the wild birds to build is to employ "lukke-fugl" or decoy ducks of rubber or plaster. Some are placed on the slopes of land in a sitting position, and others are moored in the water by strings long enough to allow them to move to and fro as if swimming. The growth of a varpet is necessarily slow at first, but once fairly established it yields a good profit. Engey, the island that I visited, and Videy, not far away, produce about 300 pounds annually, and great quantities are taken to Isafjord, in Northern Iceland. A writer upon Iceland, in speaking of a visit to one of the Isafjord farms, wrote: "On the coast was a wall built of large stones, just above high water level, about 3 feet high and of considerable thickness at the bottom. On both sides of it alternate stones had been left out so as to form a series of square compartments for the ducks to make their nests in. Almost every compartment was occupied, and as we walked along the shore a long line of ducks flew out, one after another. The house was a marvel; the earthen walls that surround it and the window embrasures were occupied with ducks. On the ground the house was fringed with ducks. On the turf slopes of the roof we could see ducks, and a duck sat on the scraper."

About 10,000 pounds of eider down are collected annually in Iceland, 7,000 being exported to foreign countries. Formerly the peasants used to receive over 21 shillings a pound, but the price has now fallen to half that amount. The peasants seldom receive money, and are obliged to barter their down for merchandise furnished by the Danish merchants at the little settlements on the fjords.

An old Icelandic proverb illustrates the strange elasticity of the down: "What is it that is higher when the head is off?" "An eider-down pillow," is the answer. A pound of down can be compressed into a ball the size of a pint bowl, but, once released, it swells and mounts like something alive until it would fill a bushel basket. A pound and a half is enough to fill an ordinary bed puff. These very comfortable articles are found in the guest room of every Icelandic farm, however poor and small it may be. After a long, hard day in the saddle the traveler longs for warmth and shelter. But these little guest rooms have never had a fire in them, and built as they are on the ground floor here is in them a dreadful chill. Once tucked away in bed, however, and well covered with the down puff, a delightful sense of comfort follows, and tired ones lose their pains and stiffness.

The last days of my ten weeks' visit in Iceland were spent at Laxamyr, one of the finest farms in Iceland. Many sheep grazed on the neighboring hills; sea trout and salmon; the sea furnished codfish and seals, and large numbers of eider ducks rested on the

little islands where the river broadened to the sea. On one side of the comfortable modern farm house picturesque old outhouses formed a kind of square. In one the farm tools and the salmon nets and cages were kept, one served as sleeping quarters for the farm laborers, another for the supply of peat, and in another was an open fireplace with a high raised hearth of stone. Here, during the winter, the eider down is cleaned. It is first placed in a large open caldron over a hot fire in order to have the dried grasses and other refuse burned away. A flat plate of iron fits in the bottom, raising the down from the too intense heat of the fire. As it is stirred and turned quickly the foreign matter is destroyed before the down suffers. But this process only partially cleanses it. The dust, ashes and harder bits of grass stalks must now be removed. This is done by rubbing the down over stout thongs of sealskins, which are stretched from side to side on an oblong wooden frame about 3 feet long. The worker, sitting a short distance from the wall, tilts one end of the frame against it while the other rests in her lap. Then, taking a bunch of down in each hand, she scrubs it up and down across the thongs with an alternate motion. After this the down is looked over carefully, and every remaining bit of grass or dirt is removed by hand.

## THE SITUATION IN ITALY.

General Poverty the Cause of the Dangerous Disorder.

The state of Italy, as described in despatches, is only a little short of revolutionary. The saving feature of the situation, so far as the Government is concerned, is that the troubles do not appear to be the result of any solid political organization, but are due to the hunger of the population. If this proves to be the case, they may be got over with comparatively little difficulty. There is, however, a danger that they may develop into a political movement if the immediate wants of the people are not appeased, more particularly in the north. Besides the Socialists, whose chief centre is at Milan, there are the Irredentists, who have only been restrained by the exigencies of the Triple Alliance, to be counted with. There is also the Republican element that has been gaining in strength year by year through the unpopularity of the monarchy, arising from the ever-increasing burden of taxation. Should all these elements combine and find a common basis of action the situation might easily become very serious for the Government.

There are of course many causes at the bottom of the present troubles of Italy, but they may be narrowed down to two principal ones, the military exigencies of the Triple Alliance and Crispi's African adventures. The excessive taxation required to pay for these two policies are responsible for the present difficulty, and it will be interesting to see how the Italian Government will work its way out of it. International complications may easily ensue if the troubles are allowed to gain headway, for the bulk of the Italian debt, which now amounts to over \$2,500,000,000, is held in France; and the Italian Government has certain engagements with England regarding its navy that would be seriously interfered with by prolonged internal disorder or a change in the form of government.

As to the other causes of Italian disorder they have been less visible to the outside world, but they have been no less sure in their operation. The privations endured by the poorer classes have been steadily extending to the entire population, and several years ago it was nothing uncommon to find families among the latter where more than one full meal a day was an exception. This was especially the case in southern Italy. It appears now to spread over the whole country, with the result we now see.

An average of five hundred vessels daily leave the Thames for all parts of the world.

Henry Allen Howard can do strange things. He can stick hatpins through his cheeks, lips, and calves, drive nails through his feet and hands, and perform many similar wonders. He recently gave an exhibition at the Astor House, in New York, and demonstrated that wounds of the character above described cause him no pain.

Twice has a fatal accident closed the career of a gentleman in Maine. At least this is the impression conveyed by the following news item in a Belfast paper: "Robert Smith was struck by the south-bound passenger train last night and instantly killed. Mr. Smith, it will be remembered, met with a similar accident, about a year ago, near Scarborough."

A Chicago seamstress dropped tears upon a wedding gown, and her mistress at once dismissed her, saying, "It is unlucky to have a wedding dress stained by a year." The seamstress called upon the prospective bride, and asked her intercession for reinstatement; but the haughty maiden spurned her saying that the dressmaker had done right in discharging her.

There is a little cemetery for dogs in a corner of Hyde Park, London. On neat headstones their virtues are conspicuously commemorated.

While the Rev. Herman Lindskog was celebrating divine service in the church in Chicago, his fox terrier, streaming with blood, dashed into the edifice. The clergyman hastened to his residence, near the church, and discovered that burglars had looted his home, getting off with \$300 worth of property. The dog had evidently been in a fight with the burglars.

# MR. RAMSDEN'S BRAVE ACT

## THE INCIDENT RECALLS THE CAPTURE OF THE VIRGINIUS.

British Guns Saved Many Lives—The Spanish Butcher Was Recalled, Dismissed From Office and Apologies Made—The United States and Spain Almost at War Over the Affair.

The announcement of the arrest of Mr. R. W. Ramsden, British Consul at Santiago de Cuba, by the Spanish authorities, while in the execution of his duties in protecting Americans placed under his care and the British flag, and his very quick release, when H.M.S. cruisers Alert, Dallas, and Pearl, appeared in the harbor cleared for action, must have recalled to American blue jackets the incident of the capture of the American ship *Virginus* in 1873 and the gallant conduct of Mr. Ramsden on that occasion. He showed his bulldog pluck then in defending the American lives as he did the other day.

It is but history repeating itself as regards the Spanish Don's respect for the Union Jack. As is well known, in 1873, a rebellion was in progress in Cuba, and was supported in much the same manner as the present one by aid in money, arms and sympathy from sympathizers and friends in the United States. About the last week in the month of October, 1873, the steamer *Virginus*, carrying the Stars and Stripes and of United States register left Kingston, Jamaica, ostensibly for Limore Bay, Costa Rica. She had on board a total of 155 passengers and crew. There were 108 passengers, of whom a few were British subjects, and a great many United States subjects, but the great majority were Cuban insurgents. For some considerable time the *Virginus* had been suspected by the Spanish officials as a filibustering vessel, and a sharp watch was kept on her movements by the Spanish navy in Cuban waters.

## SIGHTED THE VIRGINIUS.

The Spanish cruiser "Tornado," about October 31, caught sight of the *Virginus* in full steam for the coast of Cuba, gave chase, and soon made her heave to after sending a couple of round shot across her bows. The captured ship and those on her were taken into the harbour of Santiago de Cuba, on November 1, amidst great rejoicings from the Spanish adherents. As the *Virginus* was registered as an American vessel, and carried the flag of the United States, the American Vice-Consul at Santiago demanded of the Provincial Governor-General, Barriell, permission to see the prisoners. This was contemptuously refused, the tyrannical Governor declaring that all on board would be shown no mercy, but be treated as pirates. It is true that many of the Cuban insurgents on board were known to the authorities as active and prominent leaders in the long revolution, yet it was also a fact that some of the English and Americans among them knew nothing of the real status of the vessel. The bloodthirsty Barriell soon began his work of slaughter, of the objects of Spanish hatred. By a hurried drum-head court-martial he succeeded in condemning and shooting fifty-three of the captured people, before his hand was arrested by the frowning cannon of the British cruiser *Niobe*, commanded by Captain Sir Lambton Lorraine. Up to November 8, when the *Niobe* sailed in, only a couple of British subjects had been shot, but over a dozen Americans had been massacred. Those who were still living claimed the protection of the British flag, and Lorraine and his blue-jackets saw that they had it despite the blustering of the Spaniards.

## CABLED FOR ASSISTANCE.

The *Niobe* was in Kingston, Jamaica, when Mr. Ramsden cabled for assistance, and owing to the quickness and cleverness of the young telegraph operator at the station the lives of the other unfortunates were saved. The *Niobe's* commander and crew on getting word of the slaughtering at Santiago, got on a full head of steam and went into Santiago's harbor in a few hours, with topmasts, down decks cleared for action, and every seaman at quarters. He at once demanded the stoppage of the executions and the immediate release of every British subject or else he would open fire and lay the city in ruins. General Barriell tried to be haughty and insolent and cursed the Americans and their flag. Sir Lambton Lorraine gave the Spanish Governor one hour to comply with his demand and in less than that time the Spaniard's pride was humbled, and by the power of the British flag and all that it represents. The British Foreign Office rigorously cabled the Spanish Government to account for the conduct of Barriell. The latter was recalled and censured and retired from all offices, an apology made and compensation granted to all British subjects. With the United States it went otherwise. They demanded the release of the survivors and the surrender of the *Virginus*; that an apology should be made and a large indemnity be paid; that the perpetrators of the massacre should be tried and punished, and that the Stars and Stripes could be formally saluted. The Spanish Government were slow to reply to these demands and there was in consequence a loud call from all points of the States for war and the liberation of Cuba.

## CRIES FOR WAR.

Indignation meetings were held in all the large cities of the union and the United States Government began

to prepare for war, the navy and army officials getting everything in order and shape in their several departments for active service. The same hurry, scurry, then as to-day with had to be strengthened all along the Atlantic seacoast towns, and recruiting was in full blast and every preparation made for a determined war with Spain. The New York Times is now left to America but to declare war with Spain for the Americans considered and to take possession of Cuba. On November 20, it was stated that General Sikes the American Minister at the time at Madrid was about to demand his passports, and everything portended war, war. On November 21 Sikes asked for his passports, but suddenly in the afternoon of the same day he received a letter from the Don conceding conditionally and in part, the note Spain agreed to surrender the *Virginus* and the surviving passengers and crew and to punish those guilty of massacre and to salute the flag if it should be shown that the *Virginus* was legally entitled to carry the United States flag. All these details were subsequently arranged at a conference at Washington. The ship and surviving prisoners were given up on December 15, and about \$50,000 paid over by Spain as compensation to the families of the Americans who had been shot. The United States were forced, however, to admit that according to their own law the *Virginus* had no right to fly the United States flag, and the salute demanded was therefore dispensed with. The officials at Santiago went scot free of any punishment and the *Virginus* itself on the way to the United States foundered in a storm. Unquestionably it was the gallant conduct and firm bearing of Sir Lambton Lorraine that saved the lives of the surviving Americans and Cubans. The American Congress and people recognized this in many ways. Congress voted him and his crew votes of thanks and medals, but the latter were declined by the British Government, with the statement that the Captain and crew of the *Niobe* had but done their duty as British sailors. The miners in Nevada, however, sent Lorraine a small gold brick with his name stamped on it on the front side and on the reverse "you're a brick." Mr. Ramsden has passed the best part of his life in Santiago and is now an old man but full of fight when his countrymen or those under his protection call for his aid. He stands by and with the flag of the British Empire in the cause of freedom and civilization.

## POINTED PARAGRAPHS.

There is an able-bodied African in nearly every man's private wood-pile. When a cyclist is thrown from his wheel he feels the gravity of his position. After a woman has passed a certain age she is willing to get married on Friday. It's easier for us to see the faults of others than it is for others to see our virtues. A man never loses money on fast horses. It is the slow ones that drive him to the free-lunch counter.

## PERSIAN ETIQUETTE.

In Persia, among the aristocracy, a visitor sends a notice an hour or two before calling, and gives a day's notice if the visit is one of great importance. He is met by servants before he reaches the house, and other considerations are shown him, according to his rank.

## A FAIR MEASURE OF SUCCESS.

Foreman of Torrent Engine Company, of Podunk, gazing at the smoking ruins but speaking cheerfully.—Well, boys we saved the engine!

## ORIGIN OF GOLDFISH.

Goldfish are of Chinese origin. They were originally found in a large lake near Mt. Tientsing, and were first brought to Europe in the seventeenth century. The first in France came at a present to Mme. de Pompadour.

## KEEPS HIM BUSY.

Mrs. Kinder, reflectively.—I wonder why man never pays his wife any compliments after they are married? Kinder, briskly.—He does better, my dear; he pays her bills.

## AT THE KLONDIKE.

Boarder.—Hash, again? Boarding Mistress.—Don't sneer at it, Mr. Goldstuck. I'd have you know, sir, that this hash is made of very expensive materials.

## TOUCHING.

What caused you to become a tramp? A love affair, lady. How sad! Tell me about it. Well, yer see, when I wuz very young an' didn't know any better I fell in love with idleness, an' I have never bin able to conquer me comsumin' passion.

## APPROPRIATE.

That submarine boat seems to be a success. Yes? I suppose she goes down with flying colors.

## IN KLONDIKE.

Nugget McKab.—Gimme a san'wich. Storekeeper.—What kind—mule meat? Foot heel, hoss blanket or dog?

## NOT SO WARM.

He had money to burn. And he burned it. Foolish, you think? Well, perhaps so. But a man has to keep warm, even if the Klondike, so he burned his money

How Roads May Be Made  
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