## SEASONS OF HUNTING—continued

Otter. The Forest Laws give the season as from Shrove Tide (Feb. 22) to Midsummer (June 24), but we find that in King John's reign the otter was hunted in July (Close Rolls 14 John i.).

Martin, badger and rabbit were hunted at all seasons of the year.

SKINNING AND SKINS of beasts of Venery and of the chace:

Red deer Hare Fallow deer Boar		Act of Skinning. Flay or fleace Strip or case Skin Strip	Skin Skin, leather, hide Pyles, leather, hide,
Wolf . Fox .		Case	Pyles, leather, hide Pyles, skin
Marten . Otter .		"	,, ,,
Badger . Coney .		,,	,, ,,
Roe deer	•	Skin	Leather, hide

SLOT, or footprint of deer on earth or soft ground, is one of the chief signs by which those versed in woodcraft can distinguish an old stag from a young stag, or a stag from a hind. The old stag leaves a blunter print with a wider heel than a hind, but it is difficult to distinguish the slot of a hind from that of a young stag, although the latter has invariably a bigger heel and makes deeper marks with his dewclaws, yet his toes are narrow and pointed, their edges are sharp and the distance between his steps is somewhat unequal, all of which may lead his slotting to be mistaken for the tracks of a hind. "He has found what he wanted," says Dr. Collyns, when speaking of the harbourer, "the rounded track, the blunted toe point, the widespread mark, the fresh slot in short of a stag" (Chase of the Red Deer).

The old huntsman used to consider that any slot into which four fingers could be placed with ease belonged to a warrantable stag (some declared a stag of ten). That would mean that the slot would be about three inches wide, if not more, I believe two and a half inches is considered a fair measurement for mark of the heel by Devonshire stag-hunters, who alone in England concern themselves with the differences in the slot, as they only chase the wild deer. No such woodcraft is necessary for the chase of the carted deer, and as long as the master and huntsman can distinguish the footprint of a deer from that of any other animal, that is all that is required of them in this matter. The stepping or gait of a stag is also a sign that was taken into consideration. The old stag walks more equally and generally places the point of his hind feet in the heel of his fore feet. The gait of a hind is more uncertain, it is said she misprints, that is sometimes the hind foot will be placed beside the fore foot, sometimes inside or in front of it. She is not even so regular in her gait as a young

stag, unless she is with fawn, when she will place her hind feet constantly outside her fore feet. A hind walks with wide spreading claws, so does a young stag with his fore feet, but those of his hind feet will be closed. The larger the print of the fore feet are in comparison to the hind feet the older the stag.

The M. of G. is not very clear (p. 90) when he speaks of the gait of the stag, but as this whole chapter is copied from G. de Foix we give the original. "Cerf qui s'outre marche, c'est à dire que le pié derrière passe le pié devant, ce n'est mie bon signe; et s'il surmarche, c'est à dire qu'il mete le pié derrière sus celuy devant sans outre passer encore, n'est ce pas bon signe; mes s'il met le pié de derrière loingh de celuy devant, c'est bon signe, ou s'il marche plus large derrière que devant encore est ce bon signe" (p. 145). Therefore G. de F. considered it a good sign if the stag put his hind feet ouside the print of his fore feet, for he adds that a stag who walks like this must have large flanks (i.e., be a heavy and fat deer); the one that puts his hind feet on the print of the fore feet he says would be a light galloping deer, or as our MS. says "a light der and wel rennying."

G. de F. also says that if a stag is going a good pace his claws will be closed, but if he is tired and going slower, the toes will be widely spread. Roy Modus says that the print of the two bones (dewclaws) in hard earth is a sign that the stag is in full flight (Modus. xiii.; G. de. F. p. 155).

"Lisez mon nom, vous le pouvez, Messieurs Mon Cordonnier l'a mis autour de ma semelle," Lav. p. 237.

says the stag, like the horse, in the fable, and to learn how to read this book of venery G. de F. says one should take a stag's and a hind's foot and press them into hard and also soft ground so that he may learn the ABC of his craft, but this method was ridiculed a couple of centuries later by the great staghunter Charles IX. who declares that little could be learnt from a dried foot of an animal, but everything from practice and experience to be derived only by going to the wood and seeking for the deer.

By the foot shall ye know which stag to run, says the author of the Chace dou Cerf in the 13th century: "Grosse esponde et large talon, Ce ne doit refuser n'uns hom. S'il a gros et larges les os, Se tu t'en pars tu seras fos" (Jub. p. 157). The underneath edge of the claws round the hollow of the sole was called the esponde (sponde edge or border). In older stags they were blunter and more worn, and in hinds and younger deer sharper, unless indeed the stag inhabited a damp and mossy country where the esponde would not be so much worn down as if he lived on a rocky or stony ground. (G. de F. 155, 129-145; Lav. p. 246; Stuart, p. 58; Fortescue, p. 133.) And thus did the woodmen of old study the book of nature which told them all they wished to know, and found for them better illustrations than any art could give. Nothing was too minute for them to notice. Here the

SLOT—continued

stag has foiled the grass, the tender blades are trodden down, but a spider has spun a delicate web across the depression, it is therefore no recent track, it is de hautes erres as the Frenchman calls a stale slot; here the soft earth has been sharply cut and the brown fresh earth shows that this is a fresh mark or "de bonnes erres," but it is not that of a stag, but the marks that the pointed toes of my lady the hind made, as she left the corn field early this morning to go to her layer in the thicket. Further on in the field see how the turnips are pulled up by their roots and thrown about; this is where the big stag came to pasture. A jay flies up with a shriek, a rook caws and takes flight over there by the upstanding oak in the covert; what has disturbed them, but the movement of the stag returning to his 'ligging'? The huntsman holding his limer eagerly straining on his leash, as he noted all these things and made sure of having found the large chaseable stag, must have had almost the most enjoyable part of the day's sport and it is no wonder that Princes and Lords in the old days used often to go to the wood themselves and learn all the science of the craft. (See Appendix: Trace.)

SNARES. No work dealing with the chase of wild animals in mediæval times would be complete were it to omit all reference to snares, traps, gins, pitfalls and other devices to take game other than by hunting. The "Master of Game" mentions the subject but briefly, saying, "Truly, I trow no good hunter would slay them so for no good," but Gaston Phoebus contains seventeen short chapters in which the author as well as the miniaturist describe the various contrivances then in use, although the same disdain of these unsportsmanlike methods is expressed by G. de F. that marks the Duke of York's pages. That the former took no pleasure in snaring animals can be seen from the beginning of his 60th chapter where the following passage occurs:

"After I have spoken of how to hunt wild beasts with strength, I will devise how one can take them by mastery (skill) and with what engines one can do it. For it seemeth to me no one is a perfect good hunter if he knows not both to take beasts by strength and with gins—But I shall speak of this unwillingly, for I should not teach to take beasts, unless it be by nobleness and gentleness, and to have good disport, so that there be more beasts, and that they be not killed falsely, but that one should always find some to hunt."

Roy Modus evinced a similar spirit, and although he describes all kinds of traps and nets for the taking of wild beasts, he expressly says (fol. lxxii) that these are for poor men and not for the rich who can afford plenty of hounds.

The use of these traps, pitfalls and nets by the former was a very necessary measure of self protection against the depredations of game and beasts of prey. In one passage in Roy Modus (lxix)

a poor man comes to him and says: "Sire, I dwell near a forest and great damage is done to me by a wild boar who comes into my garden and eats my plants; deign to counsel me how to take him." Eight chapters of this ancient hunting book are devoted to the manner of taking animals by the poor man.

Traps and snares therefore played an important role as a protection from wild beasts and as a means of replenishing the larder, so that in the earliest times man's ingenuity in the invention of devices to destroy the wild beasts that shared with him the vast primæval forests, was practically a matter of life and death.

Scientific researches in this direction, it is said, show that the mastodon and other prehistoric monsters seem to have fallen victim to similar devices, for their remains have been found together with spear- and arrow-heads. Of course this does not prove that these gigantic pachyderms were bagged while in a state of untrammelled freedom; it would appear far more probable that they had first been rendered helpless by being entrapped in pitfalls or in enclosures before they succumbed to the stone arrows of their pigmy pursuers.

The pitfall is the most ancient and simple kind of trap. It had but to be dug in the right place in the path used by the animal on his way from his lair to his food or to water, and then, disguised by a covering of earth and grass or green boughs, to make it a deadly trap even for the most wary beast; and, indeed, it must have often been a case of the trapper trapped. Does not the Psalmist sing of his enemies being put to confusion: "He made a pit and digged it and is fallen into the ditch which he made." "They have prepared a net for my steps, they have digged a pit before me into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves"?

The pit originally scooped out with rude implements and covered with rough branches became later on more scientific in shape, wider at the bottom than at the top; the branches which covered it were laced together and formed a permanent lid, made in the manner of a hurdle, which was so hung and nicely balanced on swivels that when the beast stepped on it it tilted up, precipitating the victim into the pit and closing on him. Used in combination with fences of hurdles placed in the shape of a "V" or an "X" (at the base of the "V" and in the waist of the "X") they made a deadly trap. Gaston Phoebus shows a device of this kind, with a wild boar going headlong into it. The pit in this picture seems to have had no shifting lid, but its mouth was merely covered with grasses and branches. These pits for wild boar were three fathoms deep. The fences led the driven animal to the pit much in the same manner that partridges were driven into a tunnel-net. Gaston favours the "X"shaped fence, for, he says, if the animal sees a wider space again beyond the neck or waist he will run into it more readily, thinking he can get away when once beyond the narrow part.

These hurdle fences were also one of the oldest hunting appurtenances of our Saxon forefathers;