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SMALL COUNTRY NEIGHBORS*

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SMALL mammals, with the exception of squirrels, are so much less conspicuous than birds, and indeed usually pass their lives in such seclusion, that the ordinary observer is hardly aware of their presence. At Sagamore Hill, for instance, except at haying time, I rarely see the swarming meadow mice, the much less plentiful pine mice, or the little mole shrews, alive, unless they happen to drop into a pit or sunken area which has been dug at one point to let light through a window into the cellar. The much more graceful and attractive white-footed mice and jumping mice are almost as rarely seen, though if one does come across a jumping mouse it at once attracts attention by its extraordinary leaps. The jumping mouse hibernates, like the woodchuck and chipmunk. The other little animals just mentioned are abroad all winter, the meadow mice under the snow, the white-footed mice, and often the shrews, above the snow. The tell-tale snow, showing all the tracks, betrays the hitherto unsuspected existence of many little creatures; and the commonest marks upon it are those of the rabbit and especially of the white-footed mouse. The shrew walks or trots and makes alternate footsteps in the snow. White-foot, on the contrary, always jumps, whether going slow or fast, and his hind feet leave their prints side by side, often with the mark where the tail has dragged. I think white-foot is the most plentiful of all our furred wild creatures, taken as a

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whole. He climbs trees well; I have found his nest in an old vireo's nest; but more often under stumps or boards. The meadow mice often live in the marshes and are entirely at home in the water.

The shrew mouse which I most often find is a short-tailed, rather thick-set little creature, not wholly unlike his cousin the shrew mole, and just as greedy and ferocious. When a boy I captured one of these mole-shrews and found to my astonishment that he was a bloodthirsty and formidable little beast of prey. He speedily killed and ate a partially grown white-footed mouse which I put in the same cage with him. (I think a full-grown mouse of this kind would be an overmatch for a shrew.) I then put a small snake in with him. The shrew was very active but seemed nearly blind, and as he ran to and fro he never seemed to be aware of the presence of anything living until he was close to it, when he would instantly spring on it like a tiger. On this occasion he attacked the little snake with great ferocity, and after an animated struggle in which the snake whipped and rolled all around the cage, throwing the shrew to and fro a dozen times, the latter killed and ate the snake in triumph. Larger snakes frequently eat shrews, by the way.

One of my boys—the special friend of Josiah the badger—once discovered a flying-squirrel's nest, in connection with which a rather curious incident occurred. The little boy had climbed a tree which is hollow at the top; and in this hollow he discovered a flying-squirrel mother with six young ones. She seemed so tame and friendly that the little boy for a moment hardly realized that

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she was a wild thing, and called down that he had "found a guinea-pig up the tree." Finally the mother made up her mind to remove her family. She took each one in turn in her mouth and flew or sailed down from the top of the tree to the foot of another tree nearby; ran up this, holding the little squirrel in her mouth; and again sailed down to the foot of another tree some distance off. Here she deposited her young one on the grass, and then, reversing the process, climbed and sailed back to the tree where the nest was; then she took out another young one and returned with it, in exactly the same fashion as with the first. She repeated this until all six of the young ones were laid on the bank, side by side in a row, all with their heads the same way. Finding that she was not molested she ultimately took all six of the little fellows back to her nest, where she reared her brood undisturbed.

Among the small mammals at Sagamore Hill the chipmunks are the most familiar and the most in evidence; for they readily become tame and confiding. For three or four years a chipmunk—I suppose the same chipmunk—has lived near the tennis court; and it has developed the rather puzzling custom of sometimes scampering across the court while we are in the middle of a game. This has happened two or three times every year, and is rather difficult to explain, for the chipmunk could just as well go round the court, and there seems no possible reason why he should suddenly run out on it while the game is in full swing. If he is seen every one stops to watch him, and then he may himself stop and sit up to look about; but we may not see him until just as he is finishing a frantic scurry across, in imminent danger of being stepped on.

Usually birds are very regular in their habits, so that not only the same species but the same individuals breed in the same places year after year. In spite of their wings they are almost as local as mammals, and the same pair will usually keep to the same immediate neighborhood, where they can always be looked for in their season. There are wooded or brush-grown swampy places not far from the White House where in the spring or summer I can count with certainty upon seeing wrens, chats, and the ground-loving Kentucky warbler; an attractive little bird, which, by the way, itself looks

much like a miniature chat. There are other places, in the neighborhood of Rock Creek, where I can be almost certain of finding the blue-gray gnat-catcher, which ranks just next to the humming-bird itself in exquisite daintiness and delicacy. The few pairs of mocking-birds around Washington have just as sharply defined haunts.

Nevertheless it is never possible to tell when one may run across a rare bird, and even birds that are not rare now and then show marked individual idiosyncrasy in turning up, or even breeding, in unexpected places. At Sagamore Hill, for instance, I never knew a purple finch to breed until the summer of 1906. Then two pairs nested with us, one right by the house and the other near the stable. My attention was drawn to them by the bold, cheerful singing of the males, who were spurred to rivalry by one another's voices. In September of the same year, while sitting in a rocking-chair on the broad veranda and looking out over the Sound, I heard the unmistakable "ank-ank" of nut-hatches from a young elm at one corner of the house. I strolled over, expecting to find the white-bellied nut-hatch, which is rather common on Long Island. But instead there were a couple of red-bellied nut-hatches, birds familiar to me in the northern woods, but which I had never before seen at Sagamore Hill. They were tame and fearless, running swiftly up and down the tree trunk and around the limbs while I stood and looked at them not ten feet away. The two younger boys ran out to see them; and then we hunted up their picture in Wilson. I find, by the way, that Audubon's and Wilson's are still the most satisfactory large ornithologies, at least for nature-lovers who are not specialists; but of course any attempt at serious study of our birds means recourse to the numerous and excellent books and pamphlets by recent observers.

In May, 1907, two pairs of robins built their substantial nests, and raised their broods, on the piazza at Sagamore Hill; one over the transom of the north hall door and one over the transom of the south hall door. Only one pair of purple finches returned to us this year; and for the first time in many years no Baltimore orioles built in the elm by the corner of the house; they began their nest, but for some reason left it unfinished. The red-winged blackbirds,

however, were more plentiful than for years previously, and two pairs made their nests near the old barn, where the grass stood lush and tall; this was the first time they had ever built nearer than the wood-pile pond, and I believe it was owing to the season being so cold and wet. It was perhaps due to the same cause that so many black-throated green warblers spent June and July in the woods on our place; they must have been breeding, though I only noticed the males. Each kept to his own special tract of woodland, among the tops of the tall trees, seeming to prefer the locusts, and throughout June each sang all day long—a drawing, cadenced little warble of five or six notes, usually uttered at intervals of a few seconds; sometimes while the little bird was perched motionless, sometimes as it flitted and crawled actively among the branches. With the resident of one particular grove I became well acquainted, as I was chopping a path through the grove. Every day the little warbler was singing away in the grove when I reached it, one locust tree being his favorite perch. He paid not the slightest attention to my chopping; whereas a pair of downy wood-peckers, and a pair of great crested fly-catchers, both of which, evidently, were likewise nesting near by, were much put out by my presence. While listening to my little black-throated friend I would continually hear the songs of his cousins, the prairie warbler, the redstart, the black-and-white creeper and the Maryland yellow-throat, not to speak of other birds, towhees, oven-birds, thrashers, vireos, and the beautiful golden-voiced wood thrushes.

The black-throated green warbler has seemingly become a regular summer resident of Long Island, for after discovering them on my place I found that two or three bird-loving neighbors were already familiar with them, and I heard them on several different occasions as I rode through the country roundabout. I already knew as summer residents in my neighborhood the following representatives of the warbler family: The oven-bird, chat, black-and-white creeper, Maryland yellow-throat, summer yellow-bird, prairie-warbler, pine-warbler, blue-winged warbler, golden-winged warbler (very rare), blue yellow-backed warbler, and redstart.

The black-throated green as a breeder and summer resident is a newcomer who

has extended his range southward. But this same summer I found one warbler, the presence of which, if more than accidental, means that a southern form is extending its range northward. This was the Dominican or yellow-throated warbler. Two of my bird-loving friends are Mrs. E. H. Swan, Jr., and Miss Alice Weeks. On July 4th Mrs. Swan told me that a new warbler, the yellow-throated, was living near their house, and that she and her husband had seen him on several occasions. I was rather skeptical and told her I thought that it must be a Maryland yellow-throat. Mrs. Swan meekly acquiesced in the theory that she might have been mistaken; but two or three days afterwards she sent me word that she and Miss Weeks had seen the bird again, had examined it thoroughly through their glasses and were sure it was a yellow-throated warbler. Accordingly on the morning of the 8th I walked down and met them both near Mrs. Swan's house, about a mile from Sagamore Hill. We did not have to wait long before we heard an unmistakably new warbler song; loud, ringing, sharply accented, just as the yellow-throat's song is described in Chapman's book. At first the little bird kept high in the tops of the pines, but after a while he came to the lower branches and we were able to see him distinctly. Only a glance was needed to show that my two friends were quite right in their identification, and that the bird was undoubtedly the Dominican or yellow-throated warbler. Its bill was as long as that of a black-and-white creeper, in sharp contrast to the bills of the other true wood-warblers, and the olive-gray back, yellow throat and breast, streaked sides, white belly, black cheek and forehead, and white line above eye and spot on the side of the neck, could all be plainly made out. The bird kept continually uttering its loud, sharply modulated and attractive warble. It never left the pines, and though continually on the move, it yet moved with a certain deliberation, like a pine warbler, and not with the fussy agility of most of its kinsfolk. Occasionally it would catch some insect on the wing, but most of the time kept hopping about among the pine needles at the ends of the twig-clusters, or moving along the larger branches, stopping from time to time to sing. Now and then it would sit still on one twig for several

minutes, singing at short intervals and preening its feathers.

In one apple tree we find a flicker's nest every year; the young make a queer, hissing, bubbling sound, a little like the boiling of a pot. This year one of the young ones fell out; I popped it back into the hole, whereupon its brothers and sisters "boiled" for several minutes, sounding like the cauldron of a small and friendly witch. John Burroughs, and a Long Island neighbor, John Lewis Childs, came to see me one day, in June, 1907; and I was able to show them the various birds of most interest—the purple finch, the black-throated green warbler, the red-wings in their unexpected nesting place by the old barn, and the orchard orioles and yellow-billed cuckoos in the garden.

At the White House we are apt to stroll around the grounds for a few minutes after breakfast; and during the migrations, especially in spring, I often take a pair of field-glasses so as to examine any bird as to the identity of which I am doubtful. From the end of April the warblers pass in troops—myrtle, magnolia, chestnut-sided, bay-breasted, blackburnian, black-throated blue, Canadian, and many others, with at the very end of the season the black-polls; exquisite little birds, but not conspicuous as a rule, except perhaps the blackburnian, whose brilliant orange throat and breast flame when they catch the sunlight as he flits among the trees. The males in their dress of courtship are easily recognized by any one who has Chapman's book on the warblers. On May 4, 1906, I saw a Cape May warbler, the first I had ever seen. It was in a small pine. It was fearless, allowing a close approach, and as it was a male in high plumage, it was unmistakable.

In 1907, after a very hot week in early March, we had an exceedingly cold and late spring. The first bird I heard sing in the White House grounds was a white-throated sparrow on March 1st, a song sparrow speedily following. The white-throats stayed with us until the middle of May, overlapping the arrival of the indigo buntings; but during the last week in April and first week in May their singing was drowned by the music of the purple finches, which I never before saw in such numbers around the White House. When we sat

by the south fountain, under an apple tree then blossoming, sometimes three or four purple finches would be singing in the fragrant bloom overhead. In June a pair of wood thrushes and a pair of black-and-white creepers made their homes in the White House grounds, in addition to our ordinary home-makers, the flickers, red-heads, robins, cat-birds, song sparrows, chippies, summer yellow birds, grackles, and I am sorry to say, crows. A handsome sapsucker spent a week with us. In this same year five night herons spent January and February in a swampy tract by the Potomac, half a mile or so from the White House.

At Mount Vernon there are of course more birds than there are around the White House, for it is in the country. At present but one mocking-bird sings around the house itself, and in the gardens, and the woods of the immediate neighborhood. Phoebe birds nest at the heads of the columns under the front portico; and a pair—or rather, doubtless, a succession of pairs—has nested in Washington's tomb itself, for the twenty years since I have known it. The cardinals, beautiful in plumage, and with clear ringing voices, are characteristic of the place. I am glad to say that the woods still hold many gray—not red—foxes; the descendants of those which Washington so perseveringly hunted.

At Oyster Bay on a desolate winter afternoon many years ago I shot an Ipswich sparrow on a strip of ice-rimmed beach, where the long coarse grass waved in front of a growth of blue-berries, beach-plums and stunted pines. I think it was the same winter that we were visited not only by flocks of cross-bills, pine linnets, red-polls and pine grosbeaks, but by a number of snowy owls, which flitted to and fro in ghost-like fashion across the wintry landscape and showed themselves far more diurnal in their habits than our native owls. One fall about the same time a pair of duck-hawks appeared off the bay. It was early, before many ducks had come, and they caused havoc among the night herons, which were then very numerous in the marshes around Lloyd's Neck, there being a big heronry in the woods near by. Once I saw a duck-hawk come around the bend of the shore, and dart into a loose gang of young night herons, still in the brown



Pine Knot.

plumage, which had jumped from the marsh at my approach. The pirate struck down three herons in succession and sailed swiftly on without so much as looking back at his victims. The herons, which are usually rather dull birds, showed every sign of terror whenever the duck-hawk appeared in the distance; whereas, they paid no heed to the fish-hawks as they sailed over head. The little fish-crows are not rare around Washington, though not so common as the ordinary crows; once I shot one at Oyster Bay. They are not so wary as their larger kinsfolk. The soaring turkey buzzards, so beautiful on the wing and so loathsome near by, are seen everywhere around the Capital.

In Albemarle County, Virginia, we have a little place called Pine Knot, where we sometimes go, taking some or all of the children, for a three or four days' outing. It is a mile from the big stock farm "Plain Dealing," belonging to an old friend, Mr. Joseph Wilmer. The trees and flowers are like those of Washington, but their general

close resemblance to those of Long Island is set off by certain exceptions. There are osage orange hedges, and in spring many of the roads are bordered with bands of the brilliant yellow blossoms of the flowering broom, introduced by Jefferson. There are great willow oaks here and there in the woods or pastures, and occasional groves of noble tulip trees in the many stretches of forest; these trees growing to a much larger size than on Long Island. As at Washington, among the most plentiful flowers are the demure little Quaker Ladies, which are not found at Sagamore Hill—where we also miss such northern forms as the wake robin and the other trilliums, which used to be among the characteristic marks of spring-time at Albany. At Pine Knot the red bud, dogwood and laurel are plentiful; though in the case of the last two no more so than at Sagamore Hill. The azalea—its Knickerbocker name in New York was pinkster—grows and flowers far more luxuriantly than on Long Island. The moccasin flower and the china blue Virginia



From the veranda at Pine Knot.

cowslip with its pale pink buds, the blood-red Indian pink, the painted columbine, and many, many other flowers somewhat less showy, carpet the woods. The birds are, of course, for the most part the same as on Long Island, but with some differences. These differences are, in part, due to the more southern locality; but in part I cannot explain them, for birds will often be absent from one place seemingly without any real reason. Thus around us in Albemarle County song sparrows are certainly rare and I have not seen Savannah sparrows at all; but the other common sparrows, such as the chippy, field sparrow, vesper sparrow, and grasshopper sparrow abound; and in an open field, where bindweed morning glories and evening primroses grew among the broom sedge, I found some small grass-dwelling sparrows, which with the exercise of some little patience I was able to study at close quarters with the glasses; as I had no gun I could not be positive about their identification, though I was inclined to believe that they were Henslows sparrows. Of birds of brilliant color there are six species—the cardinal, the summer red-bird and the scarlet tanager, in red, and the blue-bird, indigo bunting, and blue grossbeak, in blue. I saw but one pair of blue grossbeaks; but the little indigo buntings abound, and blue-birds are exceedingly common, breeding in

numbers. It has always been a puzzle to me why they do not breed around us at Sagamore Hill, where I only see them during the migrations. Neither the rosy summer red-birds nor the cardinals are quite as brilliant as the scarlet tanagers, which fairly burn like live flames; but the tanager is much less common than either of the others in Albemarle County, and it is much less common than it is at Sagamore Hill. Among the singers the wood-thrush is not common, but the meadow-lark abounds. The yellow-breasted chat is everywhere and in the spring its clucking, whistling, whooping and calling seem never to stop for a minute. The white-eyed vireo is found in the same thick undergrowth as the chat, and among the smaller birds it is one of those most in evidence to the ear. In one or two places I came across parties of the long-tailed Bewick's wren, as familiar as the house wren but with a very different song. There are gentle mourning doves; and black-billed cuckoos seem more common than the yellow-bills. The mocking-birds are, as always, most interesting. I was much amused to see one of them following two crows; when they lit in a plowed field the mocking-bird paraded alongside of them six feet off, and then fluttered around to the attack. The crows, however, were evidently less bothered by it than they would have been by a king-bird. At Plain

Dealing many birds nest within a stone's throw of the rambling attractive house, with its numerous outbuildings, old garden, orchard, and venerable locusts and catalpas. Among them were Baltimore and orchard orioles, purple grackles, flickers and red-headed woodpeckers, blue-birds, robins, king-birds and indigo buntings. One observation which I made was of real interest. On May 18, 1907, I saw a small party of a dozen or so passenger pigeons, birds I had not seen for a quarter of a century and never expected to see again. I saw them two or three times flying hither and thither with great rapidity, and once they perched in a tall dead pine on the edge of an old field. They were unmistakable; yet the sight was so unexpected that I almost doubted my eyes, and I welcomed a bit of corroborative evidence coming from Dick, the colored foreman at Plain Dealing. Dick is a frequent companion of mine in rambles around the country, and he is an unusually close and accurate observer of birds, and of wild things generally. Dick had mentioned to me having seen some "wild carrier pigeons," as he called them; and, thinking over this remark of his, after I had returned to Washington, I began to wonder whether he too might not have seen passenger pigeons. Accordingly

I wrote to Mr. Wilmer, asking him to question Dick and find out what the "carrier pigeons" looked like. His answering letter runs in part as follows:

"On May 12th last Dick saw a flock of about thirty wild pigeons, followed at a short distance by about half as many, flying in a circle very rapidly, between the Plain Dealing house and the woods, where they disappeared. They had pointed tails and resembled somewhat large doves—the breast and sides rather a brownish red. He had seen them before, but many years ago. I think it is unquestionably the passenger pigeon—*ectopistes migratoria*—described on page 25 of the 5th volume of Audubon. I remember the pigeon roosts as he describes them, on a smaller scale, but large flocks have not been seen in this part of Virginia for many years."

The house at Pine Knot consists of one long room, with a broad piazza, below, and three small bedrooms above. It is made of wood, with big outside chimneys at each end. Wood rats and white-footed mice visit it; once a weasel came in after them; now a flying squirrel has made his home among the rafters. On one side the pines and on the other side the oaks come up to



The fire-place.



From a photograph, copyright 1907, by Christinet

"Roswell behaves like a gentleman"

the walls; in front the broom sedge grows almost to the piazza and above the line of its waving plumes we look across the beautiful rolling Virginia farm country to the foothills of the Blue Ridge. At night whippoor-wills call incessantly around us. In the late spring or early summer we usually take breakfast and dinner on the veranda, listening to mocking-bird, cardinal, and Carolina wren, as well as to many more common singers. In the winter the little house can only be kept warm by roaring fires in the great open fireplaces, for there is no plaster on the walls, nothing but the bare wood. Then the table is set near the blazing logs at one end of the long room which makes up the lower part of the house,

and at the other end the colored cook—Jim Crack by name—prepares the delicious Virginia dinner; while around him cluster the little darkies, who go on errands, bring in wood, or fetch water from the spring, to put in the bucket which stands below where the gourd hangs on the wall. Outside the wind moans or the still cold bites if the night is quiet; but inside there is warmth and light and cheer.

There are plenty of quail and rabbits in the fields and woods near by, so we live partly on what our guns bring in; and there are also wild turkeys. I spent the first three days of November, 1906, in a finally successful effort to kill a wild turkey. Each morning I left the house between three and

five o'clock, under a cold, brilliant moon. The frost was heavy; and my horse shuffled over the frozen ruts as I rode after Dick. I was on the turkey grounds before the faintest streak of dawn had appeared in the East; and I worked as long as daylight lasted. It was interesting and attractive in spite of the cold. In the night we heard the quavering screech owls; and occasionally the hooting of one of their bigger brothers. At dawn we listened to the lusty hammering of the big logcocks, or to the curious cough-

ing or croaking sound of a hawk before it left its roost. Now and then loose flocks of small birds straggled by us, as we sat in the blinds, or rested to eat our lunch; chickadees, tufted tits, golden crested kinglets, creepers, cardinals, various sparrows and small woodpeckers. Once we saw a shrike pounce on a field mouse by a haystack; once we came on a ruffled grouse sitting motionless in the road.

The last day I had with me Jim Bishop, a man who had hunted turkeys by pro-



From a photograph, copyright 1907, by Clouston.

Audrey takes the bars.

fession, a hard-working farmer, whose ancestors have for generations been farmers and woodsmen; an excellent hunter, tireless, resourceful, with an eye that nothing escaped; just the kind of man one likes to regard as typical of what is best in American life. Until this day, and indeed until the very end of this day, chance did not favor us. We tried to get up to the turkeys on the roosts before daybreak; but they roosted in pines, and, night though it was, they were evidently on the lookout, for they always saw us long before we could make them out, and then we could hear them fly out of the tree-tops. Turkeys are quite as wary as deer, and we never got a sight of them while we were walking through

the woods; but two or three times we flushed gangs, and my companion then at once built a little blind of pine boughs, in which we sat while he tried to call the scattered birds up to us by imitating, with marvellous fidelity, their yelping. Twice a turkey started toward us, but on each occasion the old hen began calling some distance off and all the scattered birds at once went toward her. At other times I would slip around to one side of a wood while my companion walked through it; but either there were no turkeys or they went out somewhere far away from us.

On the last day I was out thirteen hours. Finally, late in the afternoon, Jim Bishop marked a turkey into a point of pines which



From a photograph, copyright 1917, by Clivedinst.

Roswell fights for his head.



The stone wall.

stretched from a line of wooded hills down into a narrow open valley on the other side of which again rose wooded hills. I ran down to the end of the point and stood behind a small oak, while Bishop and Dick walked down through the trees to drive the turkeys toward me. This time everything went well; the turkey came out of the cover not too far off and sprang into the air, heading across the valley and offering me a side shot at forty yards as he sailed by. It was just the distance for the close-shooting tenbore duck gun I carried; and at the report down came the turkey in a heap, not so much as a leg, or wing moving. It was an easy shot. But we had hunted hard for three days; and the turkey is the king of American game birds; and besides I knew he would be very good eating indeed when we brought him home; so I was as pleased as possible when Dick lifted the fine young gobbler, his bronze plumage iridescent in the light of the westering sun.

Formerly we could ride across country in any direction around Washington; and almost as soon as we left the beautiful, tree-shaded streets of the city we were in the real country. But as Washington grows, it naturally—and to me most regrettably—becomes less and less like its former, glorified-village, self; and wire fencing has destroyed our old cross-country rides. Fortunately there are now many delightful bridle trails in Rock Creek Park; and we have fixed up

a number of good jumps at suitable places—a stone wall, a water jump, a bank with a ditch, two or three post-and-rails, about four feet high, and some stiff brush-hurdles, one of five feet seven inches. The last, which is the only formidable jump, was put up to please two sporting members of the administration, Bacon and Meyer. Both of them school their horses over it; and my two elder boys, and Fitzhugh Lee, my cavalry aide, also school my horses over it. On one of my horses, Roswell, I have gone over it myself; and as I weigh two hundred pounds without my saddle I think that the jump, with such a weight, in cold blood, should be credited to Roswell for righteousness. Roswell is a bay gelding; Audrey a black mare; they are Virginia horses. In the spring of 1907 I had photographs taken of them going over the various jumps. Roswell is a fine jumper, and usually goes at his jumps in a spirit of matter-of-fact enjoyment. But he now and then shows queer kinks in his temper. On one of these occasions he began by wishing to rush his jumps, and by trying to go over the wings instead of the jumps themselves. He fought hard for his head; and as it happened that the best picture we got of him in the air was at this particular time, it gives a wrong idea of his ordinary behavior, and also, I sincerely trust, a wrong idea of my hands. Generally he takes his jumps like a gentleman.