

**The home-life of a golden eagle / photographed and described by H.B. MacPherson.**

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THE HOME-LIFE OF A  
GOLDEN EAGLE

H. B. MACPHERSON

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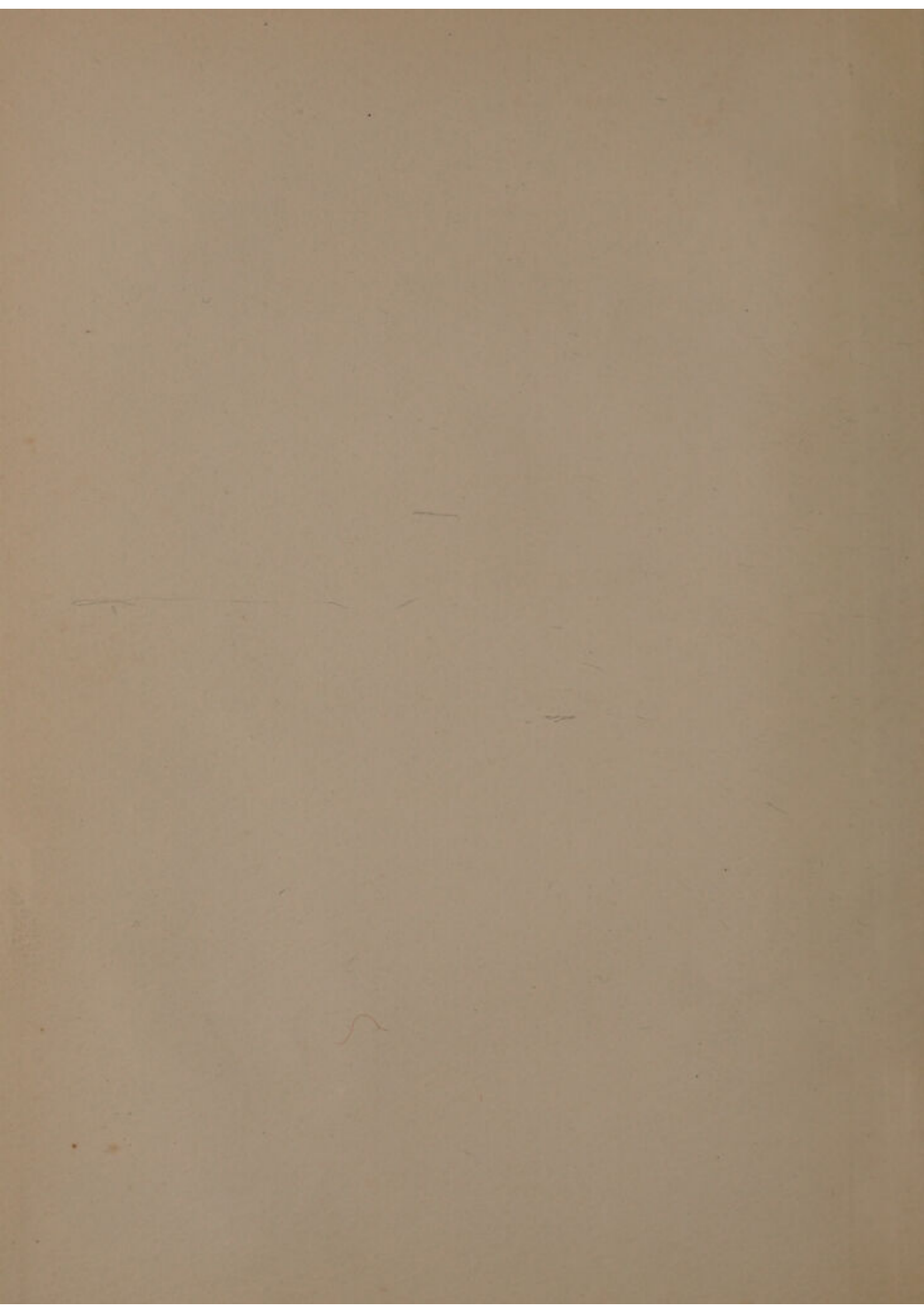


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THE HOME-LIFE  
OF A  
GOLDEN EAGLE

PHOTOGRAPHED AND DESCRIBED

BY

H. B. MACPHERSON

WITH THIRTY-TWO MOUNTED PLATES

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## THE HOME-LIFE OF A GOLDEN EAGLE.

IN a wild deer-forest situated in the heart of the Grampian range, there lies a dark, gloomy corrie, where the sun penetrates for but a few short hours during the long summer's day. At the head of the gorge, where rocks rise almost perpendicularly from the banks of a brawling burn, a pair of Golden Eagles had first made their eyrie in bygone days. Strictly protected by the proprietors and tenants of the forest, the nest had grown in bulk from year to year, and when I first climbed the rock some three years ago, it was a structure of considerable size and width. On that occasion I photographed the young—one egg being addled—at different stages of his growth, and it was not until the Eaglet had flown that I began to realize the unique possibilities which the situation offered to the photographer. I determined, however, that if in the future the Eagles should return some attempt should be made to study their habits, and, if possible, to obtain a series of pictures illustrating the progress of the Eaglets, and showing the most characteristic attitudes of their parents from the time when incubation commenced until the young were ready to leave the nest.

Three years passed by, and at length, on April 23rd, 1909, the welcome news arrived that the eyrie was again occupied, and that the Eagle was sitting hard on two eggs. The head stalker, to whose courtesy I owed this information, reported that one of the eggs was almost white, and that he expected only one Eaglet to



be hatched. As he seemed to think that the old birds were less suspicious than usual, I determined to risk a visit to the eyrie, though, knowing well that these birds are more prone to desert their eggs if disturbed than any of the lesser birds of prey, I was unwilling to go till incubation was far advanced. The behaviour of the pair, which, as my ally stated, had been circling close round his head while he was standing on the ledge, showed that the time of hatching would not be long delayed, and on May 3rd, the last day of the only week of sunshine which was vouchsafed to us in this most gloomy season, I made a start at daybreak on my bicycle, laden with cameras and other accessories.

After a long ride over a rough hill-road I reached the lodge and found the second stalker, to whose able assistance I owed much of my subsequent success, ready to accompany me to the eyrie. As we entered the corrie a herd of deer clattered up the steep slopes above us, and stood on the skyline in the bright sunshine gazing at us as though well aware that at this season there was a truce between man and the wild denizens of the hills. I cross-examined my companion as to the possibility of photographing the old Eagles, but he seemed doubtful whether the attempt was likely to be successful. A sharp walk of perhaps three miles brought us to our destination, and from a crag on the opposite side of the corrie to the eyrie we had the satisfaction of seeing the cock sail over our heads, flapping slowly down the corrie before gradually rising on upturned wings, until he hovered almost motionless, a mere speck against the dark blue sky.

It was a wild spot that the Eagles had chosen for their home, for on both sides of the corrie the cliffs rose sheer from the edge of a burn, and though now lit up by the rays of the sun, the gloomy grandeur of the scene could scarcely be surpassed. Scarred by the countless storms which had in bygone days swept through the gorge, and their slopes covered by the *débris* which



marks the path of the avalanche, the hills around bore witness to the fact that here, in this lone mountain fastness, was a dwelling-place meet for the King of Birds and his royal spouse.

At first glance the position might well seem impregnable to a casual observer, for the nest was situated on a narrow ledge some two hundred feet above the water, and at this point the rock was practically perpendicular. There were, however, two means of reaching the eyrie, one from above and the other from below. By choosing the former, by far the easier of the two, we could probably approach within a few yards of the female if she was still brooding, but, fearing lest our sudden appearance should alarm her and cause her to desert, I decided to climb from below. To active men the task presented no great difficulties, and a few minutes' hard work brought us to the end of a narrow ledge, while the burn roaring at the foot of the cliff deadened the sound of our footsteps. Before me the ledge turned abruptly to the right, and I peeped cautiously round the corner, just in time to see the female fling herself into mid-air from the nest. She sailed down the corrie, poised herself majestically in space beside her mate, then both vanished from our sight behind the shoulder of a distant hill. There were two eggs in the Eagle's eyrie (Plate 1), both worn and faded through long exposure and incubation, one, as my friend had stated, being almost white and bearing a close resemblance to a giant egg of some barn-door fowl. The fact should here be noted that on no occasion did I see the Eagle *rise* from her nest. She invariably flapped down the corrie close to the side of the hill, and subsequently either soared gradually upwards or sat watching us on a point of rock about half a mile away. During a long experience of Eagles I have never known the parents return to the eyrie when a man was near, if the latter was within their sight, nor have I seen them make the slightest



effort to drive away the intruder, far less to attack him, as has sometimes been reported, with wings and feet. Of all our shy birds the Eagle is the most timid, and generally remains out of sight for an hour or more if disturbed from the nest.

There was no food at the eyrie, and the nest was marvellously clean, while a quantity of fresh heather had evidently been added recently during incubation.

After photographing the nest and eggs from both sides, we carefully examined the surroundings and found a place where, among the stones, the camera might be hidden on a subsequent occasion to obtain a view of the sitting bird. A small pile of rocks was therefore arranged at the spot, so that the Eagles might become accustomed to the structure which eventually was to conceal the camera from their sight.

On the 19th of May, after a successful attempt to photograph a Peregrine Falcon brooding at the far end of the forest, we again returned to the eyrie, approaching it, however, from a different direction. The fine weather had ended abruptly, and the burn at the foot of the cliff was roaring in spate, fed by the melting snow-drifts above. There was no sign of the Eagles, and I climbed to the nest in fear lest others had been before me and had carried off the eggs. To my delight, however, both had hatched, and two young Eagles evidently about six days old, with eyes newly opened, surveyed us placidly from their rocky home. They were a comical pair (Plate 2 (a)), with large black eyes and yellowish beaks of huge size tipped with black. Already their claws were powerful and gripped one's finger tenaciously if a chance was given them. The hindquarters of a rabbit, freshly torn open and partially devoured, was the only article of food in the eyrie, and had been placed by the old birds beyond the reach of the young. The cold, however, was intense, and the dark lowering clouds above foretold rain or snow. This



was a difficulty which I had not foreseen, for, though the nest was warmly lined with thick grass and heather, the Eaglets were extremely sensitive to cold. I therefore covered them with my cap while the camera was being arranged, and examined them at frequent intervals to make sure that they were not suffering from the protracted absence of their mother. The arrangements for securing the portrait of the Eagle being complete, a long length of rubber tubing was affixed, and we stopped to examine our handiwork. The camera was now completely hidden among the stones, the lens only being visible. An ultra-rapid plate was inserted and the shutter set to  $\frac{1}{2}$  sec. at F.8, the most rapid speed which could be risked in the failing light.

We then climbed to the top of the rock and made our way to a sheltered nook nearly a mile down the corrie, from which, with the aid of the glass, we could command a view of the nest. Here we waited for an hour and a half in vain, till suddenly my companion drew my attention to a dark form flapping slowly across the opposite face. The Golden Eagle was returning to her eyrie. Those only who have experienced the fascination of this most exciting form of sport will understand my feelings at this moment. Hope alternated with despair as the Eagle circled round above the nest, then settled on a rock on the opposite side of the corrie. Here she sat motionless for perhaps a quarter of an hour, then, rising again into mid-air, disappeared from sight behind the hills.

I was now becoming anxious about the young Eagles, and had it not been for the stalker's persuasion should have removed the camera, for the cold was intense and at this elevation, nearly 3,000 feet, snow was extremely probable. The question now arose, was this long absence from the nest part of the Eagle's everyday programme, or was she suspicious of the hidden camera? Or, perchance, her piercing eyes had discovered



us in our lair among the rocks! The question was soon answered, for again she soared majestically in from the south, settled on the same spot, and then, to my delight, flapped across the corrie to the nest. Here she stayed for a few seconds, then retired to the other side of the corrie. After another long interval of fully half an hour she rose and disappeared once more towards the south. I now insisted on visiting the nest to see how the Eaglets were standing the cold, and found them quite warm and comfortable, the nest being comparatively sheltered from the wind.

Again we retreated to our hiding place, but before we reached it the stalker suddenly dropped face downwards to the earth, and I followed his example on seeing the cause of his collapse. We were now on an exposed top far above the nest, and directly above us were the two Eagles, soaring and wheeling about thirty yards over our heads. Hardly daring to breathe I nevertheless managed to watch the one on my left, while my companion was keeping his eye on its mate. For a time they hung almost motionless in the sky, then, apparently both coming to the conclusion that all was not safe, swooped away again out of our sight. We took advantage of the interval to lunch and to reach our hiding place, from which, about half an hour later, we saw the pair approaching at a great height from the south. This time they showed no hesitation, and the cock seemed to be driving his mate towards the corrie, circling round her when she swerved in the wrong direction, and evidently anxious for her to return. They both flapped slowly up the corrie and settled on the face opposite to the eyrie. After a few short flights up and down the gorge, the female crossed boldly and settled upon the edge of the nest. At this point we lost sight of the cock, and it is probable that he moved off as soon as he saw his mate return to the young and while we were intently watching her



movements. At this distance it was impossible to see exactly what she was doing, but we both agreed that she was tending the young, probably feeding them on the remains of the rabbit which we had noticed, for, as it turned out, she had brought no fresh food with her to the nest. She then settled herself down, and we gave her twenty minutes to warm up the Eaglets. Then began one of the most exciting stalks in my experience. The first part was easy enough, and we progressed noiselessly along the skyline above the eyrie without fear of arousing her suspicions. On reaching the top of the rock I took off my shoes, and began to descend with the utmost caution. A single false step or a rolling stone might arouse her suspicions and render the whole of our labour fruitless. All, however, went well, although at one moment the ready hand of my companion arrested the progress of a stone, which my elbow had moved, only just in time. Below me, scarcely ten feet beyond my reach, the bulb connected with the shutter lay, and as yet the Eagle had not taken the alarm. Somewhere below us, glaring outwards over the abyss, she was brooding (Plate 3) her young, faithful to her duty, her fierce eye watching the far side of the corrie lest any foe should come near. At length the bulb was in my hand, but even as I leaned forward to grasp it I lost my balance and slipped towards the abyss. A firm grip on my ankles from behind saved me from possible death, and I retained enough presence of mind to release the shutter. At its click the Golden Eagle flapped from her nest, and in a few seconds I stood beside the Eaglets on the ledge. They were surprised at my sudden appearance from above and, standing nearly upright, held a consultation (Plate 2 (b)), posing in such a comical attitude that I thought it worth recording with the camera. We now beat a hurried retreat, and left the Eagles in peace for the day.



A fairly satisfactory picture of the female brooding having been thus obtained, the eyrie was now left quiet for nearly a week, during which period I made up my mind to give up the rest of the summer to the task of making a complete record of the home-life of our noblest bird of prey. How far I succeeded it is for my readers to judge.

On the 25th of May, having left the camera at a Kestrel's eyrie further down the glen, we visited the Eagles again, but to my extreme annoyance found that one Eaglet had vanished. The other, the smaller of the two, which turned out to be a cock bird, was now strong and lusty, but the larger one had presumably died and had been removed by the parents or taken by some vermin from the nest. There was much speculation as to its fate, and the possibility of its having been removed by the old birds to another nest was suggested. This theory, however, was disproved by the subsequent behaviour of the parents, and the matter has remained a mystery till the present day.

On this occasion picks and spades formed part of our equipment and took the place of the camera which usually accompanied me on these expeditions, and, after a fruitless search for the missing Eaglet, we set to work to excavate and build a hiding place which would conceal myself and the camera. There was, as before, no sign of the parents when we arrived, nor did they put in an appearance during our operations. A carcass of a grouse, freshly plucked, and disembowelled, and the hindquarters of a young rabbit, were the only dainties which we found in the eyrie.

The making of the "bothy," as it was afterwards called by the stalkers, was, however, no easy job, for the ledge was extremely narrow at the only point which commanded a view of the nest. Here a false step would have spelt death, for the cliff below us was almost perpendicular, and great care had to be exercised to avoid slipping while the work was in progress. With



much difficulty a hole about two feet in depth was dug out, and three rough walls were raised around, the cliff on the fourth side serving as the other. Covering the whole with heather and moss to conceal its artificial character, we returned homewards well pleased with our progress.

After two days' rest I again resumed operations and decided to stay a night in the forest, the weather being now appalling, the state of the roads rendering the bicycle almost useless. I may say here that considerably more than a thousand miles were covered by me in travelling to and from the nest, and in bad weather the road became almost impassable. The lessees of the forest, who courteously placed the lodge at my disposal, saved me many a weary journey home by their kindness, and on these occasions gave me every possible assistance that could be imagined.

On our arrival at the nest at 11 a.m. we had a magnificent view of the female sheltering her offspring from the storm in a semi-erect attitude (a photograph of which on a subsequent occasion I secured), the remains of two rabbits lying beside her on the ledge. We now proceeded to roof the hiding place with canvas covered with heather and sods of turf, and the stalker devised an opening behind which enabled me to crawl in with the camera on subsequent occasions. All day the rain fell in torrents, and we were soon soaked to the skin. Owing to the cold, which I feared might affect the young Eagle if we stayed longer, we were unable to complete our task satisfactorily. Through the gorge the wind was howling in fierce gusts as we departed, and we were scarcely half way down the corrie when the female soared back towards the eyrie through the white wreaths of floating mist which now obscured the hills from view.

On the following morning I was early afoot, but the mist was low on the tops and at frequent intervals heavy showers of sleet came driving up the glen from the north.



At 8 a.m., however, we made a start, and again saw the female flap slowly away from the eyrie as we approached. She had evidently just fed the Eaglet, for he seemed sleepy and contented, while the torn carcass of a grouse lying beside him showed that a feast had been in progress. Covering him again carefully with my cap, we started work, and rebuilt one of the walls of the "bothy" which seemed inclined to collapse. The stones used for this purpose were all carried and rolled for a considerable distance down the cliff—a somewhat arduous undertaking.

All being now ready, and two peep-holes having been arranged, I crawled into the hiding-place, and succeeded in arranging the camera to my satisfaction. My ally then closed me in with thick bunches of heather, and, wishing me luck, took his departure according to my instructions.

For the first time in my life I was now alone with the Eagles in a hiding-place commanding a view of the nest. The young Eagle lay asleep, like a mere bunch of white down, in the huge structure. The wind moaned in strange, piercing gusts, which echoed and re-echoed from the rocks, and the burn roared furiously in spate below. A frail wall of stones alone separated me from the edge of the cliff, and through my peep-hole I could see the mist rolling in endless wreaths along the opposite face, though as yet the nest itself was clear. An hour passed by and still the Eaglet slept, protected from the drenching rain by the ledge of rock projecting from above. At 1.30 p.m. a dark shadow flitted across the peep-hole, and, peering cautiously out, I saw the giant bird sitting on the ledge close to the nest. The Eaglet was now squeaking lustily, but the mother had brought no food and seemed restless, staying only a few seconds before she flapped away. Ten minutes later she settled again on the edge of the eyrie, and seemed quite unsuspecting of my hiding-place. She was gazing anxiously at the sleeping Eaglet, and,



with a sudden rush of wings, the cock lit beside her on the ledge (Plate 4). He had brought with him the hindquarters of a rabbit, which he carried in one powerful foot. As if satisfied that all was well, the pair retired, and I took advantage of the interval to remove and clean the lens, which had become clouded by the mist and rain. The dark slides also were swollen with the wet, and the shelter was dripping in several places, while I myself, soaked more or less to the skin, was sitting literally in a pool of water.

At 2.30 p.m. the female returned again, and began to remove the fouled, dirty sticks from the edge of the nest (Plate 5), carrying them away in her powerful beak. The Eaglet was now awake and watched her, squeaking at intervals, while she performed this task. He was evidently hungry, and had I waited longer I should probably have seen him fed. On this occasion, however, she noticed the slight click of my shutter, and, unwilling to disturb them further, I crawled out into the raging storm half frozen and stiff with cold. On reaching the lodge a welcome change and a plentiful repast awaited me, and, the storm somewhat abating, I started for home, noting that the tops of the higher hills were now coated with snow.

The next entry in my diary recalls to my memory what was perhaps the most fearful storm which I have ever seen in summer in the Highlands. It was the last day of May, and the mist hung low to the foot of the hills. It was raining in torrents, and it took me fully four hours to reach the lodge. The rain now turned to sleet, and a hurricane of wind rattled up the glen. At 3 p.m. I became weary of inactivity and expressed my intention of going alone to the eyrie to see if all was well, being unwilling to ask anybody to accompany me in such a storm. The young stalker, however, hearing of my plans, joined me as I started, and we reached the eyrie again at 4.30 p.m. The mist lay thick around us,



and, like some huge phantom, the Eagle flew away from the nest as we approached. I had one glimpse of her before she left the eyrie, and the attitude in which she was crouching, sheltering the young one from the rain, was so characteristic that, although as usual soaked to the skin, I determined to make an attempt to secure the picture. At 4.45 all was ready, and my companion closed me in as before. The Eaglet was now squeaking loudly, and I began to fear that he might suffer from the cold. Scarcely a quarter of an hour, however, elapsed before the Eagle flapped in through the mist and settled on the far side of the nest. The Eaglet tried to crawl towards her, but as yet his legs were unequal to the effort. The old Eagle advanced a step and glared at the shelter, for the first time noticing the projecting lens. Satisfied that all was well, she settled down in the attitude which I coveted, half of the Eaglet being hidden below her breast. This picture (Plate 6) shows clearly the position in which the Eagle shelters her young when the latter are too large to be covered in the usual way.

I exposed four plates in quick succession, and then waited for a short time to see if any further development was likely to take place. It was a weird experience, entombed as it were in the bowels of the earth, with the burn roaring in flood below as the torrent hurled itself through the corrie, the wreaths of floating mist around, the rattle of sleet and hail on the rocks, all combined to make up a strange picture, which still haunts me in my dreams, enhanced by the darkness of the hiding-place and the gloom around. Opposite me the giant bird brooding like some spectre conjured up by a wizard's hand, but how different was her appearance now from the glorious *Raptor* as seen on a bright summer's day! Dripping with wet, her feathers draggled, her plumes matted with the rain, she sat patiently watching the far side of the corrie, turning her head at intervals towards the young one below her breast.



At last, during a temporary lull in the storm, she rose to her feet and began to tear ravenously at the rabbit which lay beside her. Instantaneous photography was out of the question and her movements were so rapid that the time shutter was equally useless. She swallowed rapidly masses of intestines, and picking out some titbits from the liver presented them to the Eaglet, which was now sitting in a half upright position; then, seizing the carcass by one leg, she disappeared with it into the mist-wreaths beyond. I took advantage of the opportunity to escape from my hiding-place, as dusk was approaching and the snowflakes were now whirling down the gorge.

"Fine, but dull, with passing showers," such is the extract from my diary which describes the following morning. I reached the eyrie at 7.5 a.m., and again found the old Eagle sheltering her young. The latter was gorged, and I subsequently ascertained that at this stage of the Eaglet's career he was fed with great regularity twice a day—at daybreak and about 5 p.m. Occasionally one of the birds came in with prey at intervals through the day, the majority of their visits occurring after noon, between 1 and 3 p.m. Scraps of raw flesh were scattered on the ledge and the remains of a grouse and two rabbits were to be seen. The hiding-place being to-day comparatively dry, I settled down comfortably with two cameras in position to await the course of events, and, to my delight, the sun broke through the clouds and for a short time blazed full upon the eyrie. The Eaglet was still asleep and evidently quite content to bask in the rays of the sun.

The air now became warmer and the canvas above me began to dry. The dripping ceased, and for the first time I sat in comparative comfort. At 11 a.m. the Eaglet raised himself and turned round towards the outer edge of the nest, looking intently upwards and calling loudly to something which evidently moved



from place to place on the opposite side of the corrie. A few minutes later a shadow crossed the roof of my hiding-place, and the mother Eagle settled on the ledge. She had brought no food, and had evidently only looked in to see that all was well with the young. Her beak was bloody and small feathers adhering to its edges showed that she had brought her morning hunt to a successful finish. She stood there in the sunlight a picture of perfect grace and symmetry (Plate 7), her feathers now dry and clean, watching as though on guard, while the Eaglet squeaked plaintively to her from behind. Then with one graceful effort she flung herself from the cliff, and again the Queen of Birds had vanished from my sight.

Seen in wet and stormy weather the plumage of the Golden Eagle appears very dark, and one scarcely wonders that it is known locally as the "Black Eagle" in many parts of the Highlands. On such a day as this the brilliant light seems to tinge each feather with a golden hue and fills one with admiration for this glorious bird, which has survived so many dangers and rears her young in the wild solitudes of this lonely corrie. As she gazes at the Eaglet her eye seems to change, and a soft look of mother-love takes the place of the fierce expression common to all our larger birds of prey. There are few artists who can draw a picture true to life of the Golden Eagle. The attitudes of captive birds are false, their movements cramped, their wings hang drooping, and their tails are draggled. The Eagle is a bird which loves solitude, and its home is in the wild places of the earth.

Again the Eaglet settled himself down and went to sleep, while, quite involuntarily, I nearly followed his example, being, however, aroused from a reverie by the squeaking of the youngster, which, as a friend aptly put it, "always gave tongue loudly when the old birds were near."



With a rush of wings she came again, and this time deposited a grouse ready plucked on the ledge. It was now 3 p.m. and the Eaglet was hungry, but she evidently considered that it was too early for supper, and again departed. In less than five minutes the cock dropped in with another grouse, also plucked clean of feathers and headless, and as soon as he had departed the hen returned with a third, and as quickly vanished. This store of food had evidently been accumulated by them somewhere outside the eyrie, and I subsequently discovered several places among the rocks where game had been plucked, for no bird is ever brought to the young without being stripped of its feathers. As we shall see later, hares are sometimes brought unplucked at another stage, but while the Eaglets are still in the first down both hares and rabbits are also stripped of fur, but not skinned, before being brought to the eyrie. Other places were found later where the refuse from the nest was deposited, for during the first two months the eyrie was kept remarkably clean. These "middens" were not used for plucking, but were kept for their own purpose as storehouses for refuse.

The Eaglet was now very excited and would not settle down again to sleep, searching the sky for his parents, his eyes rolling with anticipation of the coming feast. At 3.45 the cock appeared with a fourth grouse, and turned sideways upon the ledge, standing upon the prey with both feet. Suddenly, with a terrific blow of his powerful claw, he ripped the bird open from breast to tail, and then again took his departure.

In a few minutes the female returned to the eyrie, and picked out the grouse which the cock had prepared, choosing it carefully from among the other carcasses. Seizing it in one foot, she shuffled forward towards the Eaglet, and placed the prey in front of the expectant youngster (Plate 8), with its legs sticking



up into the air. The young one was now expecting to be fed, but she suddenly changed her mind, and flew away once more.

In the evening, about 6 o'clock, the Eagle returned once more to feed her young (Plate 9), and I secured a picture of her in a characteristic attitude. The light was now failing and dark clouds rolled up from the west, putting an end to all possibility of instantaneous work. The scene which followed was, however, well worth a long day's patience, for the Eagle picked out the prepared grouse again and carried it to the far side of the eyrie in her beak. Here, beyond reach of the young one, she gorged herself upon the entrails, coming forward at intervals to the Eaglet with a titbit of liver or other dainty morsel, which he greedily pecked from her beak. When she herself was satisfied she brought the prey nearer and proceeded to gorge the youngster till he settled down contented in the nest. She then seized the remains of the carcase in her beak and bore it away out of my sight.

A moment later, having disposed of the refuse, she returned and again settled herself down beside the Eaglet to shelter him for the night. As this position had been already photographed, I slipped quietly away without disturbing her, having placed caps over the lenses to shield them from the rain.

The most extraordinary feature of the day was the behaviour of the cock in splitting open a grouse for the convenience of the female and the young, and I have often wondered whether this is an exceptional occurrence, or whether it is common during the earlier stages. It was certainly never repeated during my observations, and neither on this nor on any other occasion did I see the cock himself feed at the nest, though he sometimes gave the young one a titbit if one was handy.

On June 4th, leaving home at 4 a.m., I found the mist rising from the tops when I reached the eyrie a few minutes before 7 o'clock. The sun was breaking



through at intervals and the day promised well, but a slight touch of frost at dawn had chilled the air. The old Eagle was sheltering her young, and I crept quietly into my hiding-place without disturbing her. Her beak was bloody, and the youngster, evidently gorged, was lying below her breast in a lethargic attitude. Beside her was the clean-picked skeleton of a grouse, and the hindquarters of a rabbit, only partially plucked and recently killed, had been deposited on the ledge, in all probability by the cock bird this very morning. Attempting to arrange the camera for a picture without disturbing her I unfortunately moved a small stone, and though the noise was of the slightest, she took alarm and flew away. The Eaglet, not the least annoyed by her departure, still dozed peacefully, and I afterwards ascertained that this was his invariable custom after his early meal at daybreak.

At 10.12 a.m. the Eagle alighted on the ledge beyond the nest, and the Eaglet, now thoroughly awake, cried incessantly, while she stood glaring at my hiding-place. She was evidently a little suspicious, and I heartily regretted my attempt to photograph her on my arrival, but remained quiet in the hope that she would soon regain confidence. At last, after what seemed an eternity, she stepped slowly forward, her footsteps sounding clearly through the still air, turned at right angles and bent forward to inspect the Eaglet (Plate 10), in an attitude which I afterwards found to be by no means uncommon when she brought no prey with her. The object of these periodical visits throughout the day, on the occasions when no food was brought, seemed to be caused simply by anxiety for the welfare of the young, for she never stayed long at the eyrie except when feeding or sheltering the Eaglet.

Her next visit was at 1 o'clock, when she returned with a grouse, headless as usual and completely denuded of its feathers. This she deposited on the edge of the



nest and then turned her attention to the rabbit, which had been there when I arrived. She tore its two hind legs apart without the slightest difficulty, and proceeded to devour one of them, having separated it into two sections at the middle joint. She swallowed the bones of this leg and carried away the other with her, presumably to devour it elsewhere. The Eaglet had meanwhile been watching her enviously and crying piteously for food, but she either considered rabbit too tough for him or thought him unduly greedy, refusing to feed him till the proper hour. It is worth noting that she always seemed unwilling to give the youngster rabbit if grouse was available, and never gave him portions of the flesh of four-footed animals until he was able to tear the prey for himself, offering him only titbits from the liver, though at this stage she fed him freely with the flesh of grouse.

At 1.30 the cock dropped in (Plate 11), and the photograph which I then obtained shows him in an attitude extremely characteristic of anger among the larger birds of prey. The cause of his furious demeanour was at the time a mystery, but before leaving the eyrie I discovered that a tuft of heather had fallen from the roof of my hiding-place and that a small portion of the canvas had been exposed. This, though now stained and weather-beaten, had doubtless attracted his attention, and he resented it accordingly. However, he soon came to the conclusion that it was harmless, and carefully inspected the Eaglet from every point of view, finally standing for some time on a small rock hardly two feet from the lens. At length he took his departure, and in five minutes the female appeared with another grouse and gave the Eaglet a few titbits from its liver (Plate 12), "wolfing" the entrails herself with great gusto. She then retired, leaving the two grouse for the evening feed.



The sun had now vanished behind the clouds and huge drops of rain began to fall. The corrie became dark and gloomy and the Eaglet cried ravenously for food, his small voice echoing at intervals through the howling gusts of wind which preceded the coming storm. As if in answer to him, his mother again swooped in and for the next half hour steadily gorged him with the flesh, liver and heart of grouse. The light was hopeless for photography, but I crouched in my hiding-place fascinated by the sight of this wild creature feeding her young in my presence, unconscious of the close proximity of man. She fed herself and the Eaglet alternately until he crawled back satisfied into the nest. At that moment a peal of thunder awoke the echoes of the hills, and through my peep-hole I saw the Eagle vanish into the swiftly falling mist. A jagged flash of lightning crossed the small section of the sky which was within my view and the rain fell in torrents, while the Eaglet squeaked piteously, trembling and shivering with the cold. In a few seconds she returned, and he crept close to her breast for shelter. She touched him gently with her beak as though to quiet his fears and to assure him of her protection. And now peal followed peal and flash followed flash, while, to add to the tumult, a rock, loosened by the storm, crashed headlong past my hiding-place to hurl itself into the burn below. During a gust of wind which drowned the sound of my retreat, I crawled away, and thus I left them, the mother Eagle and her child, to face the storm together throughout the long watches of the night.

On my next visit to the eyrie I found the Eaglet gorged and asleep, the parents being absent. He was literally surrounded by the remains of leverets and rabbits, but for the most part they were mere skeletons which had been devoured during the previous day. In this connection it was noticeable that the leverets



had been brought in whole, and not divided into two sections. I ascertained later that it was the custom of the Eagles to bring only the hindquarters of full-grown hares and rabbits to the nest, while the young of both these animals were not divided and seldom disembowelled. The forequarters were presumably devoured in the first case by the parents themselves.

At 7.30 all was in readiness and I prepared for another long day with the Eagles. It was nearly noon when the female returned, and on this occasion she brought no food, but, after a look round the eyrie, decided that the nest required rebuilding. She first carefully rearranged a few of the sticks whose position I had altered, and, having placed them to her satisfaction, flew away for more. In a few minutes she came back with a large stick in her beak (Plate 13), and having laid this in a suitable position, stepped back to inspect her handiwork. She then picked up a dirty bunch of heather and carried it away, returning several times for more refuse, and finally removing all the old skeletons of hares and rabbits with which the nest had become crowded. This accomplished she disappeared, returning after a long absence at 5.15 p.m. bringing a fresh grouse in her talons with which to feed the Eaglet. The latter was, as usual, ravenous, and she now began to encourage him to feed himself, first opening the prey with her powerful beak and devouring the entrails herself. She never allowed him to eat the entrails at this stage, but when these were safely disposed of she held the carcass towards him in such a position as to make it easy for him to pick out the liver and other dainties. It was interesting to watch her gestures and to see with what patience she thus gave the Eaglet his first lesson in feeding himself. She then tore the flesh into fragments and, both being satisfied, flew away.

The 11th of June found me again *en route* for the forest—a bitterly cold morning, with driving showers of



sleet and snow. Having slept long, I was late in arriving at the nest, and, as I had expected, found both parents absent and the young Eagle asleep. The wind was blowing from the north and the cold was intense. The Eaglet spent most of the morning in his snug quarters under the rock, but a brief glimpse of sunshine at noon awoke him from his slumbers. He was now beginning to use his legs, and his clumsy efforts to walk were exceedingly amusing. For perhaps a second or two he would stand upright, but the weight of his body generally overbalanced him when he tried to make a step, and he fell ignominiously forward. His determination to walk, however, was very marked, and in the course of an hour or so his perseverance was rewarded with some measure of success.

At 2.5 p.m. his mother brought him a grouse, and seemed surprised to find him standing more or less upright. She gave him a few titbits from the liver and, as usual, devoured the entrails herself, but she had evidently no intention of giving him a square meal at this early hour. At 4.30 she came back and gave him his supper, still encouraging him to pick out the titbits for himself, and while she was thus engaged the cock settled on a stone close to the nest, but too near my "bothy" for a satisfactory picture. He then flapped on to the top of my hiding-place and sat there for some minutes close to my head, showing by this action how completely the suspicions of the Eagles had been overcome. Both birds then took their departure, the female bearing away with her the remains of the carcase of the grouse.

The next day was comparatively uneventful, the most noticeable feature being the extraordinary progress which the Eaglet had made in his walking lessons, but from the point of view of photography the day was unsatisfactory, because somehow or other the Eagles had become suspicious of my hiding-place. Possibly the female had



seen me enter, for on this occasion I had neglected the precaution of bringing my ally the stalker to walk away when I was safely hidden.

At 2.5 p.m. the female brought a young hare, only partially plucked, and deposited it at the far side of the nest, but she showed great cunning and evinced a most unreasonable dislike to the lens, which may possibly have been reflecting the light at the time. On the stroke of 5, during a heavy shower of sleet, she came back with a grouse, which she placed on a ledge beside the nest and there disembowelled it.

She now attempted to decoy the Eaglet from the neighbourhood of my hiding-place, and the method which she adopted showed considerable reasoning power. First, gorging herself on the ledge with the entrails, she made the Eaglet furious with envy and disappointment, for he was watching her every movement over the edge of the nest. She then picked out a piece of liver, walked up to the side of the nest and offered it to him, without allowing him to take the dainty morsel. Stepping backwards she decoyed him gradually away till he flapped over the edge, and her object was attained. This was the first time her suspicions had been aroused, and I feared that she might make a practice of decoying the Eaglet thus away from the camera, so decided to give the birds a long rest and to ask the stalker to leave the eyrie quiet till I returned. Before leaving I replaced the Eaglet in the nest, and in doing so noticed that the first dark feathers on his wings were now sprouting. A month had now gone by since he left the shell.

A fortnight passed before I saw the Eaglet again. He was half covered with short thick feathers, while the quills of others could be seen sprouting through the down. He was at least twice as big as when I had seen him last and had become as savage as a young tiger, crouching down at my approach and opening his huge



beak in rage. A young hare, half-plucked, but not opened, was lying beside him, and under the rock were the remains of a grouse and of a rabbit, which had probably already served for breakfast. I saw no signs of his parents till about 2 o'clock, when his mother brought in the hindquarters of a full-grown hare, deposited it on the ledge and retired. The Eaglet had rushed forward to the edge of the rock to meet her and seemed disappointed when she flew away, but consoled himself by making a hearty meal on the fleshy parts of the hare's legs. He was now fast gaining strength, but had not yet learnt to stand on the prey and to grip it with his feet. As usual, the day was dark and gloomy, with heavy showers of rain and sleet.

After his feast the Eaglet walked round the edge of the nest and began to play. He behaved exactly like a child thrown upon its own resources for amusement and compelled to fall back upon any handy article as a toy. Small pieces of heather in this case served his purpose, and he appeared to enjoy lifting them from the ground and throwing them down again. He also picked pieces of moss from the rocks and only desisted from this occupation after having completely stripped the walls of the eyrie. He then began to make the most comical grimaces, turning his head sideways and upwards at the same time. His manœuvres were so diverting that I had much difficulty in restraining myself from laughing, and a chuckle which escaped me involuntarily on one occasion caused him to stiffen momentarily into an attitude of attention.

He next began to make his toilet, carefully removing all the loose down, which was now freely coming away. This was accomplished with the aid of his beak, and, the task completed to his satisfaction, he lay down and went to sleep. At 6.15 he began to call for his mother, and from his movements it



was evident that she was hovering round. At last he gained courage and, probably for the first time in his life, ventured to the edge of the abyss and watched her circling in the depths below (Plate 14). His attitude and voice now showed that she was approaching, and in a few moments she dropped in again and sat for a short time on the far side of the nest. She had brought no more food, and evidently considered that he had eaten sufficient for the day, for she removed the remains of the hare when she departed. After this the Eaglet went to sleep again under the ledge, and when she returned at 8.30 made no movement and showed only by a faint cheeping that he was aware of her presence. She flapped in and out several times during the next hour, and at 9.30 took up her position for the night in a magnificent attitude, which, with a long exposure of about 10 sec. at F.8, I secured. Watching the eyrie thus in the twilight (Plate 15 (a)) she presented a perfect picture of a devoted mother prepared to guard her young from all the perils of the coming night. And always she gazed outwards as though fearing danger from the far side of the corrie.

I now decided to spend the rest of the night in my hiding-place, and had fallen into a doze when a voice from below drew my attention. The head stalker, anxious at my protracted absence, had climbed up to the eyrie and now persuaded me to return to the lodge. At his appearance the Eagle had vanished, and I now consented to accompany him and get a few hours sleep before daybreak.

At 2 a.m. I started off again, and reached the eyrie in a thick white mist. Warned by previous experience I approached with great caution, for being alone it was essential that I should not be seen entering the "bothy." I had now ascertained that the Eagles, on seeing me go to the eyrie, did not venture to return till



somebody walked away, thus allaying their suspicions. Fortunately they are unable to count, and it is said that the only birds which possess this power are the Hooded Crows.

Once safely ensconced in my hiding-place it was an easy matter to close up the opening with heather from inside, and in the grey mist of dawn I sat down to wait for the Eagles' return. The Eaglet was still asleep, and there was no sign of his parents. At 5.20 his mother appeared and stood on the far side of the eyrie gazing at her sleeping offspring. Between 6 and 7 o'clock she paid three visits, on each occasion removing refuse from the nest. Then slowly the mist cleared, and the sun lit up the eyrie with unaccustomed brilliance. The Eaglet, as though aroused by its welcome rays, lifted his head and gazed upwards. Again she settled beside him, and the sleepy youngster emerged from under the rock (Plate 16). She had brought him a grouse for breakfast, and now, after tearing it open, she devoured the entrails, and, leaving the rest of it with him, she flew away.

At 2.5 p.m. she dropped in again, and this time brought him a young hare, for once in a way unplucked. This she deposited and departed. Immediately afterwards the cock settled on the far edge of the nest with a ptarmigan in his grip, and, as though she realized that she had omitted an important duty, his mate again appeared and began to pluck the hare. The speed with which this was accomplished was almost incredible, and in a few minutes the carcass was ready for the Eaglet. The cock now departed, and almost at the same moment she followed his example. The Eaglet had meanwhile been very excited, running from one parent to the other, uncertain from which to expect food. He now attempted to open the carcass of the leveret for himself, but his futile efforts to accomplish this evidently attracted his mother's attention, for she returned again and fed him with the ptarmigan, as usual "wolfing" the entrails herself. I saw nothing more of her till dusk, when she dropped



in for a moment and vanished as quickly as she had come. After this she no longer watched the eyrie at night, but invariably looked in at dusk to inspect the sleeping Eaglet and generally cleaned the nest at dawn, removing carcasses and the castings of the Eaglet.

On the following day the Eaglet was again asleep when I arrived, and was hardly awake when his mother came at 8 a.m. On this occasion she brought no food, but a couple of hours later appeared with a grouse. She had evidently already devoured part of this bird before bringing it to the eyrie, and left the remainder for her offspring. He devoured it greedily, and now began to stand on the prey, holding it firmly with his talons while tearing at its flesh. At 3.10 p.m. she brought him another grouse and laid it at his feet. A young hare, only half-plucked, was brought by the cock at 5.30, and this was uneaten when I left the eyrie. During the intervals between his meals the Eaglet played the same little games which I described before, and his energy was obviously increasing day by day. From now onwards hares and rabbits were sometimes brought only partially plucked, and some fur was swallowed regularly by the Eaglet.

My next visit was on June 29th, and I found a considerable quantity of remains of grouse and rabbits at the eyrie, which, however, the female removed between 6 and 7 o'clock. At 8.40 she brought a fresh ptarmigan, but the Eaglet was not hungry and scarcely noticed her approach. At 10.15 the cock brought a grouse, and still the young one slept peacefully. A friend of mine now appeared upon the scene and was requested to throw these carcasses over the rock, as I wished to see what the result would be. About three o'clock the Eaglet became hungry and began to search for food, finally standing upright and screaming for his supper. His mother heard him and returned to ascertain the cause of his outcries, and seemed immensely



surprised to find the larder empty (Plate 17). She sat still for a moment and then vanished, having evidently thought out a plan of campaign. Almost immediately she once more lit upon the ledge, and the Eaglet tore ravenously at the grouse which she had brought. Her short absence seemed to indicate that she had the prey ready prepared in some storehouse, which indeed we found later in a steep rock at no great distance from the eyrie.

In thick mist and rain the Eaglet woke on the following morning and to his extreme annoyance found that the larder was again empty. During his slumbers I had approached unnoticed, and now, seeing that he was hungry, threw him a rabbit's leg which I had brought for the purpose. He seized it ravenously and was on the point of tearing a strip of flesh from the bone when his mother settled on the nest and seizing it in her beak, bore the coveted morsel away. Doubtless she thought that the leg had been overlooked by her when house-cleaning at daybreak.

Shortly afterwards the cock appeared with a grouse, and the two Eagles, father and child, stood side by side upon the ledge (Plate 18), and the picture which I then obtained shows clearly the size of the Eaglet at this stage, when he was about seven weeks old. The rain was now descending in torrents and the mist closed in around the eyrie. The Eaglet, after a liberal breakfast of grouse, retired to the shelter of the ledge, and I, following his example, returned home for rest and sleep, my supply of plates being exhausted.

The last month of the Eaglet's long sojourn at the eyrie opened with a day of brilliant sunshine, to which, in his gloomy abode, he was unaccustomed. There was hardly a breath of wind, and the rays of heat, reflected from the rocks, penetrated even into my hiding-place, bringing to life many biting insects which henceforward caused me considerable discomfort. They had doubtless found their way hither from the eyrie, which was now



swarming with vermin, and several times during the day the Eaglet found it necessary to scratch himself violently, while it was only with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from following his example. At 9.15 his mother, her plumage radiant in the sunshine, came in to see if more food was required, and took away with her the carcase of a grouse which was nearly finished. At 10.7 she brought him a rabbit's leg, which he picked clean at intervals during the course of the next hour. This he evidently regarded as a very unsatisfactory breakfast, for, after performing his toilet in the usual way and removing a considerable quantity of loose down from among his feathers, he began to flap his wings violently and then cried incessantly, like a child who has not had enough to eat.

At 1 o'clock she came in again with a huge brown rat in her talons, and of this dainty the youngster made short work. He then indulged in a siesta under the rock out of the rays of the sun, and at 2.35 woke up to find the cock standing on the ledge beside him. He had brought part of a young grouse, which also the Eaglet devoured. At 5.10 p.m. the female looked in again, but brought no food.

The sun was now setting and the nest was again almost in shadow. As the last beams of the sun flickered through the corrie, the cock lit again upon the ledge and jerked forward a small lump of red flesh (Plate 15 (b)) into the nest. This turned out to be the headless body of a small bird, probably a lark or some similar species, but as it was clean plucked I could not be certain as to its identity. This was the only occasion on which I saw prey carried in the beak, and the characteristic attitude assumed by the cock while jerking the prey forward should be noted.

At 5 o'clock on the following morning the Eaglet was still asleep, but shortly after my arrival his mother dropped in suddenly, and I had barely time to slip a plate into position when the Eaglet came to meet her



from under the rock. At 9.11 she brought him the hinder portion of a rabbit, and he devoured this with relish, though there was not enough meat on the bones to satisfy his appetite. At 9.40 she dropped in again, but brought no prey, and the Eaglet retired to the shelter of the overhanging ledge during a terrific rain-storm which now swept down the corrie. This continued till 1 o'clock, and at intervals during the storm the Eaglet played his comical little games with pieces of heather, while the dried-up blades of grass which lined the nest also gave him much amusement.

At 1.5 the cock brought a young grouse, and his offspring devoured the dainty morsel—bones, legs, claws and all. With the legs he had much difficulty, first lifting them up in his own foot and inspecting them, then swallowing them in turn with a great effort. These were probably the first bones he had ever swallowed, and, apparently delighted with his success, he turned his attention to the rabbit's legs, but took some time to consider the matter, turning a leg over and over with his foot and examining it most carefully from every point of view. At last, however, half-choking himself in the attempt, he swallowed it whole, and stood for some time gulping and struggling to get it down his throat. When it was safely over he seized the other leg, but apparently thought better of it and decided that it was too big a mouthful. At 2.15 his mother came in and looked at the remaining leg, while the Eaglet, ravenously hungry, screeched for more food. She, however, seemed angry with him, and picking up the leg in her beak offered it to him, becoming quite annoyed when he refused to take it. This scene was most amusing, for it was quite plain that she thought he had no business to screech for more food while this leg remained. Eventually, as if to show him how to do it, she tore it apart at the middle joint, devouring half of it and decamping with the remainder.



Six minutes later she returned and offered the infuriated youngster a bunch of heather (Plate 19), which she deposited beside him. She then brought a large bunch of coarse grass, which was likewise laid upon the ledge. The Eaglet was still crying for food, and it almost seemed as if, having failed in her hunting, she was trying to appease him with offerings of heather and grass. Probably, however, her real object was to rebuild the nest, which had now become quite flat from the continual trampling of the bird's feet. The Eaglet at this stage closely resembled the surroundings of the nest, which was now sprinkled with feathers, down and droppings.

In torrents of rain I reached the eyrie again on the 7th of July. At the nest were only the remains of a rabbit, partially devoured. Hoping against hope that the storm might pass, I waited in my hiding-place, though now almost soaked to the skin. At 10.30 the Eaglet, which had hitherto been sleeping in the shelter of the ledge, looked up and began to call loudly. His mother, dripping and bedraggled, dropped in suddenly and left a grouse in the eyrie, but the Eaglet, which had rushed eagerly to meet her, was afraid of the downpour, and crouched down again under the ledge. The wind soughed down the corrie and the mist settled upon the eyrie, while below me the burn roared in spate. Between 2 and 3 o'clock the cock brought another grouse, and the female appeared shortly afterwards with a third. At that appearance the Eaglet only raised his head and cheeped in a low tone, as though he knew well that the storm had not come to an end.

A heavy mist clung to the rocks around the eyrie at daybreak on the following morning, and a fine drizzle set in later. At 5.30 a.m. the female brought in a grouse, and the Eaglet rushed to her feet (Plate 20), throwing himself down in the attitude shown in the photograph, pecking vigorously at the carcase. This was



invariably his custom when very hungry, and it will be seen that his wings are slightly spread to cover the prey. Although he was alone in the eyrie, it was obviously his object to keep the prey to himself, and the inherited instinct to prevent his brothers or sisters from securing the coveted morsel shows its influence on his attitude. She then retired and left him to enjoy his meal, but the cock brought him half a young rabbit about an hour later. The Eaglet, his crop being full, stood for a short time gorged and sated with food. He then decided to go for a walk, and, with somewhat uncertain footsteps, waddled slowly down the far side of the nest and disappeared from my sight. Wondering what the parents would think of this proceeding, I sat awhile longer in my hiding-place, and at 1.50 was rewarded by the sight of his mother hovering above the nest. She settled on the ledge and looked around her in surprise, wondering what had become of her offspring (Plate 21). The eyrie was empty, the young Eagle had gone—whither?

She stood there for some time listening, uncertain how to act, with a young grouse held in her foot, listening for the sound of the voice of her truant child. She heard him at length, cheeping from the ledge beyond the nest, where I could now see him standing upright, calling lustily with all his might. In a moment she had vanished, bearing with her the prey, and I saw her settle again beside the Eaglet, but out of reach of the camera. Once more she flew away, and as dusk came on a heavy shower of rain drove the Eaglet back to the nest.

My next visit, on the 9th, was chiefly marked by the fact that the Eaglet was now practising using his wings, and, standing erect with his legs well apart, flapped vigorously and continuously for some seconds on end several times during the day. This exercise is evidently the means by which strength is gained in the wings and legs, the muscles of the latter being strengthened by



the continual jumping which accompanies the flapping action. In this connection it is worth noting that the old birds spring, rather than fly, from the nest, then spreading their wings and swooping for the first few yards slightly downwards till sufficient impetus to carry them on their flight has been gained. The wings are not spread until after the spring has been made, though the two actions are so rapid that a casual observer might well think them simultaneous.

At 10.30 he began to devour a rabbit which was in the eyrie when I arrived, and the whole carcase (which was that of a young one) vanished down his capacious throat—bones and head included. He had now learnt to tear the hind legs apart at the joint as his mother had shown him on a previous occasion, and this knowledge considerably facilitated the progress of his meal.

At 12.15 the cock brought him a young grouse, and he fell upon it with great gusto. The cock stepped backwards to the edge of the nest and watched him enjoying his meal (Plate 22), apparently deriving much pleasure from the spectacle, and well-pleased with his offspring's progress. On leaving the eyrie he carried away the carcase of a grouse, the only occasion on which I ever saw the male bird thus employed. The Eaglet finished his meal in peace, and then again walked away from the nest to the same place as before, thus preventing me from obtaining any further pictures. In order to prevent him from repeating this manœuvre, I now erected a small barrier on the far side of the eyrie, and left him in peace for the day.

On the 12th, at 6 o'clock, I found him awake and exceedingly hungry, calling for food when I appeared, standing watching for his mother's return (Plate 23). There was nothing to eat in the eyrie, and in a short time he again attempted to go for a walk, and, to my great annoyance, succeeded in climbing the barrier and began to gorge himself on the remains of a hare which



had been deposited outside the eyrie since my departure on the previous day. On the following morning, finding him again in the nest, the barrier was altered and a few stones were added. This proved successful and enabled me to complete my observations. It should be noted, however, that at this stage it is the habit of the young Eagles to walk about the ledges near the eyrie, when their surroundings permit of it, during the middle hours of the day, returning to the nest at night.

At 9.20 the Eaglet's mother brought him a grouse, and out of curiosity I timed him while he devoured it. The meal lasted exactly twenty minutes, the breast bone only being left, claws and legs following the flesh down his capacious throat. After about an hour's sleep the Eaglet again went through his flapping exercises, and then, his work being over, played for some time like a child.

At 11.45 the female returned with the hindquarters of a large hare, one leg of which the Eaglet deliberately swallowed with much relish, and after this had been successfully accomplished he lay down as if to sleep, though his restless eye, searching the air around at intervals, belied his lethargic attitude.

At 3.5 his mother appeared again and brought him another grouse, this time obviously an old one. In the photograph (Plate 24) we see him in the characteristic attitude assumed while pecking at the prey, which, though out of sight in the picture, she held in her foot. The Eaglet then indulged in another huge meal, and retired to the shelter of the ledge for a rest. He was aroused from his slumbers in the evening at 5.30 by her again, and the two Eagles, mother and son (Plate 25), stood side by side on the edge of the abyss, the youngster being now almost fully fledged and nearly as big as his parents. His movements, however, were still clumsy and his appearance somewhat spoilt by the constant rains. After some minutes, during which the birds sat in a



listening and watchful attitude, she left him for the night, taking away with her a huge casting which he had ejected.

During the morning of the 13th two visits of the female were recorded, at 9.20 and at 11.45, on both of which occasions she brought the Eaglet a grouse. A deluge of rain interfered with photography, but during a lull in the storm, at about 4 o'clock, she dropped in with the hindquarters of a full-grown hare, rousing the Eaglet from his afternoon's siesta (Plate 26). After she had taken her departure, he settled down once more under the ledge and was still in this position when I returned on the following morning. This day passed somewhat uneventfully, but in the afternoon the mother brought a young grouse in her talons, while at the same time she carried in her beak a morsel of red flesh (Plate 27), with which she endeavoured to beguile him away. He wondered what she held in her foot, but she refused to satisfy him, and gradually walked away towards the stones which barred his progress to the next ledge. Standing on them, with the prey still firmly held in her talons, she offered him the morsel of meat from her beak, but backed suddenly to the ledge below before he could seize it. He was now furious and flapped his wings in unavailing protest, eventually attempting to follow her over the rampart. She encouraged him in his endeavours by coming nearer with fragments of flesh from time to time, and this most fascinating scene was ultimately brought to a close by the Eaglet, half-climbing, half-flying to the top of one of the stones, whence, rendered desperate by the sight of the red meat, he jumped down to the ledge below. She now allowed him to devour the prey, her object having been successfully accomplished. I therefore rebuilt the barrier, making it more formidable, as it was evident that the Eagles were determined to induce their offspring to take his regular exercise.

On the next morning a gale was raging, but the mist had



cleared and a bright sun was breaking through the clouds, the unaccustomed warmth rousing the Eaglet from his dreams. At a quarter to eight he began to search for food, and discovering a hare's leg with a fair quantity of flesh on it, proceeded to devour the titbit. He was tearing the meat from the bone when the cock suddenly and quite unexpectedly appeared upon the scene, bringing the hindquarters of another hare (Plate 28). This was the only occasion on which I saw the Eaglet surprised by the arrival of his parents, for he generally saw or heard them long before they appeared. I had barely time to secure the picture when the great bird of prey disappeared as silently as he had come. During the long interval which elapsed before the female's next visit, the youngster gorged himself, slept and indulged in flying exercises alternately, on one occasion succeeding in balancing himself insecurely upon a stone (Plate 29), evidently thinking that he was in a very dangerous position indeed. This was the first occasion on which I saw him use his wings to reach a point of vantage, and it became evident that the stones which I had placed on the far side of the nest would soon become useless as a means of restricting his daily rambles.

As the days went on the Eaglet's strength gradually increased and the last remnants of down vanished from among his pinions. There was still down on his body, among the feathers of the back and round the crop, also at the root of the tail and under the wings. The long black pinion feathers were growing rapidly, and the weight of his body alone prevented him from taking flight. He was now nine weeks old, and expecting daily to find him gone I watched his progress closely, and during this period noted that on an average his parents paid him three visits each day with prey in their talons, but that they had now ceased to remove the remnants of his meals from the eyrie, leaving all refuse to accumulate.



On the 19th, however, the Eagles decided that the position was becoming intolerable, and during the whole day they placed prey, grouse and hares, on the far side of the barrier, at intervals tempting the youngster with the sight of some tempting morsel. Rendered desperate by hunger, he eventually flapped and climbed *round* the barrier, and I now realized that Nature must take her course and that the time had come for my feathered friend to leave the nest. I therefore removed the barrier and allowed the Eaglet to enjoy his little walks as before.

At length there came a day when the Eaglet's wings carried him for the first time to the top of my hiding place, from which point he surveyed the corrie, and began to take food here with him to devour on his new perch. As before, he retired at night to the shelter of the ledge, and waited here till his parents appeared with prey. But day by day his journeys became longer, and he flapped along the ledges with ever-increasing strength and activity, though handicapped in his progress towards maturity by the continual rain and the cold, wet mist which hung ever like a shroud upon the hills around.

A typical day (July 23rd) may be chosen to illustrate his programme at this stage. In the eyrie, now filthy beyond description and swarming with vermin, he had spent the previous night, and, the sky for once in a way being comparatively clear, he stood waiting for his mother's return. The carcass of a grouse and a few hares' legs engaged his attention from time to time, but he was evidently waiting for fresh food, and in due course his expectation was fulfilled. She came in once more, fearless of danger, bringing the hindquarters of a rabbit to serve for his morning meal. Settling on the far side of the nest, she flapped her wings repeatedly, as if giving him a flying lesson (Plate 30). The Eaglet, now ravenous, seemed to grasp her meaning, and for



the first time I saw him on the wing. For one brief second he flew clumsily towards her, then lit on his feet again at her side, following her again over the ledge as she backed away. They were now beyond my sight, and on leaving my hiding-place I found him devouring the rabbit at a considerable distance from the nest, after which he flapped still further away, seeming to revel in his newly-gained strength and powers of flight. Wherever he stopped during the day his parents found him without the slightest difficulty, alighting wherever they had seen him last and listening intently till they heard his voice.

For a week or more a heavy mist hung around the Eagles' home, but at last there came a night when the white veil was swept from the hills by a wild gale from the north. At midnight the moon peered through a rift in the clouds, and, hoping for the best, I started again for the eyrie at daybreak. Like a red ball of fire the sun leaped up in the east, and the tops of the distant mountains gleamed in its rays, clad thinly in a white garb of mist. The nest was empty when I arrived, and for a moment I feared that the young Eagle had gone. A brief search, however, discovered him on the edge of the cliff close to my hiding-place, where he was busily devouring a grouse, freshly killed since daybreak. For the last time I crept into my hiding-place, and the young Eagle, now suspicious of any sound, flapped back slowly into the nest. A red dawn spells rain, and, sure enough, before an hour had passed, the sky became darkened and a steady downpour began once more. The hours passed slowly, and the Eaglet stood beneath the ledge which had sheltered him from so many storms throughout the summer months. At length he stepped forward to the edge of the cliff and gazed intently upwards, at the same time uttering the low cheeping note with which he had always greeted his parents' return. It



was little harsher, though a trifle louder, than the cry with which as a babe in white down he had hailed their coming, and the small voice proceeding from so large a bird seemed now somewhat incongruous. Then suddenly a dark form flashed up the corrie, and his mother swung past on silent wings. She circled round and round, as though annoyed at finding him still in the nest, then settled on the rocks beyond and tried to tempt him from his fastness. But the Eaglet was unwilling to obey, for his hunger had been appeased, and still the rain pattered down pitilessly outside the eyrie. She rose once more into the air and flew towards him, almost buffeting him with her wings as she swooped past the nest. Again and again she hovered round, and then a wild, weird cry rang echoing down the glen. For the first time I had heard the yelp of the adult Eagle, the voice of the Queen of Birds calling to her young. Thrice was the note repeated, then again silence reigned for a while. The Eaglet cheeped continuously till, as though seized by some irresistible impulse, he flapped to the very edge of the abyss and turned his head from side to side, listening to her call (Plate 31). And now he, too, changed his cry, his voice seemed to break, and the adult yelp, though in a lower and feebler key, burst from his throat. The Eagles called to each other, yelp answered yelp as they held strange converse in this wild mountain solitude. The young Eagle gazed around him as though taking a last farewell of his birth-place, spread out his giant wings (Plate 32) and vanished for ever from my sight among the ledges below. And the yelping ceased, and again there was silence.

The Eaglet had left the nest and had flown. He had spent eleven weeks in the eyrie and now entered on a new stage of his career, through which I could not follow him. No longer could the camera record his adventures or pursue him in his wanderings. There are scenes in his life-story which no mortal eye shall witness and

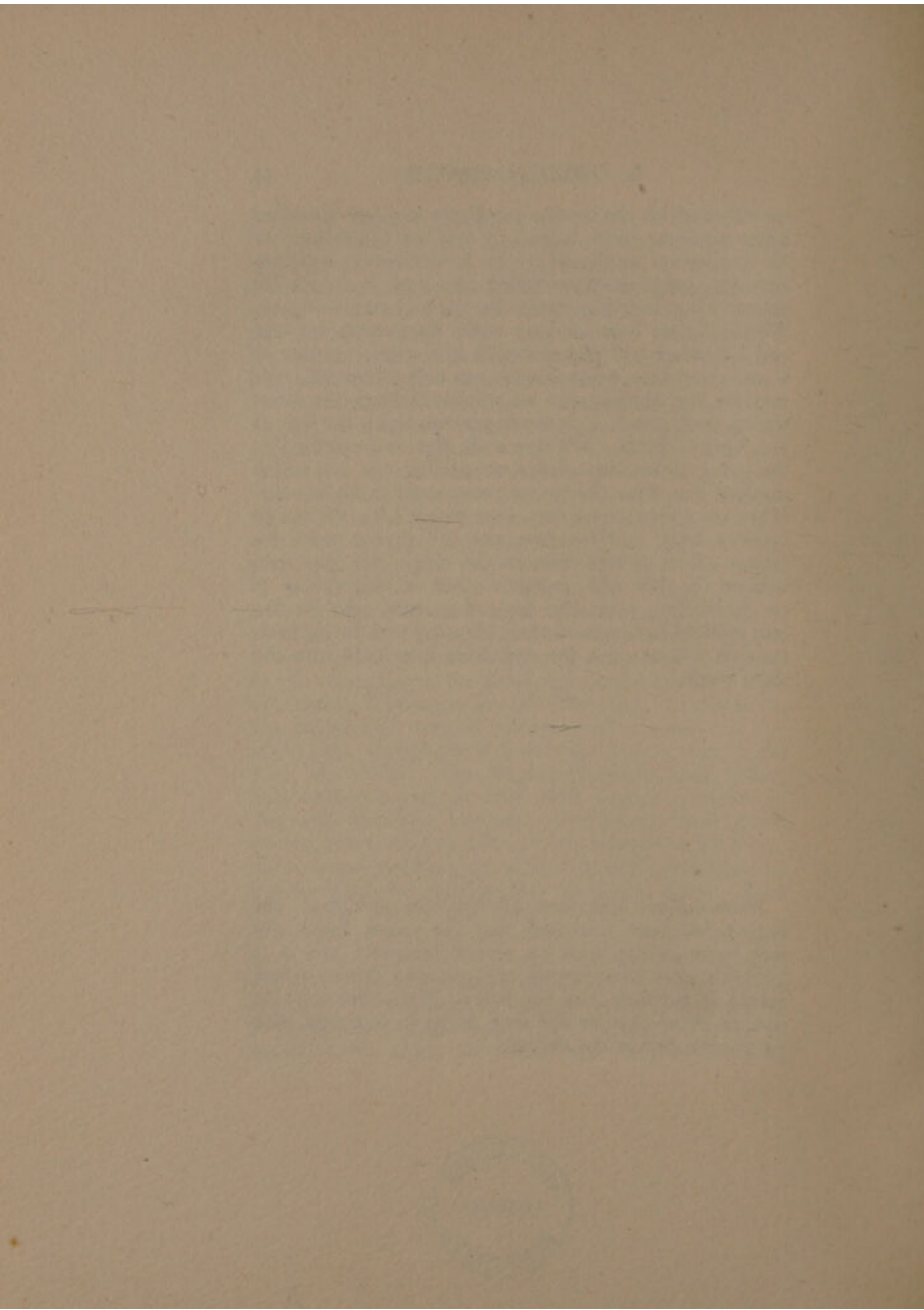


secrets of which the key lies perchance in a few shrivelled bones on some rocky ledge. Could we follow him on his wanderings we should see his first lessons in hunting, how his 'prentice efforts failed and how at length his clumsy wings bore him down the corrie in search of prey. We should see how for long weeks his parents fed him and how they still placed beside him a juicy grouse or a succulent hare when August was well advanced. We may see him perchance as we wander through the forest sitting upon a rock, a prince in his own right, the heir of the King of Birds. We may stalk him on a stormy day sheltering below some ledge resembling the one which shielded him from the spring snowstorms in his infancy. If we are fortunate we may even watch his attempts to catch a hare, and see how the red grouse scorn his clumsy efforts to take them on the wing. We may even witness the last and strangest scene in this drama of an Eagle's life, when the devoted parents, who for five long months have tended their offspring with loving care, turn on him as on a foe and drive him forth into the outer world.

NOTE.—Since the first edition was published the author has been informed that the young Eagle was seen again in the eyrie on several occasions, and it is probable that he returned at night and during severe storms to the shelter of the ledge. Naturalists will be glad to know that he was seen flying in company with his parents during the autumn.









PLATES



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There were two eggs in the Eagle's eyrie.





A comical pair. (a)

The Eaglets held a consultation. (b)





Somewhere below us she was brooding.

Plate 3.





The cock lit beside her on the ledge.





Began to remove fouled sticks from the nest.





Sheltering her offspring during a storm.





She stood there in the sunlight, watching as though on guard.





Placed the prey in front of the expectant youngster.





Plate 9.

In the evening the Eagle returned to feed her young.





She bent forward to inspect the Eaglet.

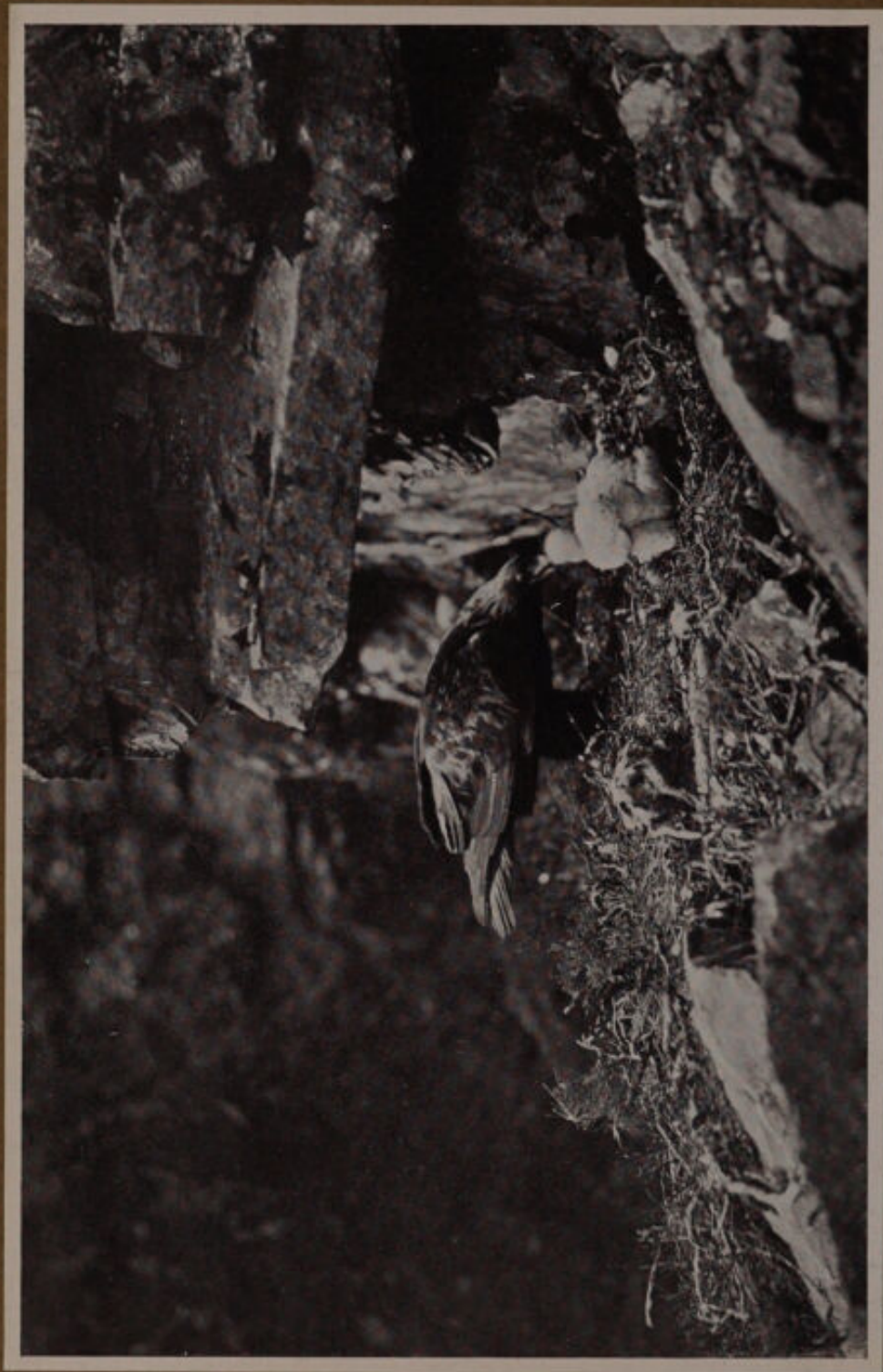




At 1.30 the cock dropped in.

Plate 11.





Gave the Eaglelet a few titbits from its liver.





She came back with a large stick in her beak.





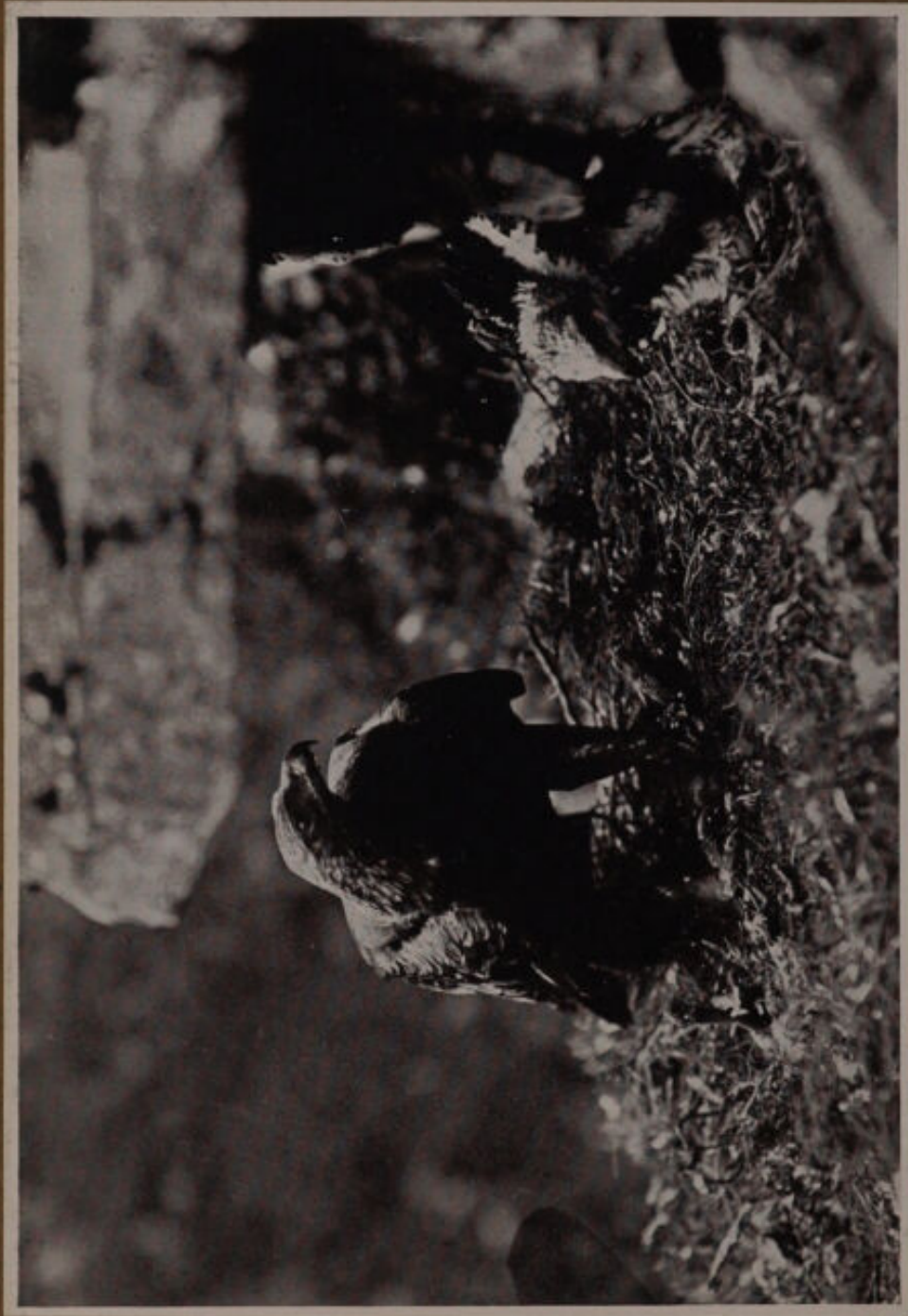
He watched her circling in the depths below.





Watching her cyrie in the twilight. (a) The cock jerked a lump of flesh into the nest. (b) Plate 15.





The sleepy youngster emerged from under the rock.





She seemed surprised to find the larder empty.

Plate 17.





Plate 18.

Father and child.





She offered the infuriated youngster a bunch of heather.





The Eaglelet rushed to her feet, pecking vigorously at the carcass.





She looked around her in surprise, wondering what had become of her offspring.





The cock watched him enjoying his meal.





Watching for his mother's return.





Pecking at the prey, which she held in her foot.





Mother and son stood side by side on the edge of the abyss.





Rousing the Eaglet from his siesta.





She carried in her beak a morsel of red flesh.





He was tearing the meat when the cock suddenly appeared.





Balancing himself insecurely upon a stone.





Plate 30.

Giving him a flying lesson.





Turned his head from side to side, listening to her call.





The young Eagle spread out his giant wings and vanished for ever from my sight.















