

# **REMINISCENCES OF A FALCONER**

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Reminiscences of a Falconer by Charles Hawkins Fisher

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**CHARLES HAWKINS FISHER**

**REMINISCENCES  
OF A FALCONER**





*C. Hawkins Fisher*

# REMINISCENCES OF A FALCONER

BY

MAJOR CHARLES HAWKINS FISHER  
OF THE CASTLE, STROUD, GLOSTER

WITH SEVEN PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES  
AND SIX PORTRAITS

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

LONDON  
JOHN C. NIMMO  
14 KING WILLIAM STREET, STRAND  
MDCCCCI

## INTRODUCTION

**A**FTER a life already four years longer than "the allotted time of man," and now, alas! approaching its close—a life in which I have devoted much time to hunting, shooting, fishing, archery, and falconry—I find myself thrown back upon my recollections of the past for a little solace in much physical suffering.

I recovered from a severe fall, when out hunting many years ago, only to find myself, after many a trial and many a vain hope, never likely to stand the strain of crossing a country as near as I could wish to the tail of hounds. After this accident, shooting and archery very much monopolised my attention; but I was weaned away from both, and my thoughts and desires were directed to falconry, the old sport of our ancestors, in a way that I shall venture briefly to describe.

One day, in the year 1858, I had missed a train at Thetford, in Norfolk, when returning to my home in Gloucestershire. Having at least a couple of hours to spare before the next train could arrive, I went for a stroll into the country around the railway station—a district which is certainly peculiar, the soil being of an extremely sandy character, with so little cohesion, that I have seen the seedling turnips blown

out of the ground by the wind, and with so little nourishment that it is a common thing to find a plantation of Scotch firs standing all dead and lifeless. That country is the natural home of the partridge, and game-preserving is there the order of the day. I was interested on that occasion to find that the plantations of firs, which stood up dead and bare in scattered clumps, were frequently utilised for game coverts, by the loppings of greener and more fortunate trees being scattered as underwood profusely amongst them.

I soon found myself in a lane leading to a few lone hamlets, the names of which were unknown to me. As a quaint little inn presented itself, and I was in want of lunch, I gladly walked towards it. Judge of my surprise when, on nearing the house, I saw, for the first time in my life, a hawk's cadge (or frame) as used by our ancestors, and exactly as their descendants use it now, standing on its four legs, and with the cadge-man's braces dependent from it; while on and around the frame itself were perched, motionless, five or six hooded hawks, which I was able to determine must be peregrine falcons of various ages.

The falconer's cadge with its hawks, as depicted in an admirable picture by Landseer called "The Return from Hawking," is well known to most of us, and an engraving of it hangs on the wall of the library in which I am writing. It may interest some who know that picture to learn that the hooded falcon which an ideal cadge-man is there seen to be holding up on his gloved hand



(apparently for the infant child of Lord Ellesmere to see), was a hawk which, some time after the date of which I am writing, became well known to me. She sat for her picture with the others which belonged to the Duke of St. Albans, the Hereditary Grand Falconer of England, and were, for the time being, in charge of his deputy, Mr. John Pells, son of the well-known Dutch professional falconer Jan Pells (or Peels), who had long been in service with Lord Berners, the Duke of Leeds, and Mr. Clough Newcome—all members of the Loo Hawking Club when it flourished under the presidency of Prince Alexander of the Netherlands.

I asked the cadge-man, who was lounging in the porch of the inn, to whom the hawks belonged. He surlily replied, "to Mr. Pells," and seemed disinclined to give further particulars.

I made my way to the bar, and there in the neat little sanded parlour I found two men sitting and enjoying their pipes, the one being evidently the landlord, the other as obviously the falconer in charge of the hawks.

"Are those hawks yours, and are you the falconer?" asked I.

"I am, sir," he replied; "deputy-falconer of the Duke of St. Albans, Grand Falconer of England, at your service."

I learned from him that he was then living in the Norfolk village of Feltwell, some eight or ten miles distant, and had been having a day's sport at partridges on the land of one of the neighbouring gentry, the country round Brandon and Thetford

being open, with few trees or fences, and admirably suited to partridge hawking, which in such a district is, in many a falconer's opinion, second only to grouse hawking.

As a boy my fancies had early been directed towards falconry by receiving, as a present, a copy of "The Gentleman's Recreation," a compilation relating, indeed, to other sports in addition to falconry, viz., hunting, fishing, and fowling, adorned with many quaint woodcuts; but I did not then know that this fine old sport of our ancestors had never been extinct in the eastern counties, many parts of which are so well adapted to the pursuit of its finest flight, viz., that at the noble heron; still less did I ever expect to meet a falconer with a cadge of live hooded hawks actually engaged in its practice.

It ended in the way that might have been expected with one so keenly interested. After what I had seen, and what Pells promised to show me, I telegraphed home that I was not to be expected there just yet, and when the *seance* in the inn parlour to which I was admitted had come to an end, Pells sent his light cart to the station for my luggage, and he, his hawks, his man, and I seated ourselves therein, and slowly wended our way to Pells's home in the distant village of Feltwell.

As we drove into that village, Pells triumphantly pointed out to me three or four motionless figures of birds seated on the stone parapets of the old church, and which I needed not to be told were hawks. They were "eyesses" or nestling falcons

being brought up in a state of perfect liberty, or, as it is technically termed, "flying at hack."

On reaching the village, John Pells, thinking that I could not possibly endure the local inn, kindly offered to put me up, in which offer he was joined by his excellent wife; and finally I had my supper that night, and slept in a good bed, in a Norfolk village of which I had never previously heard, and with the hawks which I had so often wished to see sitting alive and well on a falconer's pole not very far off.

And so, by the merest chance, from that time forth a new chapter in life was opened to me, destined to occupy and interest and claim my keenest attention until its close.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to set down some of my reminiscences as a falconer, in the hope that they may be acceptable to those who have already had some experience of the sport, and encouraging to others who may be inclined to take it up. Certes, this ancient field-sport is a fascinating one, and deserves all that has been said of it by the old writers. On the part of the falconer, no doubt, it requires the exercise of much gentleness, patience, and skill, as well as attention to the proper mode of procedure. This has all been sufficiently explained by several of my friends, whose books will be found mentioned in the following pages. My share of the business has been rather to show what may be accomplished by daily practice in the field; and by now relating such incidents in a falconer's life as have come within