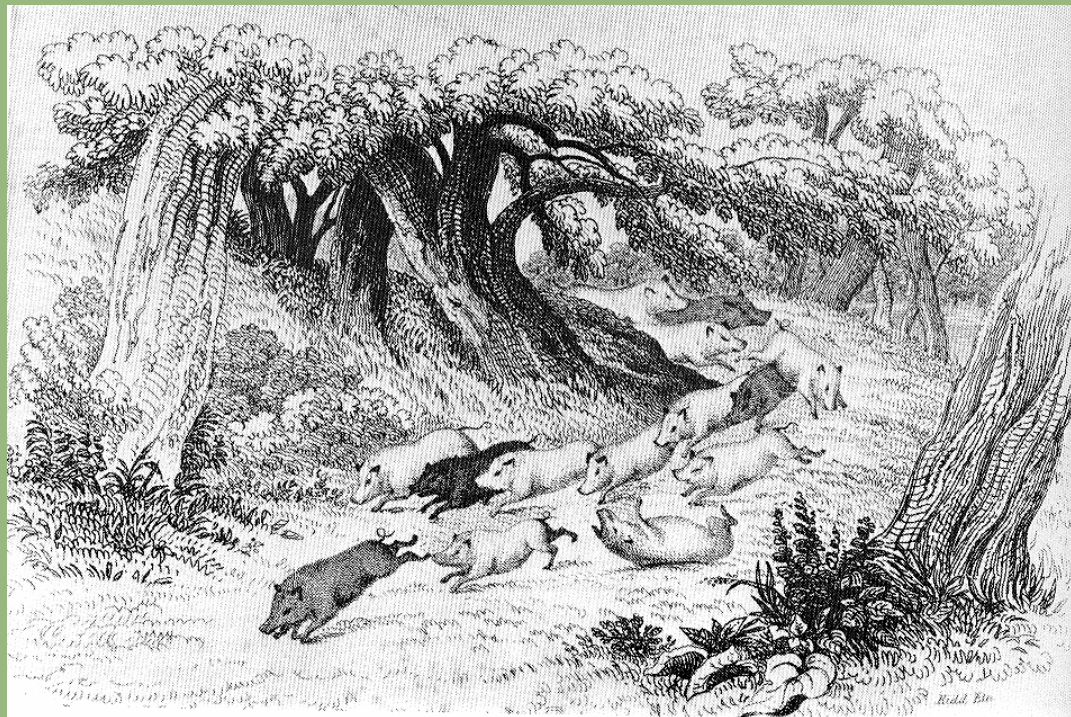


TALES OF THE NEW FOREST



PHILIP KLITZ

CHAPTER X

THE WOUNDED STAG

It was a lonely winter's eve;
The moon's pale beaming light
Shone brightly forth, so soft, so clear,
So calmly through the atmosphere,
That all on earth, both far and near,
Look'd pure and silv'ry bright!

The twinkling stars came peeping out,
And willing seemed to try
Who'd shine the brightest, fairest, best,
The while all earth lay hush'd in rest,
Yet, ever and anon, to test.
A cloud came sailing by.

The bracing coolness of the air,
So crisp, so pearly grey,
Play'd o'er the surface of the brook,
Which, ever as a leap it took,
Would gently stop, as if to look
At what had checked it's way.

The forest trees of leaves bereft,
Stood forth in outline bold,
Their branches tipp'd, as oft of yore,
In glitt'ring rims of frosted hoar;
The furze in folds was mantled o'er
By snow so chill and cold.

That gentle slope which summer time
Had deck'd with bright green fern,
Was cover'd o'er by bitter frost,
And all it's lovely freshness lost,
As to and fro, in storms was tost,
By winter, cold and stem.

'Twas such a night in Rhinefield Walk;
The keeper was at rest
When all at once he thought he heard
A sound - it was not voice, or word -
Perchance the plaint of some lone bird,
By lawless fowler prest.

But see! Who lurks in yonder glen
And noisless steals along?
I fear thou art bent on aught but good;
Too well thy calling's understood;
Nay, leave the stag to range the wood,
He will not want it long.

THE WOUNDED STAG

Thou wilt not surely kill and steal,
And break the laws of God;
Nay, leave him to the cold, cold bed,
Whereon he rests his branching head;
O, do not send him with the dead,
By artifice and fraud.

He'll best thee, man, if face to face,
Unarm'd, thou wilt appear;
Let nature's weapons prove the truth -
Thou could'st not, though thou'rt yet a youth,
Withstand the onslaught fierce, uncouth,
Of a brave forest deer.

Shame, shame! On man, who thus betrays
Both cruelty and fear;
Who skulks behind a hedge to kill,
By dint of art or cunning skill,
A creature form'd by God's own will,
A coward is, that's clear.

I glory in the lawful sport
That's given to man in chase;
But in that sport give space and breadth -
A single chance of life or death -
And not at once deprive of breath,
But win by strength or pace.

Why e'en the bird which high on wing
Hangs floating in the air,
The sportsman true would scorn to take,
Whether in field, by bush or brake
On marsh or mount or on the lake,
Unless the game is fair.

Hark! Hark! Now, through the brittle air
The echo of that gun,
Around it flies - now back again,
But not a sound will e'er remain
To drown the moan of dying pain
So treacherously won.

But all thy skill, thou poaching elf,
Will bring no gain to thee;
For see! What's this comes limping near,
Moaning loud with pain and fear?
By heavn, 'tis the wounded deer -
Now from the foe he's free!,

And wither would'st thou wend thy way,
Thou injured harmless thing?
Ah! To the keeper's lodge - I see;
For he has e'er been kind to thee:
When roaming in the forest free,
Thy fodder he would bring.

THE WOUNDED STAG

Last night he fed thee at the gate
That leads down to the farm,
The while thou lickd his hand with glee,
And he in turn caressing thee:
He little thought this sight to see,
His favourite come to harm.

And thou would'st call him from his rest,
By butting at the door;
He hears thee now - quick from his bed
He lifts his weary, dreaming head;
But now all sleep has from him fled,
And he has grief in store.

Here, wife and Mary! Edward, George!
Come, see the wounded deer;
Some poaching rogue has shot poor Jack,
And see, he's broke the poor thing's back -
Ned, go and find a stout warm sack,
And quickly bring it here.

Fetch cloths, we'll staunch the bleeding wound,
There's life left in him still!
Ah! Good kind keeper it is in vain,
For nought but death can ease the pain,
A few short minutes yet remain,
And he's beyond thy skill.

The children all with tearful eye,
The keeper and his wife,
Crowd round the dying stag, whose eye
Expressive rests on those close by,
Who vainly hope, yet kindly try
To save the poor thing's life.

And see, now from his dying face
The trickling tear-drops fall;
The poor dumb creature cannot tell
Who wounded him or why he fell
But seems to speak a last farewell,
To keeper, wife and all.

Look! Keeper, look! Once more to raise
His drooping head he tried
One ling'ring look, that seem'd to say
"Kind master, can't you let me stay?
O, why should I be sent away?"
And then the poor stag died.