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AN OUTRAGED MONARCH.

BY E. BRAND.

IN reading Mr. James Duncan's interesting article, "The Inner Circle of the Cairngorms," in the last issue of the *Club Journal*, I came across the remark that it had always been a regret to Mr. Duncan that he had never seen an eagle near enough to see his beak. This reminded me of an occasion when I not only got near enough an eagle to see his beak but also to feel it!

I may say that the sport of bird-ringing is a hobby of mine, although my knowledge of birds and their ways is very far from being as extensive as I would like it to be. It may be noticed that I have termed bird-ringing a "sport." I do so advisedly; for, if one tackles the big birds, there exists every element of sport in the proceeding.

On this particular August afternoon I had had an utterly blank day. I had "ranged and searched a thousand nooks" on the Broad Cairn, from about 9 o'clock that morning, and had arrived at lunch time without having got near a single bird. Seated upon a boulder on the plateau, where the path from Glen Muick ends, I was eating a sandwich in a very disgruntled frame of mind. Suddenly I heard a familiar yelp, and, looking up, I beheld a golden eagle soaring high above me. "What about him!" thought I. At that moment he turned sharply and made for the summit. I abandoned my lunch, and, rising, made

for the summit also, keeping him in view as well as I could. It was a most amusing scramble to the summit. I had of course to keep my eyes upon "the thing above," namely the eagle, with the result that my feet, left to their own devices, often slipped, and two or three times I seated myself involuntarily and most uncomfortably upon some particularly knobby boulders! Eventually I reached the summit, however, to observe my "objective" seated in all his majesty upon a flat-topped rock, some twenty feet below me, gazing meditatively down towards Glen Doll. He appeared to me to have dined and to have settled there in the sun for his afternoon siesta. That was the idea! I would creep towards him, wait until he was asleep, then seize him and place a ring upon his leg. Down I went flat and proceeded to wriggle gently down through the heather and boulders in approved stalker's fashion. The gentleman began to tidy himself up, and preen his feathers. I paused in my gyrations to admire the gorgeous bird as he sat and tidied up the long-flight feathers of his wings, with one great wing outstretched, the sunlight glinting on the golden brown feathers of his handsome head. And Shelley's words came into my mind—

As on the jag of a mountain crag,
Which an earthquake rocks and swings,
An eagle alit one moment may sit
In the light of its golden wings.

Only I hoped he would sit longer than one moment. Slowly and painfully I wriggled on till I got within range. I carefully raised myself, keeping well behind his back, raised my arms to seize him and . . . A sudden and most terrific sneeze rent the air. Away soared his majesty up into the blue sky. I used an expressive, though somewhat unparliamentary expression, and turned to behold two men coming up towards me from Glen Doll! They were merely climbing the hill. One of them had inadvertently sneezed, and I

think they thought me distinctly daft when I expounded to them the havoc that sneeze had wrought!

But I had little time to talk, for his majesty the eagle, considerably upset and displeased at this startling disturbance, was making a straight line for the Dhu Loch, yelping an indignant protest as he flew. On I pegged round the shoulder and down the face towards the loch. This got me on to the more difficult side of the hill, and care had perforce to be taken, for I did not particularly desire to make a forced descent by way of the slabs, ending in a highly uncomfortable stotting act down the crags. Accordingly, I paid for the moment more attention to my feet than to his majesty, with the result that I nearly lost sight of him. Luckily, as I came down to where the line of the old drove track ascends from the Dhu Loch, I again spotted him speeding for Lochnagar. Once again I put on speed, heading in the same direction.

I need not recount all the details of my hurried descent—my quite unexpected cold bath when I was let down by a treacherous stone as I forded the burn, nor how my garments, "heavy with their drip," impeded my progress. Suffice it to say that, as I struck the course of the Glas Allt on Lochnagar, I had the luck to spy the eagle, poised once more upon a low rock, making another attempt to conclude his toilet. Down I went flat, and had the pleasure of studying him while he performed his dressing operations. After these were completed, he gave himself a final shake to settle all his feathers into place again. At the same moment my arms came round and caught him. Then the fun began! I had of course incurred the royal displeasure, not to say anger, and this his majesty expressed in no uncertain fashion! He swore, he hit out at me with his powerful beak, while he tore my nether garments with his big claws, in the hope, I am sure, that he would reach the leg below. Yet with it all he somehow kept his kingly dignity. He was still a monarch, if a sorely outraged one. I would

not have minded so much if he had not tried to go for my eyes with his beak. But he aimed straight for them and, consequently, I was compelled to keep my head as well averted as I could. This meant that I had to ring his leg by faith, more than by sight, an almost impossible task! Finally I got the ring on, and then it refused to fix; the clip of the ring being a poor one. Ultimately I had to close it with pliers, the while he tore large tufts of my hair out by the roots—a most painful proceeding! “All’s well that ends well.” As soon as possible I let him go. Very cleverly as I released him he at once spread his wings and with a mighty flap or two rose up above me. He circled two or three times over my head, as if to make sure he was complete after such an outrage. Then swiftly turning right, he flew rapidly away over Loch Muick, far above the impudent human being who had dared to take liberties with the king of the birds.