

## THE PRESERVATION OF BIG GAME.

By SIR HENRY SETON-KARR, C.M.G.

It will doubtless be a satisfaction to the members of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire and other lovers of wild natural life if the Blue-book recently issued on this subject succeeds in attracting some public attention. We of the Society attach material, as well as sentimental, importance to the reasonable protection and preservation of the wild fauna—particularly the larger big game—in all British possessions. They not only add to the interest and attraction of our outlying portions of the Empire for sportsmen, naturalists, and travellers, but they also contribute to the material wealth and revenue thereof. The fauna of East Africa, for example, are an asset of large pecuniary value. The direct revenue derived from licences, &c., in British East Africa alone now amounts to between £8,000 and £10,000 a year, while the indirect annual revenue from the visits of sportsmen to that British possession has been estimated at over £20,000. These are figures—particularly in a young and sparsely populated portion of the Empire—that are not to be despised. Other examples of the kind could be given did space permit.

Those who are specially interested, from knowledge and experience, in this question have been called 'penitent butchers.' We are—shall I say wrongly and ignorantly?—thought to be men who, having in earlier days taken their fill of big-game slaughter and the delights of the chase in wild, outlying parts of the earth, now, being smitten with remorse, and having reached a less strenuous term of life, think to condone our earlier bloodthirstiness by advocating the preservation of what we formerly chased and killed. As a matter of fact, nothing can be more misleading as to our real feelings and intentions, no greater perversion of the real truth can be presented than such a statement. Your true sportsman is always a real lover of nature. He kills, it is true, but only in sweet reasonableness and moderation, for food if necessary, but mainly for trophies. Wholesale and unnecessary slaughter is abhorrent to him; and he always has an eye to the preservation of the stock, and so leaves severely alone all immature, and particularly all female of-their-kind-producing wild animals, except, of course, of the carnivora. I am confident that British sportsmen, as a class, have done nothing in any wild country to reduce or wipe out any kind of wild big game. Their so-called depredations—and the term is a misnomer—have been more than

compensated for by the natural reproduction and increase of the wild game.

Possibly all this is freely admitted by those who have thought on the matter at all. But it is as well to clear the ground and to know who are the real sinners, before touching on possible remedies. In case the term 'British sportsmen' should be too wide, I hasten to state two possible exceptions. Amateur ivory-hunters and certain sportsmen-naturalists in search of specimens are not altogether—in every case—clear of guilt. The former have, in some instances, been tempted to kill more than a fair proportion of elephants in Central Africa for the value of the ivory; and in reference to sportsmen-naturalists I have in my mind the recorded slaughter of the author of 'With Flashlight and Rifle,' who, in the desire for zoological specimens, committed greater depredations on African big game than the reasonable humane sportsman can approve of. But the hero in this case was not, as a matter of fact, British. The real depredators, however, in all wild countries have been natives and settlers. It is a curious fact that the men who, one would think, are, or should be, mainly interested in game preservation, the men who are indigenous to a country or have gone there to settle, and to whom the maintenance of its natural wealth of wild animal life for sport, for food, for revenue and gain is all-important—these are the very men who have invariably been most apt to diminish or destroy it. I have almost laboured to try and make this point clear, so that we may advocate remedies on right lines. A correct diagnosis of the disease precedes its cure.

I have known Western America for the past thirty years. First, in the days when big game of all kinds were plentiful, when no measures for their protection were even thought of, and when everyone killed according to his own sweet will. Then, again, I have known it since the buffalo have been wiped out, and since antelope, deer, and wapiti have been either exterminated in large stretches of country or driven therefrom into the wildest and most inaccessible portions of the Rockies. Protective legislation there is now in plenty in the Western States; but it came too late for the buffalo, and hardly in time—let us say only just in time—for the deer and the wapiti. The men who wiped out the buffalo and killed deer, antelope, and wapiti in thousands were partly the native Red Indians when they obtained cheap rifles, but mainly the white settlers, and, above all, the professional white hide-hunters. It is difficult to blame the men themselves, for some made a living out of it. But it is permissible to wonder at the shortsightedness of the State authorities and of the United States Government, who permitted the slaughter to go so far.

The moral for us of the Empire is plain. Where opportunity presents itself, we who know something of what may be going on in outlying regions wish to lose no chance of advocating, in season

and out of season, and at the risk of becoming nuisances, all reasonable and effective game preservation, and on right lines. And we maintain that this can best be done by Imperial Government action in the case of Crown Colonies and Protectorates; by a healthy and active public opinion working through Colonial Governments in the case of self-governing Colonies. And it may as well be understood here that effective preservation means more expenditure of money. Space will only permit me now to add that the pressing field for remedial action is, at present, in Africa. Much has been done there already, partly as a result of the International Conference of 1900, partly in consequence of the growth of a healthy public opinion on the subject in British Africa itself, and partly, I am glad to think, as a result of the action of the Society already referred to. The further general recommendations of this Society are before the Colonial Office, and are set out in a memorandum lately submitted to Lord Elgin.