

"MOLEY BRODIE".

"A one time well known Aberdeenshire figure".

The systematic destruction of moles by trapping is now almost a forgotten art, and professional mole catchers are almost non-existent, but time was when the services of the mole-catcher were in constant demand and the familiar figure of "Moley" was to be seen at work all up and down the country-side. Like many other rural avocations, the business of mole-catching was hereditary and names such as McLeod and Brodie were synonymous with the little black velvet coated rodent, which plagued the soul and excited the ire of laird, farmer, and gardener alike. Now-a-days however the business of mole-catching is pursued in a destructive manner, chiefly by the farmers themselves or some labourer or cottar man anxious to augment his wages by a few shillings earned from trapping moles in his spare time.

Now whether it be from the indifference of the present day farmer to the ravages of the mole or the expense entailed getting his land cleared by an expert or whether it was a slump in the price of mole-skins, that put the professional mole-catchers out of business, I know not; it certainly is not from any reduction in the numbers of moles as our fields and gardens can testify.

Nevertheless the old time "Moley" has disappeared from the land and another characteristic link in the chain of rural history

has been broken by his passing.

As was mentioned, the names of McLeod and Brodie are synonymous with mole-catching and the subject of this Sketch "Aul Moley Brodie" was the last of a long succession of trappers of that name, who were noted for their uncanny skill in circumventing the wily mouldiewart.

Brodie inherited this skill in full measure and even as a boy was a postmaster in the art of mole trapping and long before he had reached manhood, his fame had spread far and wide, far beyond the confines of his native parish and his services were in constant demand by farmers and landlords. Moley Brodie had the misfortune to lose a leg in early boyhood, but the loss proved no real handicap for as he often declared, the strength of the missing limb went into the rest of his body and gave an added vigour to an already robust frame.

He certainly was a man of exceptional strength as more than one cheeky would-be humourist found to his sorrow for William resented any funny references to the stout wooden peg which took the place of the original leg and went into action with a celerity that was as effectual as it was rapid. For over forty years he waged war on the moles of Dee, Don and Feuchside and many stories are told of the record bags he collected, stories which lost nothing in the telling over a convivial glass for "Moley" was fond of a dram and usually celebrated each successful campaign at the/

the local inn.

On one occasion, Brodie was telling an admiring audience somewhat mellowed at "Moley's" expense, how he had just trapped the largest mole either he or anyone else had ever seen or heard of, in fact it was such a monster that he was going to have it stuffed, and so for that purpose, had it in his bag at the moment.

As one of his hearers seemed somewhat sceptical of "Moley's" account of the size of the mole, one of the party was sent out to the mole-catchers dogcart for the bag, so that the doubting Thomas could be convinced. When the bag was brought in, Moley undid the flap, tipped the bag upside down and shook out the contents upon the bar-room floor and said "What think ye o' that, noo am I a leear".

To his own surprise and that of his audience, a huge black cat in an advanced stage of decomposition, rolled out. The doubting one had one look and one sniff, and then making for the door remarked, "Na, na, Moley, I widna ca' ye a leear, but ye're an awfu' peer judge o' cats".

The publican's son, it is said, could have thrown some light upon the startling propositions and strange appearance of Moley's gigantic mole, but as he offered no explanation - being wise in his generation and having a profound respect for the trapper's stick, the strange transformation was pigeon holed amongst the unsolved mysteries.

There is no question however but that Brodie was an expert at his profession, and if he did on occasion magnify his individual catches, he may be pardoned when one remembers his great yearly aggregate. That Moley's loss of a leg was an asset rather than a handicap was amply proved on at least two occasions and was also the means of providing him with considerable financial benefit.

One evening, "Moley" on his way home from a trapping expedition on Feuchside, called at a merchant's shop in Banchory and putting down a half crown on the counter said "Foo much bogie roll will ye give me for that". The grocer, who did not know who his customer was, thinking to take a rise out of the rather non-descript traveller, replied "As much as you can stretch between your two feet." "Done", said Moley, "I'll haud b' that, sae just measure me aff saxteen mile, if ye hae a roll that lang, ye see I've bit ae fit here, the ither is beeriet in Kintore, a gweed saxteen mile fae here I assure ye".

When the astounded shopkeeper discovered who his customer was and learned the truth of his statement, he was glad to effect a compromise, and tho Moley did not get his full measurement, he certainly left with a very good half crown's worth.

The scene of Moley's greatest triumph however was in the old Tivoli theatre in Aberdeen.

Heading the bill in a variety programme was Ajax, a mule, whose owner offered twenty pounds to anyone who could hold the

animal on the stage for three minutes. The conditions of the contest were that no ropes or other means other than the bare hands were to be used and it was guaranteed that the mule in its turn, would neither bite nor kick. Great interest was aroused by this inique turn and the company played to packed houses every night, everyone there anxious to see if the elusive twenty pounds would be won.

Night after night the strong men of Aberdeen and surrounding districts tried conclusions with Ajax, but invariably without success, for the moment an opponent got hold of him, Ajax seemed to explode and fly fifty different ways at once, and well within the stipulated time had left the stage in spite of the most strenuous efforts of his adversary to restrain him.

After a minute or so Ajax would return to the stage and await his next opponent - a small glossy bundle of dynamite, with a short scruffy tail, two long ears and a rather bored expression.

Well one evening when Moley was in the audience, three of Aberdeen's strongest men tried unsuccessfully to win the twenty pounds and after the third failure the owner of the mule walked to the front of the stage and holding out the twenty-pound note asked rather sarcastically if there were any more aspirants for the prize.

Now some of Moley's cronies who were with him urged him to have a try, knowing what exceptional strength he had, so after some

persuasion he consented and rising made his way to the stage.

Audience and mule owner roared with laughter when they saw Moley stumping along the aisle and the whole house simply rocked when the cause of his limp was seen to be a stout rubber shod wooden leg. But Moley was calmly indifferent to the barracking of the audience and stumped over to the centre of the stage where Ajax stood patiently waiting. Then instead of trying a neck or leg hold as the previous competitors had done, Moley backed up to the mule and leaned against it, his broad back against the glossy middle of the animal. Then he grasped the tail in one powerful hand and a long ear in the other, then exerting his enormous strength, he drew the head and tail towards his own body till Ajax was bent round in a circle, with his off hind, and fore foot practically off the stage. Then Moley called to the owner. "Noo cry on your muley mister, I'm a' ready".

The owner did, but for once Ajax was baffled, and all his master's entreaties and threats were of no avail, he could neither get rid of the man or take him with him.

I can see "Moley" yet, his blue eyes twinkling in their setting of red hair and mutton chop whiskers, pivoting around on his pin leg, a leg which would neither bend, break or slip and defying Ajax's every effort to get rid of him.

It was a somewhat chagrined owner who admitted defeat and paid over, somewhat reluctantly the twenty pounds amid the cheers

of the admiring audience for an unexpected and most unlikely looking winner.

I am afraid however, the round of celebrations which followed his victory, made a big hole in Moley's prize, and at the end of the week, he had little left except an added prestige, to show for his win.

However it was as a mole-catcher that Moley gained lasting renown and it is as one of the old time professionals that we best remember him.

A kindly simple soul, quick tempered at times maybe, but just as quick to forgive after the heat of an argument and generous to a fault Moley Brodie was one of nature's gentlemen.

And a Master of his Craft.

Barrowsgate.

