

# THE ANTLER

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## DEER SHOOTING.

Some Facts and Anecdotes Concerning this Kingly Sport.

Ed. W. Sandys, in "Outing."

To sportsmen of the Eastern, Central and Northern States and of the Province of Ontario, the American deer, *Cervus Virginianus*, is the king of forest game. Even in these days of rapid travel, it is not the privilege of every enthusiastic hunter to go speeding to Western mountains or to remote Northern wilds, where reign such monarchs as the moose, elk, caribou, grizzly, sheep and goat. Only a comparatively small proportion of the active sportsmen of to-day have tasted the joys of genuine big game hunting or have seen the greater *cervidae* free in their natural haunts. Perhaps one hundred men know more or less about deer, for every man informed by personal experience in the ways of the deer's antlered cousins; so to the average sportsman, who has not wandered farther than the magnificent forests of the Adirondacks, of Maine, Michigan, Ontario, and other equally accessible regions, the deer is king, and to kill a full grown buck is the crowning triumph of sportsmanship.

In regard to the actual glory of killing a buck, I have no opinion to pass—personally I would prefer a month's lively field shooting over good dogs to all the sport with deer that I have ever enjoyed; but there is no question about the buck being stately game and worthy of any man's rifle. Handsome beast this a full-grown buck in prime condition is not easily found, and the man who hunts him in a sportsmanlike fashion and kills him fairly has reason for self-congratulation.

Not so many years ago deer were abundant throughout all the vast territory extending from as far north as the center of the Province of Quebec to the far west, and from the region west of the rock plains to the Atlantic coast. But civilization and deer warfare are directly opposed to each other, and at present the regions where the animals are really plentiful are by no means so broad or numerous as been sportsmen might desire. My own experience with this game has been mainly acquired in the wilds of Ontario and that stronghold of deer, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, in a por-

tion of Wisconsin and in a section of that country embracing the International line between the State of Maine and the Province of Quebec. In all these regions deer are still plentiful enough to afford glorious sport, and the same may be said of parts of the far west, of the Adirondacks and of Pennsylvania, and of other districts farther south.

The American deer, common deer, or just "deer," as the animal is called by those who know naught of kindred western variety, is peculiar to the American continent. It differs broadly from the three well-known European species—the red deer, the fallow deer, and the pretty little roe. Of these three the red deer is the only one which can stand comparison with the American. To be candid, the famous stag of the Highlands and picturesque Devon is the handsomest and statelyst animal of the lot. He is a smaller edition of that grandest of all deer, the elk, or wapiti, and to him *Cervus Virginianus* must yield the palm. But an animal may rank second to the red stag in the matter of noble beauty and still be exceedingly fine and graceful.

A comparison of the heads of full-grown males of the four species will reveal marked differences, particularly in the formation of the antlers. The head of the red stag is of the elk type—clean-cut, blood-like in every line. Smaller than the elk's head, it is quite as beautiful and carries proportionally fine antlers. These also closely resemble in shape the tremendous head-gear of the bull elk, with brow antlers bending downward and forward. The main beams of the stag's antlers point backward, and the branches or tines, all spring from the anterior side and point forward.

Widely different is the palmated antler of the fallow deer, which shows in miniature something of the flattening characteristic of the antlers of moose and caribou. The head of the little roe is more of antelope type, with small erect antlers with a prong in front. Of all these antlers those of the red stag most resemble the crowning glory of *Cervus Virginianus*, yet the real resemblance is so slight that even a careless observer should note the difference at a glance. The main beams of the American buck's antlers incline sharply backward from the head, for perhaps half their length, then turn forward with a beautiful, bold curve and end in two sharp points. The brow antlers are sharp, erect spikes, and all other prongs, or tines, spring from the posterior side of the main beams, and generally point forward and upward. Peculiarities of structure are quite common in the antlers of the American deer, double tines being the most frequently noted deviation from the ordinary formation. The doe lacks the antlers, though excess has been recorded where the female head sported feeble imitations of her lord's weapons. The antlers are shed and

renewed annually, but, as they fall off at a time when the animals are protected by law, not so many sportsmen have seen bucks save with armed heads, or with the newly completed antlers in what is termed "the velvet." If, early in the year, one should chance to be poking about in the haunts of the deer, the sight of a buck with unadorned head, or with one antler gone and the other still in position, would be nothing but what should be expected. Soon after the old antlers fall, swellings, like tumors covered with plush, appear; these increase in size and assume the shape of the antlers with astonishing rapidity until the new antlers have attained their full size, when they present the appearance of an ordinary pair of antlers covered with fine velvet. The covering, or "velvet," is filled with blood-vessels which supply material for a new growth. The furrows in the complete, antler show the course of the circulation during its formation, and no sooner is the building process completed than the velvet begins to wither and dry up.

Now the buck realizes that he is fully armed and equipped for the fierce contests which must decide the possession of the does of his favorite range, and he busies himself in testing his new weapons and in putting a proper polish upon every inch of them. He bangs and rattles his horn daggers against convenient trees and thrusts and swings them into dense, strong shrubs, and if observed during this honing-up process he frequently seems a disreputable-looking beast, with long streamers of blood-stained "velvet" hanging to what will shortly be fine-polished antlers with points as sharp as knives.

When the last rub has been given and every beam and tine is furnished thoroughly, our bravo goes a wooing with the best of them. He trails the coy does through lone covers and along favorite runways unceasingly; he is fiery and impetuous and full of fight, and asks no fairer chance than to meet a rival as hard and short-tempered for as himself. He meets one before long, for every grown buck is on the warpath, and when the pair fall foul of each other there is frequently a long and desperate combat, in which one gladiator must be thoroughly whipped, or killed.

All deer kind fight savagely during the rutting season, and occasionally two battling rivals find a miserable doom by getting so interlocked, when both must perish. Two dead bucks thus locked head to head have been found lying as they fell in an open glade, where the scarred surface of the ground and the crushed and riven shrubs about, told an eloquent tale of a wild journey long sustained, and of unparelleled efforts of the wearied conqueror to free himself of his dead foe.

The finding of two bleached skulls, with antlers still locked firmly together, will conjure up in the well-informed sportsman's mind a thrilling scene.

An open glade, with two noble champions eyeing each other with blazing eyes, and perhaps a dreamy-eyed doe—the cause of all the trouble—peering timidly from the bushes near by. Explosive, wrathful blasts from angry nostrils rip the stillness, and the hair of the raging bucks stands on end. Their grand eyes blaze with jealous hate; they stamp with knife-edged hoofs that spurn the ground; blast after blast hisses to and fro; they shift their positions warily, for each is lighter with agility and science counted with sheer brute strength. Two blasts louder and fiercer yet, and then a crash as they go together in sudden, swift charge, head on, for so to the careless gladiator that fails to meet the shock fair and true. If he swerve he must give ground and expose his side to the polished lance of his rival's head, and one chance home of such weapons would probably end the battle.

Front to front they strive, pushing furiously, straining with all the wondrous nervous strength of deer, panting heavily with the tremendous exertion of a life and death struggle. First one is forced backward and then the other yields in turn. Sharp tines draw blood from both; they fall upon their knees, rise again, wheel this way and that, but ever head to head and pushing with what strength remains.

At last, too exhausted to battle further, they attempt to draw apart for a moment's breathing spell. But the restless sparring of opposing points has worked a horrible mischief. The antlers have got entangled in a way that allows of no separation, and both the poor beasts must die. In desperation one lunges forward in a final effort and, perhaps, breaks by adversary's neck. He has won the fight, but the dead buck is the more fortunate of the two. The winner may fall down or stand up, his head is pinned to the dead one. He may pull and push as he will, his doom is sealed.

Weak and trembling from his deadly toil; craving to reach the well-known watering-place, and to bury his dust-fouled, foaming muzzle in the saving stream, he may stand or lie where he is. Undoubtedly the welcome deer is not long delayed; the tortures of thirst hasten the end, and in a brief time, perhaps, a keen-nosed wolf winds the rich prize and leads her greedily lured to the abundant feasting, or an instinct-guided raven falls like a plummet from airy heights, and in stooping, signals to his kind that food is found.

There are several methods of destroying the deer, and unfortunately, most of them savor of the shambles, and are, or should be, beneath the notice of men claiming to be sportsmen. These may be fairly dismissed as being unworthy the serious consideration of readers of *Outing*.

One method, and a bad one, luckily seldom practiced save by lumbermen and settlers in need of fresh meat, is attack-

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