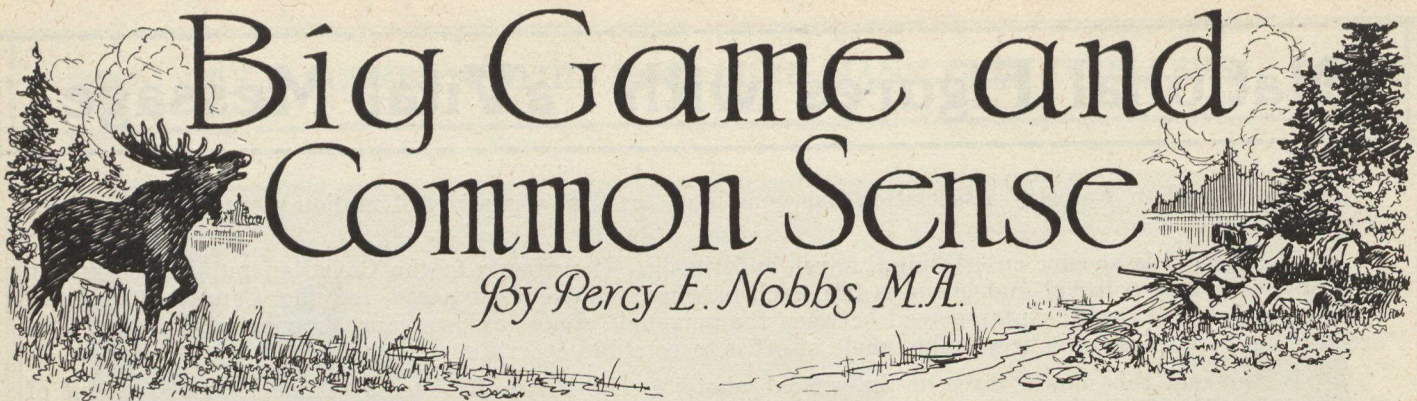




THERE are few subjects on which thought is more confused and irrational than on the question of big game. The reason is that there is a great diversity of interest in the matter, quite unreconciled by the moral suasion of our game laws. These tend to encourage a certain amount of smug hypocrisy on the part of those holding at heart such different creeds as appertain to the city bred sportsman on the one hand, and the back blocks woodsman on the other. The game laws will be dealt with in another article. The present purpose is to explore the modicum of common interest and common opinion held by those with an interest of one kind or another in our big game; what we find may perhaps be dignified as **common sense**.

Indians' Game Rights

Such of the Indians who live contiguous to big game country generally feel that close seasons and restrictions as to amount of game killed only affect white men, and there are many treaties extant, some still in force, the language of which would indicate that the red man is to have the rights he had before the white man came, that is, the right to live on the game. My personal view is that the Indian is at his best living that way, and I cannot find it in my heart to deal with him when I find him infringing the regulations as I have dealt with white men on occasion. But a sporting sentiment of this kind has, I am aware, no foundation in reason and ancient Indian privileges should be made contingent on shooting with a bow and arrow, or at least a muzzle loader, and shooting for the family pot only. When an Indian adds a modern repeating rifle to his uncanny gifts of woodcraft the game perishes, and when he adds a ready market for moosemeat to the call of the family pot, there is extirpation, first of the game, and then of the Indian. Caribou, with their fatal habit of returning in massed formation to investigate a fallen member of the herd, have no chance with In-

dians, armed with rifles, though they apparently lived and died happily for milleniums with Indians armed with bows and even H. B. C. guns.

The backwoods white man differs very little from the red man in his instinct to kill, but he usually substitutes for ancient rights and privileges either a frankly sporting delight in the chase or a simple lawlessness. Backwoods white folk invariably prefer pork to venison themselves. They are usually even more alive than Indians to the possibilities of merchandising big game in or out of season.

The Sale of Big Game Meat

In the outer settlements of Quebec there is no attempt worth mentioning at interference with the sale of big game as butcher meat, summer and winter, and there is a large class of meat hunters. Of course the lumbering industry is to a certain extent game fed, but the preference for pork keeps things within limits.

Next we have to consider the guide class, consisting largely of really skilled hunters who can get game if they want to, at times when the ordinary lumberjack would have no chance. The guides are almost without exception on the side of the authorities and the law, for they see their lucrative and agreeable occupation threatened if the game fails.

"David", I said to my 'working-partner' of many a merry ramble through the woods, "you made \$200 guiding this year, and \$600 trapping, and your wife's had twins, and that makes nine, why don't you buy a farm and settle down?"

"And what kind of a fool do you take me for, that I should follow a plough, who know how to follow a caribou?" was the prompt reply.

Why is the Sportsman?

So far we have dealt with natural phenomenon. Now we come to that highly artificial product of the ages, the sportsman. He is difficult to generalize about, being a controversial creature. In a party we were

trying to tell more or less honestly why we stumbled out in the cold, wet, weary woods at dawn, to chill for hours cramped in a canoe, or belly crawling in bog. One said it was "Nature" (with a capital N), another "the sight of the beasts"; another "the shot and the crash", and one, with no illusions, "the triumphal entry home". The big game sportsman usually thinks little of the pot, and much of the head or skin, and as good heads or hides are particularly hard to come by, except at the precise times of year when the meat is worthless there is method in that madness; but one sometimes wishes big game sportsmen would not be so virtuous and self-righteous over their disinterest in fillet steaks.

"The Sport vs the Sportsman"

It does seem rather illogical however that, through the sportsman, laws should be framed which waste as far as possible the food value of big game, (with the result that these laws are not observed), and that the abominable cruelty incidental to sport leads to a chivalrous restraint in taking chances and a delight in killing clean and quick.

And there is, lastly, that deplorable product of democracy, the 'sport'—a very different thing from the sportsman. Usually he takes to the woods too late in life to attain to skill with weapons or to retain the imagination and reasoning powers of his youth. He shoots at anything, and when a wounded animal is out of sight it is out of mind. He does not follow up nor keep account of the casualties. Like the delightful Baron in 'Punch' who confided to an M. F. H. "I, too, I hunt ze fox, and have killed twenty-six; but have wounded many more." Sometimes the sport admits his manifold deficiencies, stays in his tent with his flask, and hands his rifle to his guide, so achieving the 'triumphal entry home.'

Now, it would seem, if big game is to find its way to market there would soon be none left, and if big game is to be made sacred for sacri-