

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

BRITISH SHOOTING AND AMERICAN CRITICS

By Horace Hutchinson, in Outing

In some part, my motive for this article is a wish to remove a misapprehension which seems to possess many American sportsmen in regard to sport, especially in regard to shooting, in the Old Country. They have heard and read tales about pheasants being hatched under the barn-yard hen and fed up by hand, so that they are not very much more wild than the domestic poultry, and naturally it does not appear to them, accustomed to roam the wild woods with dog and gun in laborious quest of their game, that birds so reared can give anything that can worthily be called sport. So far as it goes, the Briton has to confess that there is justice in this criticism, but the mistake that the American critic makes is in thinking that it is applicable to the general field of British shooting and that this pheasant shooting is at all typical of it.

It is just criticism enough in regard to the pheasant shooting itself, but to pheasant shooting only; and the British shooter does not by any means look on the pheasant as the best bird that may fall to his gun. The grouse and the partridge give him his real sport. The pheasant is only to be considered as affording the best possible substitute for any really wild sport in what we may call a country of park and garden and symmetrically laid out woodland. And before dismissing this unfortunate bird with so much ignominy attached to his long tail, let us at least do him the justice of saying that in undulating land it is possible to deal with him in such fashion that he gives splendid shots to the gun.

I have shot, and I have missed, pheasants in the hilly country of Wales and of the West of England where they came at such height over the gun and with such strange slants and curves of flight that they gave the most splendid tests of shooting. Again at Milton Abbey, among the Dorsetshire downs, Sir Everard Hambro's place, where King Edward VII. was shooting very shortly before his death, I have seen some of the pheasants pass over the guns at such heights that no man could think of shooting them, and the "crumpling up" of the tall rockets, with the charge placed well forward in the head and neck, was a fine achievement in the art of scientific killing with the gun.

Of course, back of all this was the knowledge that these birds which now came speeding over the guns so gloriously had been flushed into first flight back in the wood by a line of beaters of whom they had little more fear than they had of their own shadows. It is a mistake to think that the pheasant, as he ought to be shot, gives an easy mark to the gun, but in a flat country it is to be confessed that it is difficult to induce him to fly to such heights as make his shooting interesting. At the very best there may always be the consciousness that the whole business is an artificial one. There is no question of any trouble about getting within shot of the bird; the trouble is only to persuade him to give a shot that is difficult enough to call for the skill of the gunner.

We came to quite other problems and conditions as soon as we go in quest of our grouse, our partridges, our wild fowl, and our snipe. Much of the glory of American shooting is made up of the joy of the woodland, of the scenery and the floral beauties, for the best type of sportsman is not a killer, pure and simple. But lovely as are the American forests and mountains, it is only justice to the Scottish and English and Welsh moorland, which is the home of the grouse, to maintain that in its purple splendor it is more than a match for any sample that lands beyond the sea can show. There are the grouse, there are those glorious heather-clad hills.

The Real Problem on the Moors

The question is not now, as with the pheasant of the home coverts, how we are to make the sport difficult. The question is how we are to get within shooting range of the birds at all. The methods are three, walking over the moor and shooting any birds that may rise before you, taking out dogs to find your birds for you, and having beaters to drive the birds to you where you are placed in butts, awaiting them. For my own part I find either the second or third plan much more to my pleasure than the first, but the choice is not left in your own hands entirely, for it is very dependent on the tameness of the birds, which depends a great deal on locality and climate. Many of us take a keen delight in watching the beautiful pointers and setters at their intelligent work, quartering their ground perfectly, so that not a square yard of the moorland is left untried, standing like statues to the game when it is found, one dog backing up the other, the whole performance a beautiful exhibition of the best mental and physical canine qualities. But it is no use trying to approach grouse in this manner if they are so wild that they are up and away as soon as man or dog puts his nose up over the edge of the moor, and this depends a good deal on place and climate.

In the islands in the west of Scotland I have shot grouse over dogs when they have been lying so close that it was a trouble to get them to rise and a sore temptation to a young dog to rush in and have a snap at them in the heather. Then I have passed over into Perthshire, on the mainland, and have found the grouse so wild that trying to get at them in this way you would not get a brace of birds in

the day. The climate of the islands is soft and warm and seems to make the grouse and all the birds indolent and trustful. In the keen air they are alert and wild.

I have a sad memory of one of these "dogging" days on the islands. We were shooting over Gordon setters, beautiful creatures, black and tan, a fine harmony of color but one which blends only too well with the heather. One of the dogs stood to a covey, and when I came up the birds rose and scattered, flying low over the moor. As I fired and killed one, there came a "yowl" from the direction of the shot, a movement among the heather—I had shot, luckily only slightly, the second dog, which had been backing the other up and had been completely hidden from me as I fired.

Had he been a Laverock or a liver and white setter he would have been much more conspicuous. It certainly makes for his safety that a dog should show out well, though some folk will argue that an inconspicuous one has the advantage of being less visible to the birds, so that they allow him to approach them more nearly. But when birds are as wild as this suggests, it is perhaps time for other measures. We may then begin to walk them up, or to have them driven to the guns.

If any American sportsman tells you that the British shooter going out after his grouse either over dogs or walking them up does not have plenty of exercise for his sport, do not believe him, or else come and put it to a personal test. Then you will see, and if you do not go to bed a tired man you must be a good deal more of an athlete than the average. Walking the birds up is the hardest work of all, just because it is only as you walk that you have a chance of flushing the game. When you have dogs to help you, you may go more leisurely, along the centre path, so to speak, while the dogs range widely on either side. But, remember, hardly two steps that you take will be on the same level; often there is some steep climbing, whether over the gradients of the moor itself or up and down the watercourses which intersect it, and at every step you have to lift the feet high—to acquire what has been called the "heather step"—in order to hoist them over the stiff heather.

It is an action which tries the back sinews of the calf of the leg pretty severely, and by the end of the twelfth of August there are a great many aching calves in Bonnie Scotland. Dogs save labor, but on the other hand how often have I sworn deeply when a dog, pointing steady as a rock, has induced me to come to him up a stiff hillside beneath a broiling sun, and when I have ascended to his altitude and encouraged him to go forward has at length flushed a harmless necessary lark. Evidently there is a strong gamy scent about a lark, for it will sometimes make a fool of even a wise old dog, but it is the man that feels the bigger and the hotter fool when the dog has thus led him a vain up-hill dance under the sun.

Birds are naturally most tame and least disposed to long flights when they are young and their wing muscles have not hardened, and it is the custom on many moors to begin the season with some shooting over the dogs and then to go on to the walking or the driving when the grouse grow too wild to lie to the dog. And the walking up of the birds, in country such as I have described, is "no holiday" even when a man is in hardest condition. There is no rest then, except for gathering the killed and wounded and the brief interval for luncheon, and the strain is the greater because you must have your gun always at the "ready."

The coverts probably rise far out, and if you are not on the alert they will be out of range before you get up your gun to them. There is none of the notice given by the dog's standing at the "point." You have to be on the lookout from the first moment of setting foot on the moor to the last.

Even in the earliest days of the season there are hardly any of the English moors on which the birds are tame enough for any other mode of shooting than driving them to be reasonably possible, and by the middle season the moors even in Scotland where they can be shot in any other way are the exception, not the rule. What then would the American sportsman, whose ideal is that you should hunt your game for yourself, have us do? Remember, your native quail and your partridge you hunt in a thick covert where the bird has every reason to think that he will be safe if only he lies close enough. Probably he is not even aware of the hunter's approach till the danger is hard upon him. On the comparatively open moorland it is not so. The bird sees the gunner afar off and is up and away before his wood-be shooter is within four gunshot ranges of him. To drive him is the only feasible way, and, believe me, it has its compensations.

There is one very famous drive, the Punct-bowl drive, on a very famous moor, Gannochy, in Forfarshire. I should like to convey thither on a fine September day the American gunner whose view of British sport is that it is lacking in those "side-shows" of beauty of nature and entrancing surroundings which count for so much with the best kind of field sportsman everywhere. Part of the way you may have come by motor or other conveyance, up the rough hill track, part you may have ascended (for it is all high ground and in the highest but I have seen killed a right and left of ptarmigan—birds which are dwellers only on the heights) on ponyback, or, if you prefer, you may have walked ever since quitting the ma-

chines, picking up an occasional bird by the way.

In any case you will do the final climb, on your own two feet, and even by the time you have got so far may feel that you have put in a good morning's exercise for the start of the day. And when you have arrived at your appointed butt, with your loader and perhaps your retriever beside you, and have your breath again after the climb, you may rest your gun on the heather-clad fringe of the butt and look forth and all around you, on the most glorious scene it is possible to conceive. The purple heather is about you, the great bowl of the hills after which the drive is named is before you, all around you may see these splendid hills in receding billows, growing fainter and more faint of hue till they fade to the blueness of a distance in which the horizon melts into the sky. Behind you, on a clear day, it is possible you may get a flash from the sun glinting off the North Sea. You are up far above the world of men and cities in a glorious solitude, with the clear heaven close above your head, in a splendor of pure and gorgeous colors.

Then, afar off, on the opposite side of the bowl, your eye, growing accustomed to great distances, may begin to pick out the dark figures of the beaters, looking no larger than ants, moving over the moor, the flankers bearing tall flags to endeavor to keep back the birds who would try to break out at the sides of the line. It lends a curious interest to this drive that as the beating line advances it seems, as is actually the case, to be driving the birds—which you know, though you cannot see, to be raising before it—away from, rather than toward you. The grouse has a reluctance to cross the watershed to his home glen and will always prefer to fly along the side of a corrie rather than out over its edge. So it happens that this line of beaters, wheeling when it comes to the upper end of the great glen, brings back along with it and toward you again the great mass of the birds which it has set in winged motion.

After a while the forerunners of the big lot, the strongest fliers and the wildest, begin to come to you and you get busy. It may be that even before this you have had a quick shot at a flock of golden plover, a soaring snipe, possibly a hovering hawk, and have seen—we hope you will have spared—a glorious golden eagle. The silly blue hares, too, will have come cantering up, to sit erect and wonder at you, but these, too, you will not have molested, for they are not of much value and would only weigh down the panniers of the game-carrying ponies, which will be sufficiently burdened with the bag of grouse before the drive is finished.

The Driven Bird a Hard Shot.

And now you will begin to realize that from the actual sporting, the scientific killing, point of view this mode of sport has its great even greatly preponderating advantages. About the hunting up of the bird with the aid of the dog, whether in Great Britain or in America, there is much that is of interest, much that makes its appeal directly to the very primitive hunting instinct in our nature, but after all, it has to be confessed that from the standpoint of a great scientific shooter the mark that is given to the gun by the bird rising before the dog is not, as a rule, of the first interest. It is hardly a test of skill. For my own part I have the fondest recollection of days of this very kind of sport, when, in the West Country of England, where the covert is generally heavier than elsewhere, I used to go out with an old pointer and shoot partridges over her quite in the good old manner, and quite in the way of shooting which is still possible and still followed in the United States. But later the fortune of risk took me more into the Eastern Counties and other counties in England where partridges were very much more numerous than in the West, but the covert was very scanty, and where, again, the driving was the one and the only way possible, because birds would not wait for the approach of the gunner.

The point to be insisted on, the point which the American critic often seems to miss, is that the bird is driven to the gun gives an infinitely more sporting, an infinitely more difficult shot than the bird which rises before the gunner's advance or before the nose of his dog. I have taken my American friend, the reader, to his grouse butt on the rim of the glorious, imperial Punch-bowl and have shown him inadequately the scene as he awaits the birds. Let him now suppose them coming toward him at all heights, at all slants and angles, but all with one degree of speed, their maximum.

Then, if he is used only to the shooting of the bird as it rises before him or before his dog, he will be petrified with confusion at the pace with which these birds, appearing first as small black dots on the horizon, develop into live grouse and, as soon as they have revealed themselves, are upon the gunner, or past him, with a whirl of wings, like a flash, so that it is at first as much as he can do to get gun to shoulder and discharge it at all before the birds have come and gone. The shooter who is practiced at the rising bird but inexperienced in dealing with the driven quarry is like a lost man at first, in the circumstances. It is to him a new and difficult and quite

breathless game; the art of shooting has revealed itself to him in quite a novel light and with possibilities of which he had not dreamed.

The nearest experience to the shooting of these driven game birds which comes in the normal way of the American gunner is shooting the fighting wild fowl, and all know that at the first time of asking it is not easy to get the pace of a fast-going mallard nor to hold, or swing, sufficiently ahead of him, but though the mallard is a tough and a speedy bird I do not think he is so sheerly puzzling as either the grouse or the partridge, when driven, because he holds his predestined way more resolutely and does not twist at such sharp angles.

A perpetual dispute rages among British shooters as to whether the driven grouse or partridges is the more difficult to kill. Grouse themselves vary a good deal in difficulty, according to the contour lines of the moor over which they are traveling. On the flatter English moors they come on at a fairly steady level, rather as flying wild duck come, but on a steeply undulating moor, like many in the Highlands, they are coming at all kinds of heights and angles. But though the grouse is sometimes a twister the partridge is a twister always, and a quicker twister at that.

My recollection is vivid of the first covey of driven partridges that ever came to my gun—and passed it entirely without injury. Around the fields of Norfolk, on our East Coast, are often planted belts of the Scotch fir to shield the wind from the light soil. Behind one of these say at a gunshot back, I was placed on my first introduction to this kind of shooting, and after a while of watching, in which the beaters were driving in a field or two in front, came a warning call of "Mark!" from a keeper who was posted so that he could see the birds coming. The next instant the partridges, clustered in a little pack, appeared above the fir trees, and just as I was raising my gun to fire at one of the birds something happened to the pack.

What really happened was that the birds, suddenly catching sight of me and the other waiting guns, twisted upward and sideways and in all directions at once, but what appeared to me to be happening was a sudden disrupting explosion of great force in the center of the pack, blowing its units to all points of the compass together so that I was utterly unable to get my gun directed on any one of them. That first covey passed, to my eternal shame, right over my head and away down the wind, without my ever having a shot at all.

It is a humiliating experience to record, especially as I had already some acquaintance with the driven grouse, but it is a record which is illuminating for this, or nearly this, is what happens to most men on the occasion of their first introduction to the driven partridge. He is a smaller bird than the grouse, not encased in such stiff armor of feathers, nor is his flight quite as swift; but what makes the difficulty of his shooting is his evasive twisting and antics in his terror at the sudden apparition of the waiting gun.

With regard to the other modes of shooting in the British islands, there is not much to be said by way of comparison with the shooting in the State, because there is so much more likeness than difference. Such modes are the shooting of snipe and woodchuck and of wild fowl, whether approaching them on foot or punting or awaiting their flight over. All these, in their essentials, are the same in either country, but as to the principal shoot in Great Britain, that of our chief game birds, the grouse and the partridge, I must give it to the American shooter that, roundly speaking, he does a great deal more walking in the day than we do in our islands; then again I must put it to him that this is not the end of all sport. Rather exceptionally, that is to say where our game birds are sufficiently tame for us to be able to walk them up or shoot them over dogs, we probably do more walking and much harder walking than the American does for his average day's gunning, and a vast number of partridges are shot by walking them up in the Lowland agricultural counties in Scotland.

Odds on the Briton.

But when we come to consider the gunning skill which the shooting in the one land and in the other respectively demand we certainly must grant that the old country has very far the better of it—even by so much as the skill required for the effective killing of the driven bird exceeds all science of the gun that is required of him who shoots the bird as it rises. Nor need the British sportsman fear comparison with the American in respect of the beauty and interest of the surroundings in which he follows his sport. Until American hills are clad in the imperial purple of the heather we need not have the last fear of the result of a beauty trial.

And there is no doubt whatever that driving has the very best effect on the stock that is driven. That this is so has been proved again and again in England and in Scotland by the improvement in the stock, whether of grouse or partridges, which has followed immediately on the introduction in any locality of the driving plan. It is no less in accord with all that an intelligent forecast must lead us to expect that this improvement should occur. By driving, the birds are scattered, the coverts dispersed, and it is at once obvious what



Sportsman's Calendar

JANUARY

Sport of the Month.—Wildfowl shooting.
In Season.—Ducks, geese, brant; snipe may be shot, but not sold.
Grilse and spring salmon commence to run.

a check this dispersal must introduce to any likelihood of close breeding.

Again, when birds are driven, the strongest fliers are those which are likely to come first to the guns and are therefore likely to fall most frequent victims. Obviously these will generally be the older rather than the younger birds, and consequently the driving plan has the advantage of killing off a majority of the oldsters and leaving the young blood for the replenishment of the new stock. And, by way of a final item in his favor, since a majority of the driven birds are shot as they come forward to the gun, it follows that they are shot in the head and neck, rather than far back. This implies at once much less probability of wounding the birds without killing them and many case implies killing them in a way which leaves them in much better condition for the table than when they are shot at from behind as they rise before the gun.

I am holding no brief for British as against American conditions of sport. I have enjoyed far too good times on the western side of the great ocean to think of such partial advocacy as that. But I do wish justice to be done. I think it is good to try to remove scales from all eyes whose view is distorted by them, and certainly such scales have been before many an American eye when it has been turned on shooting as America supposes it to be done in Great Britain. If America could have a little more experience of driving methods she would convince herself more quickly than any words of mine can convince her of the relative merits of the two ways of shooting.

Unfortunately it does not seem easy for her to make the trial with the true game birds. In the thick covert in which her quail and partridge are found, driving would be impossible, even if it were desired, because the beaters would never get the birds to rise properly before them. An increasing number of our British pheasants are being reared in America now, and when the keepers begin to put these over the guns they will help to show, if they are so beaten and the guns so posted that they give really good shots, what the driven grouse and partridge can be. At present the only object lesson readily available to the American is the wild-fowl flying, but the wild-fowl, always with the exception of the teal, do not execute the quick twists which so chasten the pride of the novice in his first acquaintance with our driven partridge.

EVER FAIR MAPLE BAY

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four miles from Maple Bay. Some pieces of skulls and other bones may yet be found there, although most of them have crumbled into dust or have been removed by relic hunters. The Cowichans and their allies then raided the Haida villages, and brought back not only their own women and children, but many of the Haidas also.

SMALL, BUT POTENT

What simplifies vacation trip.
Speeds trunk and suit case, rug and grip.
From traveling all cares can strip?

What means choice morsels, browned and spiced.
All beverages nicely iced.
Or melons generously sliced?

What keeps one's coat so neatly brushed.
One's hat from being banked or crushed.
Means mails most prompt, and message rushed?

What conquers surliness, wins smiles,
Sheds sunshine by its potent wiles,
Keeps things serene for miles and miles?

What, given oft grudgingly by man,
By woman never—if she can—
Is bribe polite for white, black, tan?

A tip!
—New York Times.