

Field Sports at Home and Abroad

HOW BILLY SCOTT LOST AND FOUND HIS NERVE

Four men had finished dinner, and the talk—much good talk—had run altogether on sport, and had lingered over many an adventure by flood and field; for these men were great sportsmen. Two of them were well-known big game hunters; while all were, as the phrase runs, "great hunting men." The question of nerve had been discussed, and the horror of losing that precious possession had been dwelt upon.

"It seems to me," said the host—and the Irishman of the party—"that one may be far from sure if he has really lost his nerve."

"But, if a fellow's lost his nerve, can't he tell?" said the unimaginative man.

"By no means follows," replied the Irishman. "You see," and his eyes twinkled, "we often believe what our friends tell us. That's where the mischief is!"

"Hum! I'm jolly sure I'd know if I'd lost mine," said the other.

"I feel sure you would, but then"—and again came the twinkle—"you see, we Irishmen aren't so sure of things."

A ripple of well-fed, after-dinner laughter, and the host said: "But don't forget the port, please; and, if I may, I'll tell you a story of nerve."

A chorus: "By all means!"

"Well," said the host, and he looked at Bludkins, the oldest man in the room and a confirmed bachelor, "well, Bludkins, you, at any rate, have been over to Ireland, and know County Upplondown, and, of course, have heard of Billy Scott, probably know him, too?"

Bludkins nodded an assent, and thoughtfully sipped his port.

"And now," said the host, leaning back in his chair with a retrospective air, "for my yarn:

"Colonel William Scott, of Ballyinch, County Upplondown, had retired from the Army some ten years before the date of my story. The greater part of his career had been spent in India, where he had seen much active service, and had borne himself gallantly in many a hard-fought fight. The value of his services, too, had been freely acknowledged; yet he had never been rewarded according to his merit. At least this is what his friends always said. As for the soldier himself, he never thought of grumbling because no great distinction had come his way. He had entered the Army for the best of all reasons: He knew that he would love it; and this love had proved no will-o'-the-wisp, but had remained with him all through. Surely no man with such a love can be considered anything but successful. What do you think, Bludkins?"

Bludkins smiled impartially, and the story went on.

"Sometimes, it is true, this simple-minded soldier would find himself wondering why Clorham was now a major-general with a good billet, and he thought of what an awful duffer he really was. Bloreham, true enough, had a clever wife; and people said that she had made her husband. He knew that wives did certainly sometimes count, and he smiled as he wondered how much higher he would have gone if he, like Bloreham, had had a clever wife. His profession had been his wife, and he had been content with his spouse—well content, indeed. So, when the time came for him to retire, home he came to settle down on the family estate of Ballyinch, which his Scottish forbears had been granted, during the Plantation of Ulster. He had always spent his leave here, and here to all his friends he was ever 'Billy Scott'; while there were few parts of his fine, prosperous county that he didn't know as well as he had known the units of his own regiment."

"To his love for soldiering he joined an intense passion for the chase; and wherever he found himself he hunted with all the first ardor of youth. As his old housekeeper at Ballyinch, used frequently to say, 'Is it the Colonel ye're talkin' about? Agh, he's just clean daft about huntin'!"

"Therefore, when he turned his back on India, it was with very well contented spirit that he found himself settled permanently at the comfortable manor house in the beautiful park sloping down to the shores of Rangford Lough. He could now enjoy himself for the remainder of his life, or as long as he could hunt, at any rate; for if a man can't hunt life's not much use. So thought Billy Scott, a few mornings after his arrival at Ballyinch, as he watched the white mist rising from the lough, and gradually enfolding the whole demesne. He looked on the scene with infinite satisfaction, and muttered, 'Ah! This is good! None of your eternal sunshine here!'"

"Then he went blithely upstairs to have a bout with the dumb-bells, for he always preached and practiced the gospel of physical fitness. 'Yes,' he would say, 'keep yourself fit, my boy; nothing like it! Falls won't hurt you, so long as you're fit; and you'll keep your nerve; yes, keep your nerve, and be able to enjoy yourself.'"

"It would have been difficult to have imagined Billy Scott minus his iron nerve. It was the guerdon that he prized, and that he had cultivated by every means in his power. His valor was a rare combination of pluck and nerve. Never reckless, never flustered, he had—if ever man had—to perfection the cool courage of the hunting field."

"Well, Billy hunted for three or four seasons with the Upplondown Foxhounds and the Ballyuppan Harriers, and found life pleasant

in every way. Why shouldn't he, with half a dozen good horses in his stable, good health, and good friends? At the beginning of the fifth year after his return home, a frosty morning made it doubtful if he would be able to get to the meet of the harriers at Flintagh. Nothing annoyed him more than indecision and uncertainty, especially in hunting affairs. So, when old Macmoran, his faithful head man, said, 'But, shurely, sor, ye wouldn't be thinkin' of startin' for the hunt a mornin' like that!' Billy rather testily replied: 'What on earth's to stop me? One night's frost never stops hunting!'"

"Aye, but it's a hard wan, sor, an' ye'll see that afore ye go very far, so ye will."

"Then master and man walked down the avenue, Billy trying to drive his stick into the white, rime-covered banks, studded with rare shrubs."

"An' ye see that now, sor! That's what I toul't ye!"

"Oh, it's not so bad, at all," said Billy, when, after many vain attempts to pierce the turf, he at length succeeded. "See that!"

"When they reached the main road—a more sheltered spot—Billy pretended to find it perfectly right; and even Macmoran was forced to admit, 'Well, I wouldn't like to say that ye couldn't make the meet.'"

"An hour afterwards Billy, mounted on his good chestnut mare—the best one in his stable for such a day—was picking his way carefully along. And on arrival, rather late, at Flintagh, he found the Keen Master, Farleigh White, with only half a dozen of his followers around him."

"Why, I thought you were never coming, Colonel. I was just going to start."

"The roads are fearful; can we hunt all right?"

"Hunt?" said Farleigh, "of course we'll hunt! Only a bit of bone in the ground."

"And then hounds, followed by the small field, moved off to draw the Haddens, a tiny strip of land, lying in an extremely sheltered position."

"The sun was now out, loosening the frost's grip, and warming and cheering horses and riders; and the Master exclaimed, 'What's wrong with this?'"

"In a very short time a hare was raised, and hounds went away in full pursuit, their beautiful cry ringing through the clear frosty air, and making Farleigh exclaim, 'They talk about music! That's the music for me!'"

"As often happens in a frost, hounds were running well, and a very pretty hunt took place; and Billy Scott, as usual, was right bang in front. Galloping through an open gate, he turned sharp to the left, down a steep slope—too fast, as he afterwards admitted; for, like a shot, down went the mare—slipped up on the frosty patch—and rolled clean over her rider. Well, when they got Billy straightened out, he looked uncommonly bad. It was a frightful fall. However, after three weeks in bed, and a good change of air, he seemed as well as ever. But he wasn't; for he couldn't ride a yard. Billy had completely lost his nerve. His fall had been one of those shaking, crumpling disasters—fractured ribs, internal injuries, and all that sort of thing. As Farleigh White said, 'He'd got the stuffing knocked out of him.' But probably much of his nervous trouble came from so many of his friends telling him that they hoped he would find he hadn't lost his nerve. While others, who themselves never had any to lose, persistently and pleasantly assured the poor fellow that he would find his 'nerve all gone'; one man, in particular, bringing to his recollection the well-known case of young Rouse-thorne, one of the hardest of the hard, who took a fall just like yours, Billy, and never afterwards could jump a fence to save his life!"

"So, when next season came round, Billy went out to hunt in no very blithesome mood. He—whose thoughts, with autumn, had always eagerly turned to the raptures of the chase—now felt himself shaky and depressed, as he mounted his big brown horse, and rode off to find the harriers at Killyseagh Cross Roads."

"It was a glorious morning, with a temperature more like early September than that of October. A slight frost now altogether dispelled by the powerful sun gave a delightful air. Signs of an unusually late, but well-gathered, harvest were still all around. And Billy, an ardent lover of Nature and the countryside, felt himself grow fitter, as his eye wandered over familiar objects and found fresh beauties all around. And, as the firm rhythmic walk of his favorite hunter rang on the hard, smooth road, his 'malaise' seemed to disappear; yet before he had been a quarter of an hour amongst his friends at the meet his doubts and fears had returned, and he was altogether ill at ease. But jumping, to any wild extent, is unnecessary at the opening days of harriers. Then, after a good lunch at Sam Farrell's, and just when Billy Scott was beginning to feel much happier, the field said that they had done enough jumping for a beginning; so hounds went home. Well, of course, Billy now went out regularly, but somehow or other his nerve improved very little; and, whether he was with the harriers or the Upplondown Foxhounds, it seemed to be much the same thing. The once determined horseman went about looking for 'the best place' in every fence. What everybody had foretold had really happened, and Caspar Frant—a discerning critic if ever there was one—said, 'He'll never be worth a rap!'"

"But Billy was by no means done yet!

Bludkins, don't forget the wine; you're drinking nothing! Another cigar, Somers? Tufton, just a soupcon more, and I'll soon finish. But, you remember Miss Swynnerton?"

"Ah, a nice girl," said Tufton, and his voice had a faint sound of regret.

"Well, Mabel Swynnerton came over to stay with the O'Reillys. She was just the sort to get on well in Ireland. No side, you know, full of fun, and a thorough sportswoman. Not in her first youth, of course."

"None the worse for that!" murmured Bludkins.

"But she was quite charming; and so clever that she didn't seem a bit clever. She and Billy soon became great friends; but if sport was good, Miss Swynnerton was in the first flight, and Billy, he was still looking 'for the best place!' Their friendship, though thus broken, seemed to flourish. And Joe Hudson, a confirmed bachelor himself, remarked, 'Gad, it might have been a match if Billy hadn't lost his nerve!'"

"It soon became evident that Billy was becoming more and more devoted; in fact, he was in love. And now—one couldn't help being amused—he made frightful attempts to ride in his old form, but only when the adored one was out. If she wasn't on the scene, he went off early; there was always something wrong—his horse was short of work, or important affairs called him homewards. But when the lady was out, he carried a 'do or die' look, and actually managed to ride as hard as any of us; but only for a few fields at a time. After the ardor came the dreadful chill, the inevitable search for 'the only jumpable place.'"

"Don't speak of it!" said Bludkins; "I do that searching myself now."

The others laughed and said, "Nonsense, old fellow!"

"Still, sometimes Billy went wonderfully, and then Caspar Frant said that 'he'd come all right'; but there was nothing permanent about his performances—mere flashes of his old valor, struck out of his funk by Miss Swynnerton's presence. And now the time was approaching for the lady's departure. She had enjoyed three months of exceptionally good sport; had got very fond of jumping banks and stone walls; and had made herself popular with everyone—rich and poor alike. You see," and the quizzical smile came to his eyes, "when she saw anything she hadn't seen at home it wasn't always 'Oh, how dreadfully Irish!' No Saxon condescension about her!"—as Farleigh White said.

"Well, a week before her departure, the Upplondowns met at Rinalto, not far from the Kennels. Bludkins, you remember a hunt breakfast there?"

"Rather! A real Irish welcome you get. It's in the air!"

"Yes, the Barrys live for sport and hospitality—a fine generous diet—and very well they look on it! There was a big field out that day—towards the end of February, and that great specimen of an Irish gentleman, Dick Barry, was busy welcoming all with winning smile and voice. Everyone was cheery, many exuberantly happy, although the weather was a shade 'soft'; but that's nothing in Oppondown."

"When all were mounted, a long stream of riders filed slowly through the park and on to the Ballyinch road. Rory Home, the Master and huntsman—keen as mustard; tactful as a grande dame in her salon—then jogged off to draw the small covert at Drumness, where that good fellow, Jim Wood, always had a fox; and the whole field quickened its pace. Billy Scott and Miss Swynnerton riding together at the end of the cavalcade."

"Now, Miss Swynnerton, please don't do anything rash; remember it's a nasty cutting country round here."

"Oh, that's all right, and you must remember that I have only two more hunts in dear old Oppondown; so I must make the most of my time!"

"I say, Miss Swynnerton," said Billy, nervously fumbling at his reins, "You know, I'm awfully sorry you're going."

"So am I," said the lady, apparently only interested in the hounds, just now entering the covert. "In this they had been but a few minutes, when a fine fox was viewed away. And Miss Swynnerton held her breath, and her heart beat fast and the color rose to her face, as she listened to the hounds' opening burst. Then she turned her thoroughbred bay and jumped out of the narrow lane, in which the crowd were surging and swaying. It wasn't a nice place, but Billy was with her in a moment. When I saw them I thought there he was all right now! Hounds were running beautifully, over quite an easy country for the first fifteen minutes. They then ran through a very big bank country, and falls were frequent. And I saw Billy stopping to look 'for the best place.' He remembered, once more, that his friends said he'd lost his nerve! But Miss Swynnerton was going on straight as a bird. And now I believe what happened was this: Billy was soon jogging along the road, feeling—in every sense of the word—very much out of it. Now, he saw cattle moving on a distant hill, and he pushed towards them through a gap, and over a few easy fences, until he came to a very wide brook. That was out of the question!—no man in his senses would jump it, he said. It was the dreaded Ravenet river, the Oppondown Whissendine. He ambled along its banks for half a mile. There was no best place here! But what was that sound? Surely someone in distress. And, as he approached the spot, he heard a splashing

and floundering. 'Some damned fool in here!' said Billy.

"'Help! Help!' and loud cries came from the river. And now he saw a sight which made his blood run cold. There, in the river, wedged up by her horse against the further bank, was Miss Swynnerton!"

"Oh, Colonel Scott, please do try and help me! Can't you? Won't you?"

"I will!" shouted Billy. He never thought of the best place! He cantered back nearly a hundred yards, then turned, sat down, and drove his good horse hard at the wide river."

"Well over, indeed!" murmured Miss Swynnerton.

"Billy was off his horse in a second; then unsaddled him, took the girths and joined them together, put one end round a tree, and slid down the steep bank into some four feet of water."

"Well, after a great deal of hard work he managed to extricate Miss Swynnerton, and then, aided by some country people, her horse was got out. Neither a pin the worse for their dip."

"Soon the lady and her rescuer were both mounted again. Very cold, and feeling half drowned, they started off across country—a bee line—for the O'Reillys. Billy never giving a thought to any fence. He afterwards told me that when he had safely, and apparently so easily, jumped the big river, he suddenly felt a great rush of happiness and extraordinary exhilaration: for he was certain he'd found his nerve. He was his old self again!"

"Well, Miss Swynnerton prolonged her visit, owing to a chill after her fall, and before next season she had become Mrs. Scott."

"Ah, I remember," said Tufton, softly.

"And," continued the host, "Billy's had the best of nerve ever since."

"But, it seems to me," said Bludkins, "that he found his nerve because he'd never lost it!"

"Perhaps so," said the host, lighting another cigar and smiling, "I offer no explanation."

"Ah," remarked Somers, emerging from profound thought, "after all, women can do a lot for us!"

Bludkins and Tufton—the old and the young bachelor—looked uncertain.

And the host—watching the blue smoke wreathed round the top of the pink lamp-shade—seemed doubtful, too; but at last he said, "And they do!"—Hugh Henry in Billy's.

SHOOTING AND FISHING ROUND DELHI

There is a lot of small game shooting round Delhi, and as there are plenty of small wheels and ponds, duck and snipe afford sport in addition to the usual "dry" shooting at partridges, francolin, hares, pigeon and quail. The ancient brick walls of Delhi Fort give harborage to great numbers of blue rocks. We used occasionally to have an afternoon at them. The modus operandi was to get together half a dozen guns or more, and station them at various commanding points on the walls. This kept the pigeons on the move, and we used generally to get seventy or more between us in a short time. There are also green fruit pigeons to be got, and the small stock pigeons. These latter are like a lesser and paler edition of the blue rock, but they differ entirely in their habits from rock pigeons, feeding in the morning and afternoon, and at dusk retiring to roost in trees.

The shooting round about the Kutab—a triumphal tower some eleven miles from the Ajmere Gate—used to be quite good; there were plenty of the handsome little red headed jungle bush quail, numbers of grey partridges and hares, and a few blacks. Then there were generally to be found some flocks of the common pintail sandgrouse, while painted sandgrouse were always to be got by searching the scrub covered hillocks. The Kutab is in the midst of countless ruins for this was the site of one of the ancient cities which preceded modern Delhi. There too is the famous inscribed iron pillar, about sixteen inches in diameter. The last time I saw this I was much amused with the antics of my sals, who, with his back to the pillar was endeavoring to make his hands meet round it. Success in this acrobatic feat was regarded as great medicine.

Nine miles from Delhi is Okla, the head of the canal. Here there is a pretty and comfortable bungalow, in which leave can be obtained to stay a day or two. Along the banks of the river, in the tamarisk jungle, a good many black partridges can be got by patient beating. There are also duck, teal and geese on the river there. One day we shot among other things at Okla several red crested pochard. Besides shooting at Okla there is excellent fishing in the pool below the weir. The large predaceous fish take a spoon or minnow in the evenings just where the overflow runs in a little stream into the big pool. I used to get very good sport with a fly rod and diminutive spoon. There are also enormous fresh water sharks which may be taken with a live eel on strong tackle. In the direction of Ghaziabad and Dadri, and round about the Hindan River is some very fair shooting, including black buck, but the heads are poor. Near Ghaziabad there is a long reservoir for storing water for the railway. This pool holds large rohu and white carp; there are some big murrals in it. I caught fish upto 12lb. in this



tank, and no doubt there are much larger ones. A friend who was fishing there one evening caught a 5lb. murrals on paste, rather an unusual thing to happen as they are predaceous fish. In the Ghaziabad diocesan is the village of Salempoor. Here I had some fairly good sport with black and grey partridges and also shot a fine specimen of the jungle cat in broad daylight, as it was hunting some partridges along the side of the little irrigation canal. I also see by my notes that I got a lesser florikan, and four green pigeons at Shahdara, not far from Ghaziabad.

There is interesting ground out along the Alipur and Rohtak roads, where can be found plenty of grey partridges and hares. Behind the ridge and well to the north of Delhi is the great plain, where the camps are always pitched. Camp life in the winter is cold work in Northern India. Of course the important Government officials, native chieftains, and so on, have very glorified camps—tents like houses, with floors and fireplaces—and these are comfortable enough in the cold. The ordinary officer's tent is however a very chilly affair when nights are frosty.

Close to Delhi there are some charming, half wild gardens. They are called after the princess whose dowry they once were, the Roshnara Gardens. In this little park there is a small lake fed by an irrigation canal. It has an islet in the centre, and though nowhere more than 7 feet to 8 feet deep, holds large rohu and white carp. I have in this pond caught myself, and seen caught by others, fish up to 18 lb. in weight. No shooting is of course permitted in the gardens, but while fishing I have watched green fruit pigeons climbing about in the pipal trees like parrots to get the ripe figs.

FLEUR-DE-LYS.

A POT-SHOT

Jerry Horton is one of the living exponents of the creed that a rifle is the only gun for your true sportsman. He consistently and persistently maintains this position in spite of all evidence to the contrary. So when four of us went for a week's camp in the Rainy River country up northwest, naturally Jerry took along his old '38 repeater.

The old '38 of Jerry's deserves a word of mention, for it was in a class by itself. It was of an ancient and venerable model and of a standard make, but the victim of many years' continued neglect. Its barrel was rusty and its mechanism rickety and it was "leaded" beyond all power of mere words to describe.

To say the least, it was an erratic shooter. I've seen Jerry drive a nail with it at a hundred yards, and I've been present on other occasions when he failed to hit the end of a log, four feet in diameter, at a hundred feet. The bullets were quite as likely to strike sideways as otherwise, and the havoc wrought in a squirrel when one of those soft slugs struck it while turning end over end was something harrowing to see.

One day Jerry and I were returning from town with tobacco, coffee, salt, and other supplies; I, being the bearer of the sack, was unarmed. Jerry carried his ancient and cherished rifle. As we climbed a hog-back ridge covered with straggling pine, I spied a dead tree—gaunt reminder of some bygone forest fire—upstanding some two hundred yards to the right of our course. On its topmost branch sat a hen partridge.

I stopped like a pointer and gave Jerry a "s-s-s!" of warning. Partridges are palatable when properly cooked, and we had the cook at camp who could do it.

"We want that bird," I told him.

So we made a careful detour and approached within seventy yards of the dead pine, unobserved. We then discovered a second bird—a young one two-thirds grown—perched on a limb four feet below the hen.

"Jerry," I whispered, "if you ever shot that old blunderbuss of yours to kill, this is the occasion."

"You go ahead and shoot," he returned. "You're a better shot than I am. Go on—try your luck!"

As time was precious and he was stubborn, I took the gun. I laid its aged, rusty barrel across a log and drew a careful bead on the young partridge; he was a plump youngster and my mouth watered for him. It was an easy shot—had I possessed a dependable gun. Second after second passed while I sighted and Jerry held his breath and waited in suspense. Then—hoping for the best—I cracked away and—down tumbled the hen, torn into a tangled mass of skin, gore, and feathers, from her perch four feet above. And far across the valley we watched a whirling speck, receding and presently vanishing, as the young bird split the afternoon breeze.

"I believe I'd 'a' shot the young un, if I'd been you," said Jerry.—E. E. H. in Outing.