

# Field Sports at Home and Abroad

THE FIRST OF OCTOBER

## Some Pertinent Remarks on a Non-existent English Festival

Any glamor which at one time may have been attaching to the First of October is now a thing of the past. Unlike its brothers of "the Twelfth" or "the First of September," which dates mean so much to ardent gunners, the First of October is nowadays not even noticed. Stay a moment, however—I was forgetting—it is not a forgotten anniversary, as the daily papers reminded us on Monday. We were then told that the pheasant shooting season had commenced, and that parties of sportsmen were out early, and that good bags were made. Why the papers should think it necessary to tell us that the pheasant season has opened is, even to me, a mystery, or why we should be expected to be interested in the fact (more or less) that parties of sportsmen were out is beyond my comprehension. We all know those "sportsmen!" who shoot pheasants on October 1. They are the fraternity who blaze into birds as they get up at their feet in a turnip field, and think it sport and good shooting to blow them to pieces. Truly, they are great sportsmen, and this sort of thing appeals to their hearts, for it is about the only period in the season they can manage to hit a pheasant. Later on, when they are full grown and come rocketing over the tops of trees, they will be no sort of use to the First of October pheasant slaughterers, who like them nice and close and slow-flying.

Pheasant shooting today and pheasant shooting one hundred years ago and more are very different things. In those early days guns were vastly different and very uncertain of ignition. They were clumsy, heavy muzzle-loaders, and very unlike our present day hammerless ejectors. Harvesting and hay-cutting were not conducted by means of saving machines, and sportsmen invariably shot over pointers or setters or spaniels. Parties, such as we have today, were not known, and generally one or two "guns" formed the party. Beaters and appliances as they are today were undreamed of, and the Squire, with his friend and keeper and dogs, were all that came out. That the undergrowth in woods was thick or the trees in leaf mattered not to them, for the faithful dogs did the work while one Nimrod in tall hat, green velvet coat, and leather overalls banked off his fowling-piece to the delicious and frantic joy of "Dash and Ponto." To these worthless October 1 was a very real date, and the pheasants they shot were all wild-bred ones.

If old pictures of shooting in those days are to be relied on, the birds then were not very difficult to shoot, or any more so than they are today on the 1st. Pheasant shooting, as it now is, is a totally different thing. The great desire now is to make birds fly so as to give the most difficult shots. To shoot a pheasant which is a very easy shot gives no pleasure at all, and certainly nothing in comparison with that of bringing down a tall bird flying with the wind behind it forty yards up in the air. Shooting pheasants is no good at all until frost has killed down the undergrowth in woods and the leaves are off the trees. Thus it is that not till the middle of November is any real attempt made to shoot woods. Before then only outlying spinnies on the edge of estates, or an odd pheasant or so shot for the table, is all that is done in the way of killing these beautiful birds, but when one reads of parties of sportsmen being out on October 1 to shoot pheasants one can but smile as the vision of the "sportsmen!" rises in one's mind. It is those gentlemen of the pen and guileless editors that rush into print on the subject of sport, and whose knowledge of shooting leads them to inform us "the crack of the rifle" is heard on the moors on the Twelfth, who also tell us of these gallant doings on October 1, but which, I think, are more in their own imagination than real. At least, let us hope so.—Bystander.

## THE BEST GUN, AND WHY IT IS THE BEST

Quality in implements of sport is a never-ending subject of discussion, especially in those branches where success turns on the perfect inter-working of hand and eye. There is generally an indefinable something which evades analysis, and which no term in the English language seems to be capable of expressing. Balance, which means so much and is still so vague, may be tested on sound scientific principles; but the statistical results lack meaning so long as the final arbiter is human approval—which is just instinct pure and simple. The workmanship of a best London gun derives its main justification from the effect produced. A mechanical structure which is ideal from a mechanical standpoint seems also to take on the artistic properties which are inseparable from a perfect utilitarian design. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, so mechanics abhor unnecessary clefts and gaps and angles when perfect fit and flowing harmonies are more conducive to efficiency. Guns are not made in sufficient quantities to realize the engineer's ideal of stereotyped perfection. Gunmaking remains an art, because the best results are only achieved by the class of workman whose reward is as much in the pride of a well-accomplished task as in the mere vulgar wages which are handed to him at the end of the week.

One of the first essentials of the best gun is a best pair of barrels. Some few years ago a master workman in this department was constantly being urged to supply his trade customers with second-quality barrels. His price for the best was £25 10s, and, bearing in mind that this included none of the labor of joining the barrels to the action—nothing more, in fact, than the jointing together of two tubes by means of ribs—it will be understood that no gun but one of the best could stand so large an expense for this single item. The suggestion was in effect that some part of the wide gap between best and second best barrels might be bridged if workmen accustomed to the former could devote a portion of their time to making something a grade cheaper. The task proved an impossible one, until one day it was discovered that a certain firm of barrel tube makers were able to supply the raw material of a pair of barrels at a very much more advanced stage of manufacture than had previously been the custom. By the aid of special machinery, tubes at a few shillings a pair were producible so true and accurate as to dispense with some of the expensive labor which had previously been necessary to impart the same effect. A contract for second-grade barrels, to be produced in a workshop of first-class reputation, was accordingly accepted, and here in one small particular the best gun lost some of its monopoly of excellence.

A perfect pair of barrels correct in substance for resisting the internal stresses due to shooting, and still having the necessary lightness forward to ensure perfect balance, represents a considerable asset in the economy of a first-class gun. On the other hand, great as may be the importance of balance, success in shooting turns quite as much on a perfect response of the trigger to the pressure of the finger. Correct fitting of the stock is often given the foremost position in the desirable attributes of a gun. More detailed consideration shows, however, that balance comes first, a third, and in the last-named connection it may be pointed out that no shape of stock will make a badly balanced gun fit the shooter, whereas the most approximate of measurements will make a man feel at home with a gun which has been produced on the best lines. The locking mechanism of a gun may appear to be sufficiently covered by the proof house test, for, since all guns are subjected to the same test, they are presumably of equal strength. This in point of fact is very far from the actual truth. The proof test of a gun consists of a single shot fired from each barrel, whereas the test of service is many thousands of shots fired under all sorts of conditions, not controlled by the shooter, but liable at all times to try a gun to the utmost.

A clean-working, smooth-opening gun is one of the greatest triumphs of mechanical science. An enormous load is borne by relatively small surfaces of metal, cocking and ejecting are automatically effected, yet a gentle motion of the thumb, unlocks the comprehensive system of catches, and the apparently unresisted opening and closing of the barrel does the rest. Though touching upon possibly controversial ground, it may be pointed out that one of the triumphs of several of the best-known best guns is that they are closed more securely by two fastenings than in the ordinary gun with three. Still touching on controversial subjects, it may further be pointed out that the fashion to complicate a gun's mechanism with safeties, interceptors, and sundry other more or less doubtful insurances against stupidity on the part of the shooter necessitates an altogether exceptional degree of refinement in the adjustment of working parts. The price paid for a best gun sufficiently repays the maker for the trouble he feels bound to exercise in achieving a state of sweet working of all the small limbs, catches, and levers which constitute its interior mechanism. Guns which are not the best, but which profess to be equal to the best, without, say, the adornment of a West-end address, plus the usual sneer at engraving, naturally possess a large number of what the American salesman terms "selling points," which, however, do not receive the attention in fitting which alone justifies their inclusion in the specification of a gun. The second-grade gun, with its liability to exhibit spurious imitations of the qualities and details of a best gun, in reality fails to hit the mark for the same reason that the money which will purchase a good clock may not cover the cost of a chime of bells for striking the hours.

Another reason which militates against second-grade guns being a good imitation of the best is that the latter is nearly always produced under the direct supervision of skilled judges of work who are in daily contact with sportsmen of an equally high order. Makers of the inferior grades of gun are in most instances bereft of the benefit of hearing their goods criticised by real authorities in the art of shooting. The selection of qualities, to which precedence in design and manufacture is given, is thus not what it would be if the points which most especially appeal to the sportsman were taken in their due order. By this is meant, not that the sportsman could sit down and write out a better specification for a gun than the man who makes it in the factory or garret, but that to a receptive and intelligent mind daily intercourse with the best class of sportsman produces an aggregation of gunmaking wisdom which can be reproduced in the weap-

ons supplied. The gunmaker may be forgiven if his special pride and interest is centred in the production of the best gun which his chief customers are induced to order. The other guns come along after the first blessings have been distributed, and are liable to be bought and sold in the manner of ordinary merchandise, so long, of course, as the firm's reputation is maintained by the quality of their best work.

It is impossible to apply a tangible money value to many of the details of a gun. The present writer has, for instance, devoted as many as six solid hours to the regulation and adjustment of the triggers of a gun which was supposed to have been specially overhauled in this very particular by an exceptionally competent gunsmith. The improved effect resulting from the six hours of patient labor was, first, the removal of a really dangerous condition in one of the triggers, and, further, the inducing of a clean crispness of pull, which in the one particular at any rate raised the status of the gun from £30 to £60. From the point of view of the actual value of the work performed, it would be willingly paid by anyone who appreciated the importance of a clean pull and could at the same time be sure that it would be dirty and effectively realized, and not scamped as by the man who was supposed to have made the original adjustments. Possibly if gunmakers were more enterprising, and sportsmen more willing to replace worn-out or obsolete guns it might be possible to organize machine production, as to impart to medium-price guns the more vital essentials of good quality, but as things stand far and away the best value in sporting guns is in the dearest. The cheaper qualities are doubtless strong and substantial, but they lack many simple qualifications which, though they might theoretically be included in the price, as a matter of fact and experience are only to be found in the best gun.—Maximilian, in Field.

## THE ENTHUSIASM OF FOXHUNTING.

Your genuine foxhunter, is but a narrow-minded, self-sufficient creature after all—an enthusiast where the "sport of kings" is concerned, but a mere tolerant of "lesser" amusements. He may fish, golf, even hunt a hare, with lordly condescension. He cannot hunt all seasons of the year, and so in summer must perforce pursue the pastimes of more ordinary mortals. In summer he may fish and hunt, I say. In winter—on days when there is no foxhound meet within his reach—he may honor a Master of Harriers by schooling a young horse at the expense of his pack. But he only too obviously considers the proceedings slow.

The very literature of the foxhunter betrays him. Most books on foxhunting make some mention of harriers; almost all "damn with faint praise." Beckford is no exception; he "respects hunting," in whatever shape it appears; it is a manly and wholesome exercise, and seems by Nature designed to be the amusement of a Briton. Praise certainly, and scarcely weighing much against, another passage: "By inclination I was never a hare-hunter; I followed this diversion more for amusement; and if I could have persuaded myself to ride on the turnpike road to the three-mile stone and back again, I should have thought that I had no need of a pack of harriers." No question about Beckford's sentiments.

Let us try Surtees. In John Jorrocks, Master of the Handley Creek Foxhounds, he has given us a character who will live as long as hunting itself. Wherein lies the grocer's charm? He is vulgar, a hard finker—the hardest rider in England he described himself to an old lady on the score of seldom leaving the hard high-road. Ah! but he was a real genuine enthusiast. No milk-and-water equivocation about John Jorrocks. Witness his oration at the Doleful-benefit dinner: "Untill is the foremost passion of my art! Compared with it all others are flat and unprofitable. It's not never of no manner of use 'umbuggin' about the matter, but there's no sport fit to hold a candle to fox-huntin'. Talk of stag-huntin'! might as well hunt a hass!—see a great lolloppin' beggar blobbin' about the market gardens near London, with a pack of 'ounds at its heels, and call that diversion! My vig, wot a go! Pull-huntin' is verily well for cripples, and those that keep donkeys. Blow me tight! but I never see a chap 'a trugin' along the turnpike, with a thick stick in his 'and and a pipe in his mouth, but I says to myself, there goes a man well mounted for 'arriers! wouldn't be a master of muggus for no manner of money!" And so on.

Reader, this is no common sport that will arouse such enthusiasm among its votaries. And not its votaries alone. If the exigencies of everyday life, if lack of time, or lack of means, will not allow us to follow the chase in person, we are all foxhunters at heart. Why is it? Why should foxhunting, a sport participation in which must always be confined to the few, rouse such enthusiasm in the many? Let us try Beckford again for inspiration.

"What are other sports compared with this, which is full of enthusiasm! Fishing is, in my opinion, a dull diversion; shooting, though it admit of a companion, will not allow of many; the one might teach patience to a philosopher; and the other, though it occasions great fatigue to the body, seldom affords much occupation to the mind; whereas foxhunting is a kind of warfare; its uncertainties, its fati-

gues, its difficulties and its dangers rendering it interesting above all other diversions." Note the words enthusiasm, warfare, uncertainties, difficulties, dangers! The enthusiasm of foxhunting! How seldom is the phlegmatic Englishman allowed to give rein to his enthusiasm; to let himself go! Warfare! War is the grandest of all sports, and foxhunting is its image. Uncertainties! Uncertainty is the very salt of sport. Were it otherwise, better to hunt a drag or a bagman. Difficulties! Dangers! Are not difficulty and danger the characteristics of all our great national sports? Why else should mountaineers ascend the Alps, or Himalayas? But let us try further. Ah! here we have it. "Eagerness and impetuosity are essential parts of this diversion. One hold hard, or reproof, unnecessarily given, would chill me more than a northerly wind; it would damp my spirits and send me home. The enthusiasm of a foxhunter should not be checked in its career, for it is the very life and soul of foxhunting. If it be the eagerness with which you pursue your game that makes the chief pleasure of the chase, you pursue no animal with the same eagerness that you pursue a fox."

Beckford, as always, has the last word. It is the enthusiasm of foxhunting that constitutes its charm. We pursue no animal with the same eagerness that we pursue a fox. Enthusiasm is the very life and soul of foxhunting. Here we have the secret of the foxhunter's monomania, and of the respect we all feel for his scarlet coat. His is a sport of enthusiasm, an enthusiasm only fanned by the thousand difficulties and uncertainties of the chase; an enthusiasm but the keener for the pleasing thrill of fear as he crashes through the bullfinch or doubles the bank. No dwelling on the scent, no intricacies of hound-work as in hare-hunting. But dash, and impetuosity, and mad enthusiasm. "No color like red, no sport like hunting." It is no use humbugging about it—there's no sport fit to hold a candle to foxhunting.—P. A., in Baily's.

## WILDFOWLING WITH A RIFLE

Three years ago I was spending a couple of months in the north of Ireland, near Carlingford Lough, the shores of which abound with wildfowl, but have the disadvantage of affording practically no cover whatever within the range of a short gun. Like others before me, I spent many fruitless days in stalking the wary wildfowl with a light 12-bore cylinder gun, now and then getting shots which looked to be within range, but somehow or other (and I fancy others have found it the same) the gun would not do its work. I then came to the conclusion that it was practically impossible to shoot ducks with a game gun unless they flew over you, a proceeding to which the Carlingford Lough wild ducks seem decidedly averse.

I finally decided to experiment with rifles, and did so with (1) a 22 rim fire rifle, using long rifle ammunition, and (2) a 25-20-86. Both these weapons were fitted with orthoptic backsights, head foresights, and slings. My success with the 22 was varied, and although I shot a curlew at 163 yards, another at 110 yards, and a green plover at 106 yards, I found that the probabilities of hitting a single bird beyond 75 yards were somewhat remote. I finally ended by permanently fixing my back sight at 100, and shooting low if the bird was within that distance. A guide to the range was the fact that the head of the foresight exactly covered a green plover at 75 yards. With the 25-20-86—a more powerful weapon—the following are a few of the more successful results achieved at longer ranges when the back sight was set to the estimated range:

One Brent goose out of three swimming together at 190 yards. A single Brent goose at 180 yards. One curlew out of a flock at 220 yards. Two Brent geese out of six with one bullet at 180 yards. These long distances were all carefully estimated by means of a telescope fitted with gratitudes, the use of which was necessary, as I had found it quite impossible to correctly judge distances when lying down amongst long grass or behind cover. In every case of a successful shot the distance was paced, and found to agree closely with the estimated range. My total bag with rifles, as far as I can remember, amounted to four Brent geese, one sheldrake, five wigeon, three mallard, six curlew, and thirty green plover, all of which (with the exception of about half of the green plover) were killed at distances of over 70 yards.

I do not pretend to say that big bags can ever be made with a rifle, but there is no question as to the skill necessary to make a moderate one, and there is, moreover, a great satisfaction in bringing off a long shot, entailing, as it does, stalking, finding the range, and in many cases making a wide allowance. I still have a vivid recollection of retrieving my first Brent goose (shot with a rifle) in about 400 yards of water nearly 200 yards from the shore, and of knocking over two Brent geese out of six at 180 yards with a single bullet, to say nothing of murdering two unsuspecting mallard, peacefully sleeping on the tide at a distance of 75 yards—also with a single round bullet. Unless you are nearly certain of breaking a bird's bottle at 75 yards with every shot, you had better leave wildfowling with a rifle severely



"The First of the Season"

## Sportsman's Calendar

NOVEMBER

Trout-fishing ends November 15.  
Cock Pheasant may be shot in Cowichan Electoral District only.  
Grouse (except willow grouse in Cowichan), Quail, Ducks, Deer, Geese and Snipe-shooting open.

alone. But such a standard of excellence is easily attained, and could probably be beaten by half the miniature rifle shots in England. Every shot into a 4in. bull at 100 yards is nothing out of the common, and any good shot can kill wildfowl with a rifle at long ranges if he tries.

Roughly speaking, a Brent goose offers a target equivalent to a 6in. bull's-eye, a mallard and wigeon to a 5in. and 4in. respectively, and a green plover to a 3in. Practically, there are only two ways of estimating ranges of a wildfowl; the first is to compare its size, if known, with natural objects, the fore sight of a rifle, and the distance between gratitudes in a telescope, or some similar device; the second is to have the eye draw of a large telescope graduated in yards, according to focus (on the principle of focussing a hand camera). This latter method, however, is useless, even with very large portable telescopes, beyond 150 yards, but is extremely accurate up to 120 yards, and, moreover, has the advantage of being independent of the size of the object. I have employed both these methods, but the second was seldom of any use, except to ascertain ranges of natural objects near which you were likely to find birds at some future time.

I am aware that there are people who honestly believe they can judge ranges by eye, but I fancy they unconsciously compare the size of the bird with some other object—and it is the absence of this other object that makes estimation of distances on an open shore or out at sea such a difficult matter. I have on two occasions, after a prolonged stalk, deliberately fired at mallard with the rifle sights set for 100 yards, only to find, on the birds signalling misses in the usual manner, that the ranges were barely 50 yards!—H. W.

## SKITTERING FOR BASS.

A very popular method of taking both the large and small-mouth bass is that of skittering. The same rod is used as in fly-fishing, but a soft-brained silk line is best in this case and a shorter leader will do. An ordinary bait hook is used. The usual bait consists of a piece of pork rind cut in an elliptical shape to resemble a minnow. This piece is about three inches long and an inch wide, with a slit three-fourths of its length, so that the free ends will wobble when it moves through the water. The angler casts in a manner similar to that used with the fly except that the bait is allowed to strike the water behind the caster, so that when the forward cast is made, too much of a strain is not put upon the rod. The bait is drawn in by a series of jerks and is kept on, or near, the surface of the water. As with the fly, the fish is struck immediately upon taking the bait. Live frogs and minnows are sometimes used in skittering.

When it is desirable to keep the bait at a certain depth, a float is used and attached to the line two, three or more feet from the bait. In still-fishing ample time should be given to the fish before striking, as the fish will nearly always swallow the bait if given sufficient time. When using minnows, or frogs, it is often advisable to give the fish five or ten feet of line, as he nearly always takes the bait in his mouth and swims away with it before swallowing. Striking too soon will cause him to release his hold on the bait.

Many anglers prefer to anchor their boat, but to allow it to drift with the current or wind and to allow the bait to drift slowly after them. In this way more ground can be covered, and when a good feeding ground is discovered then the anchor can be cast out. The tackle used for still-fishing can be the lightest, and therefore good sport can be enjoyed by still-fishing from a boat.—Field and Stream.

Joiner (to his apprentice)—Well, Willie, have you sharpened all the tools?

Willie—Yes—and all but the 'and-saw, and I haven't quite got all the gaps out of it.—Sketch.