

Higgledy Piggledy, My Fat Pheasant



GEORGE VIVIAN
The FAMOUS TRAP SHOT, AN
ARDENT PHEASANT HUNTER

Ten Thousand Guns Cut Loose in the One-Day Pheasant-Shooting Season in Niagara Peninsula—Fields, Orchards and Barnyards Swarm With Hunters—and From Every Ditch Pheasants Leap

By GREGORY CLARK

WHURRUP! Up leaps a pheasant out of the stubble field.

BANG! Bang! Bang! BANG! Bang! Thirty men shoot at it as it skims low over two fields.

It falls! Fifty men claim it! "Mine!"

"My bird!" "Sorry, mine, I think!" "Hyah! Thass my bird, there!" Whoever gets to it first keeps it.

It's the one day open season for pheasant in the counties of Lincoln and Welland in the Niagara Peninsula, Ontario.

For three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, the English ring-necked pheasant, which has been successfully transplanted to Canadian soil, is a beautiful barnyard fowl throughout the fruit belt, half time, to be seen all summer long in every grape-garden and every orchard, a thing of gold and bronze and metallic green. For three hundred and sixty-four days a year, it is to be seen running across roads in front of your car, skimming on race-horse legs along the ditches and furrows, flying like a bullet, its low, floating, sudden-dropping flight, amid the orchards and the corn.

Then—the one day out of the three sixty-five! And in the neighborhood of ten thousand guns swarm out into the two counties which the government throws open for the day—and from dawn unto dark, the pheasant believes the end of the world to have come.

This is not woods shooting. It is field shooting, right out in the open farms, grape-arbors and orchards of the famous fruit belt. In parties of from two to eight men, the hunters deploy across the fields, thirty yards apart, shot guns held at the ready. And from every ditch and fence the pheasants leap.

In every field, hunters. As dawn breaks, the earth seems to be fairly crawling with gunners. And it sounds like the battle of Amiens.

Each gunner is allowed five cock pheasants for the day. Hen pheasants are protected by law, and a fine of \$50 is set for the man caught with a hen pheasant. It is estimated that this army of gunners that invades the peaceful fruit belt for the day kills about five thousand birds.

It is an invasion, nothing else. Every farmer is out. Every city, town and village turns out its full quota of men and boys and dogs. St. Catharines is in the heart of the

belt, and there is scarcely a man to be found in that city by mid-afternoon of the day. And motor cars from far and wide bring sportsmen, so that the highways and side roads of the counties are lined with autos abandoned while the hunters stalk the barnyards.

World's Most Elusive Birds

ACTUALLY, the barnyards. There is no set plan. The way the pheasant is hunted in Old England is by means of the drive. The gentry stand or sit behind coverts or butts, and the yokels in a line walk through the fields, scaring the pheasants down wind. As they cross over, the gentry rise to their feet and shoot them.

It is far different in the Peninsula. It is higgledy-piggledy. You come along the road, in your car or buggy or on your bicycle, and seeing an expanse of stubble field and orchard fairly free of hunters, say, only twenty being in view, you dismount and start to walk the fields. The pheasants are everywhere and anywhere. Their favorite hide is in stubble and weed fields and in the rows of weeds along the fence bottoms.

Before you have gone the length of one field, you have either met, passed through, crossed or find yourself following another gang of hunters. You come to a corn field full of stooked corn stalks. Here is a likely place. Treading soft and pretty, bent forward, gun ready, you begin to sneak. Suddenly you round a corn stook and come face to face with another huntsman, also bent over, gun forward and eyes gleaming. You both blush, lower your gun muzzles and pass over. It is like a huge, crazy cotillion. Crossing and recrossing. You would marvel that any pheasants get by at all.

But of course they do get by. A pheasant is about the most elusive bird that flies. Plenty of men who have seen them fly but have never put a gun at them think they are easy. The secret is the pheasant's build and method of flying. A pheasant is a big bird, big as a game chicken, a fine specimen weighing three and a half pounds, with short rounded wings and a long, streamer tail. When it leaps up with a sudden whistling whirr, its wings beating rapidly, it appears to be a big bird winging heavily and not very fast. It is when you lay your head on him that you find how really fast he is going. It is safe to say that most men who got their first pheasant last Saturday—which was the one open day—fired thirty shots to get them. And the average would be far greater than that. Hundreds and hundreds must have fired a score or more of times and got nothing at all.

For the pheasant is running bird as well as a flying bird. Practically none of them is shot on the ground. It is a hundred per cent. wing shooting. Despite his size, a cock pheasant can hide in a stubble field and cross it at a race horse gallop, without ever being seen.

Shortly after sun up, the air was already torn by gunfire. And by that time, the pheasants knew that the bad day for them had come. They were wild as partridges. They flew at the slightest warning and had a smart eye for the hunter, curving beautifully away. The average bird, when being stalked across a field, jumped at something beyond thirty yards.

You would see a cock bird—they don't fly high, twenty feet or less would be the average height they attain to in any one flight—you

would see the cock bird come sailing down and alight in the field ahead of you. You would hasten to that field and scramble over the barbed wire fence—and there is more barbed wire in the Niagara Peninsula than in the Hindenburg line—and begin to stalk him where he dropped. But the pheasant, immediately on droppings, begins to run. And he runs in a diagonal line to the opposite end of the field into which he dropped. You stalk the whole field, and when you reach the far end, a volley of shots behind you informs you that your bird has been jumped two hundred yards away by another gang of gunners who came upon him unexpectedly.

It sounds dangerous. You would think the air would be full of flying shot. But a shotgun shoots only a short distance, and the scattered shot falls spent. Only one accident was reported from last Saturday, out of the ten thousand hunters who were out.

The only danger is the danger of a fight with somebody over whose bird it is—yours or his.

One Dog Could Find Them

GUNS of every description, from pee-wee .410 squirrel guns up to ten gauge goose guns. Even on occasion twenty-two rifles came into action, and then you would hear a roar. It would usually be a small boy with a twenty-two and when the little rifle squeaked men from every side would let out a yell—"Hey! Get out of this!" And the little fellow would have to scamper for his life to the nearest road. No rifles in a place like that.

And dogs—dogs of every description from a Pom to a bloodhound out helping to stir up pheasants. Of course the average mutt dog is the most helpless thing in the world for pheas-

ants. If he has enough brains or training to know what it is he is after, he usually runs wild and chases up the hot trail of a racing pheasant only to put him up on the wing a hundred yards away from his master and fair game for half a dozen other gangs of hunters in the next three fields.

But we saw one little dog—His name is Nitsdale Rab, and he is a Scottish field trial champion. He is a little black and white Springer spaniel, and he is one fine little sportsman.

His master goes into the field, and Rab runs with high head and excited tail, at his heels.

"All right," says his master. "Go on."

Rab with a little leap of joy races ahead, in a circle thirty yards across, with his master at one edge of it and his furthest run at the other. A whistle from his master, as he reaches the thirty yard run, turns him and, nose to the ground, he races back to his boss. Out again he goes, the master steadily walking forward, gun ready, while Nitsdale Rab continues to circle out thirty yards and back, to right, to left and to centre. It is as perfect a piece of work as you could ever see.

Half way across the field, Rab begins to wriggle all over. His nose is very close to the ground. The master holds his gun forward and ready.

"Put him up," calls the master, softly. And suddenly, from a few feet in front of Rab, a pheasant rockets up.

"Hup!" cries the master. Rab squats flat.

Bang! The pheasant falls. Rab never budes. "Fetch!" calls the master.

And Rab like a bullet races to the pheasant. He turns it carefully with his nose until it lies back up. Then he picks it daintily in his mouth by its closed wings and shoulders. He lays it at his master's feet, practically untouched.

Nitsdale Rab ran from dawn until dark and never quit for one moment. He put up hundreds of pheasants. His master took more joy out of Rab and his magnificent performance than in the shooting. Dozens of hunters seeing him forgot their hunting and followed just to see him work.

After lunch, when those who couldn't get off for the morning began to swarm, a new ferocity came into the bawling and whacking of guns far and near. And by mid day the pheasants were wild and shy, preferring to run than to fly. And the mysterious way a big pheasant can light in a stubble field and disappear, to appear again two hundred yards away in about a minute, is one of nature's first rate phenomena.

Pheasants Came From England

BOYS and old men have their share. One father proudly displayed two fine cocks shot by his fourteen-year-old son. We met one old man surely all of eighty years, slowly and carefully picking his way through a grape arbor, walking on a stick and carrying his twelve bore over his shoulder. He was deaf.

"Any luck?" "No, not yet," replied the old fellow, jovially. "But I always get my bird!"

He went and sat down in a fence corner where he could watch three fields for strays coming his way.

As far as exercise is concerned, it is a gruelling day. The November fields are wet and muddy. Fences are to be negotiated at every turn. Ploughed fields to be waded across. There are twenty thousand stiff and sore legs all this week in southwestern Ontario.

So plentiful are the birds, it inspires the thought that in some future day, when the duck and partridge are practically extinct, this imported English pheasant may be the only game bird left. Ontario. For with a short season and a strict limit, with the way they are becoming acclimated, the pheasant seems to have become a native for keeps.

The first pheasants were introduced into the Peninsula by an Englishman named Furminger, whose sons are amongst the best shots in the Peninsula to-day. Mr. Furminger brought out the parent birds and released them. Then when they began to flourish, Mr. Welland Woodruff, M. P., continued the good work by planting eggs in several parts of the Peninsula, about 1908 and later. The birds have flourished marvelously since, and this is the fourth year the government has permitted the shooting of them.

The finest sportsmen of the whole show, however, are the fruit farmers of Welland and Lincoln, who permit these hordes of hunters to

Not What He Expected

THE small boy was watching the vicar, who was working in his shirt-sleeves in the garden, making a fence.

Presently the vicar looked up at him and smiled.

"Ah, Tommy," he said, "trying to pick up a few hints so that you may become a carpenter?" "No," replied the boy; "I'm waiting to hear what a clergyman says when he hits his thumb with a hammer."

On the Station Platform

By W. L. EDMONDS

TOURISTS entraining at Souris, Prince Edward Island, the other day were witnesses of a scene that both excited their sympathy and turned their thoughts God-ward.

Lying upon an improvised stretcher, preparatory to being placed on board the outgoing train, was the pain-wracked body of a woman that had evidently long since passed the age of "three score and ten." Standing by in shirt sleeves, his bent and emaciated body leaning heavily upon a rubber-tipped walking-stick, was the aged husband—a pathetic figure. His wife was being conveyed to a hospital in Charlottetown, and he had hobbled with difficulty to the station platform for what, judging from the worried expression carried by his sallow features, he feared might be the final farewell.

And just before the stretcher, with its aged occupant, was placed in one of the cars two black-robed sisters quietly approached, asked an attendant the nature of the illness, and then one of them, after gently stroking the brow of the

patient, remarked with a sincerity that gripped the onlookers:

"The only thing we can do is to pray for you. And that we shall do."

"And me, too," another woman was heard to murmur, while one of the men in the group, in a voice that indicated he was feeling deeply, remarked:

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man (and woman, too) availeth much."



NITSDALE RAB AND HIS MASTER, H.S. ROUTLEY,
WITH CHARLES ACKERMAN OF PETERBORO.

swarm over their fields and orchards and grape arbors and fences, without one word of protest. It is everybody's day that one day. The hunters come right through the private yards of the residents of the country, and those fine sportsmen just grin and bear it.

One old fellow who has big orchards three miles south of St. Kitts stood with his gun for-bidding all to enter his land. Scores of pheasants found refuge there.

"Well," said one of the hunters, "you're a genial old sport, ain't you? I hope your apples freeze and your grapes all turn sour, next season."

One city sport had the misfortune to shoot a perfectly good Red Minorca hen. He saw what he thought was a pheasant in the early morning light, and took a crack at it. When he went over to pick it up, the expiring hen turned an astounded eye up to him. For though hens live in constant knowledge of their final fate, they expect the ritual of the barnyard execution and not a sudden thunder out in the thistles.

This gunner paid for the hen.

And as far as the ten thousand pheasant hunters are concerned, they say or should say, each and every one, to the farmers of the Peninsula—

"May your orchards and vines be fruitful and we will all help to create your market by consuming a hundred per cent. Canadian fruit. For you have given us a gorgeous day of fun and excitement."

JUST A LITTLE IDYL

THE sunset sky is waning green;
The twilight's sweet creases
Steals soft on the mysterious scene;
The pale stars evanesce;
Though just what evanescence may mean
I know not, I confess.

The light is on the march, my sweet
(Love, to my love give heed);
Down from the hills with rhythmic beat,
Swift through the silent mead;
The gibbous moon rolls at its feet—
Why gibbous? Why, indeed!

Thine eyes are pools of darkling sky
When wan suns linger late;
Thy voice the twilight's ecstasy
Where love lies long in wait;
Pale gales are on thy cheek—though why
I'm not prepared to state.

Thy face, thy lips, thy windblown hair
Are like, my love divine,
A star (as Wordsworth said) when there
Is only one to shine;
Though why one star should be so fair
Is his affair, not mine.

My love is like the dawn that wakes
He flowers on the lea;
Or like the swift, fair wind that takes
The tall ships out to sea.
Just take your choice, my dear, it makes
No difference to me.

And if your love for me floats free
Like banners swift unfurled;
Or wheels like scaterers over the sea
Upon the storm-wind hurled,
We'll tell some better bard than we
And he can tell the world.

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