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Guns and Dogs

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## GUNS AND DOGS

MANY years ago Charles Scribner's Sons published the gunning prints by A. B. Frost, which quickly became popular. The color illustrations by Dwight W. Huntington in the Scribner book, "Our Feathered Game," are in much the same tints. Mr. Huntington also has many illustrations of game birds in the back of the book, to which furthermore he stands in the important relationship of author.

Specific descriptions are given of our various game birds and of methods of shooting them. A more general chapter is that on Guns and Dogs. A cheap gun is useless. Mr. Huntington quotes Polonius advice to Laertes, "Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy," and adds that it applies as well to guns. The sportsman in selecting a gun should purchase the best he can afford. A good gun will last a lifetime. A cheap gun will soon wear loose at the breech, while a shaky gun is an abomination. It is true that a certain amount of good engraving about the locks adds to the beauty of a gun and gives it a finished look, but to spend money on the fancy engraving of shooting scenes with impossible ducks, pheasants, or dogs inlaid in gold, is folly. When the best guns were made in England, a good one was not to be had for less than \$150 to \$200. Now there are many excellent American makes, and a very safe and serviceable gun may be had from \$50 up. The author advises against cheaper guns.

A gun for general shooting, when the sportsman has one gun only, should be 12-gauge; the barrels thirty inches in length; the weight seven to seven and one-half pounds. "The gun should, of course, be hammerless, since the hammerless gun is by far the safest. Most of the accidents in the shooting field have been caused by the old-style gun with hammers. I have known of many accidents caused by the hammers catching when the gun was carelessly drawn toward the shooter in a boat or wagon. Many accidents have occurred by the gun being fired by the dog. A favorite setter sent a load of shot within an inch of my head. I had put the gun down; was holding it with one hand and about to open a gate when the young, enthusiastic dog, prancing about, put one foot on the hammer, raising it high enough to explode the cartridge when his foot slipped off."

Mr. Huntington adds that there should never be more than one gun in a duck-boat, and never a loaded gun in a wagon, except when the wagon is used to approach game. Even in that case there should be no more than one gun in the wagon and that always held in a safe position with the muzzle pointing outward. "I have always insisted upon an inspection of the guns—all tipping them open to show that they are empty—when several are using a wagon, and will on no account shoot with a man who brings a loaded gun

into a wagon. It is unnecessary to advise a sportsman never to point a gun, loaded or unloaded, at a person. It is the unloaded gun, usually, that kills a companion. Remove the loads in getting over a fence, especially if the fence be at all shaky."

The fit of the gun is far more important than the fit of the clothes, because good shooting is dependent upon it. A gun which fits "comes up" well or handles well. When it is tossed suddenly to the shoulder it will be so poised that the eye will see along the barrel and the aim be true without further adjustment of the gun. While some experienced shooters prefer a straight stock, and others a crooked one, the beginner should take the gun which for him comes up the best. "Many years ago, when I purchased my first expensive gun, I named the price I expected to pay and had the dealer stand out some twenty or thirty guns of various makes, all good ones, however, and taking these one by one I aimed them suddenly at a small object of some kind in the store with both eyes opened, then closed one eye to see how accurate the instantaneous aim was. Handling the guns one after another I discarded those at once that did not come up well and soon had but a half dozen left. Using these one after another I soon found one which seemed to fit me exactly and which had a fine balance and was in every way satisfactory."

Aim quickly; aim well over rising birds and under descending ones and far ahead of fast-flying marks crossing the line of sight, either directly or at an angle. More shots are missed by shooting behind than ahead of the

birds. A few shots at ducks or shore-birds flying low over the water will teach the shooter much, if he looks to see where his shot strikes the water. The shooting at one duck to see another many feet behind it fall dead will be another lesson. The gunner always should shoot with both eyes open. For the mark is seen better and the rate at which it is moving is more rapidly estimated. Mr. Huntington has more to say about guns and loads in connection with the various birds in the proper place in the book.

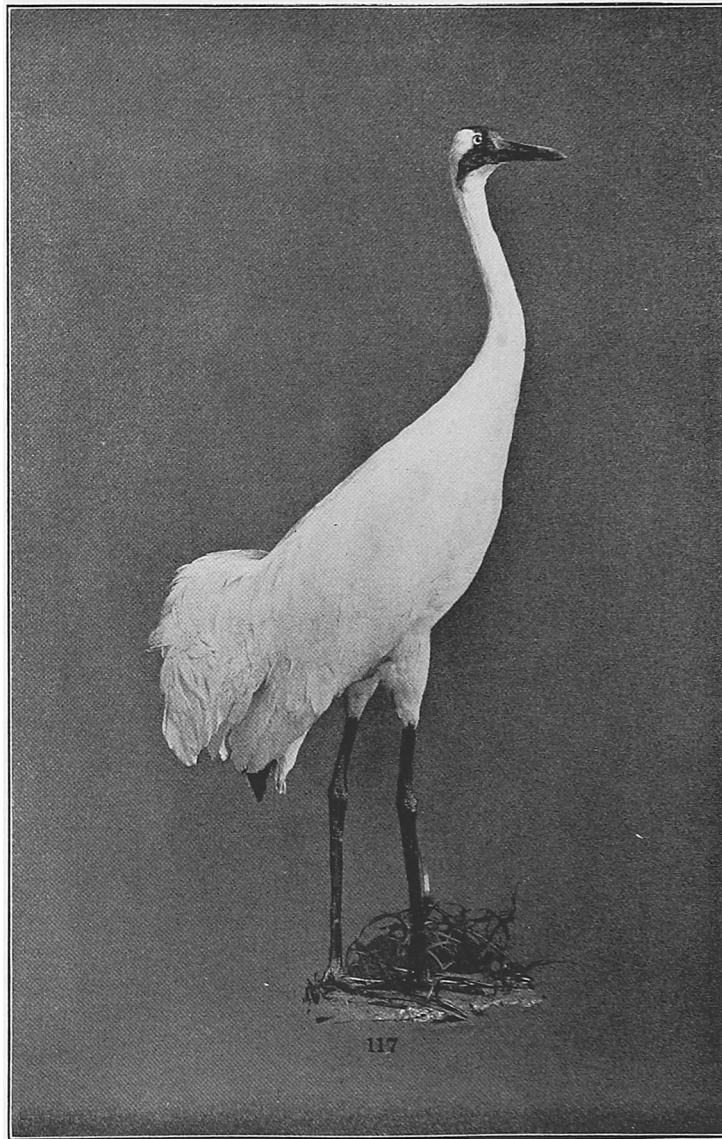
In upland shooting in the United State the dogs usually are pointers or setters. Small spaniels are used to some extent for cock-shooting, but not so much as in England. The setter and the pointer are both excellent dogs. The "pointer-man" insists that the pointer is the only dog. The "setter-man" usually will have only setters. "I have shot over both dogs, in many fields. The setters, with their silky coats, feathered legs and tails, to my eye, are the handsomer dogs. I know of no more beautiful animal in all the kingdom, than a well-marked English setter. The long hair, I admit, collects the burrs, and the dog is often badly used up by them, while but few, if any, stick to the pointer. The pointer will go farther in warm weather, and without water, and he is an excellent dog for the prairie. The setter is the better dog in cold weather, since the pointer shivers whenever he is at rest and it makes one cold to look at him.

"Pointers are by some regarded as slower dogs, but the modern pointer of field-trial stock, will go like a greyhound, and is fast enough in any field. I have seen them keep the setters busy

on the vast Western prairies.

“There is much talk, now that field-trials are held annually in all sections of the country, about the comparative merits of ‘field-trial dogs’ and ‘shooting-

ance as well as ‘bird sense’ are the qualities which go to make up a good field-dog, and after listening to the controversy until the small hours, between field-trial men and shooters, at



Crane

dogs.’ The competitive running of dogs for short heats and at a high rate of speed (the dogs going at long distances from the gun), it is argued, does not make good shooting-dogs. Fast wide-ranging dogs are often lost in the thickets and often get beyond the range of the whistle. But speed and endur-

the tavern, after a field competition, I have arrived at the conclusion that the sportsman will do well to select for his shooting, a dog of field-trial stock, but one that has been especially trained, not for a field-trial, but to hunt to the gun, as it is called, or for field shooting. The slower dog, hunting carefully

before the gun, is often referred to as a 'good meat dog.' By that is meant, of course, that more birds will be killed over him. There is much force, however, in the saying of the handlers: 'You can teach 'em to stay in, you can't teach 'em to go out.' Give me the field-trial dog with all his energy and industry, trained down to hunt to the gun where there is cover. On the vast prairies of the West, he cannot go too fast or too far to suit me, provided always he be stanch on his point and will always hold the birds until the wagon arrives."

Dogs of good pedigree will point birds without any training, nor are they hard to train sufficiently to make good field-dogs. First of all they should be taught to come instantly to the whistle. The author begins when they are quite young to have them associate the sound of the whistle with their liberation from the kennel, and as a call to meals. He has often gone to his back-door and sounded a whistle to see a lot of bright-faced puppies instantly appear at the stable windows. Having immediately let them out he feeds them. Sometimes he places the food at the other side of the house and from thence sounds the whistle, with the result that the puppies soon learn to come when called. Taking them to the fields with-

out a gun, with a few scraps of food in the shooting-coat, he rewards the first to arrive after the whistle sounds and his dogs soon learn to come in as fast as they go out. Meantime he teaches the young dogs to drop or charge at command, rewarding them for quick action, and to walk at heel until ordered to go out. Taking the young dogs to a covey of partridges, he flushes the birds after the dogs have pointed, and checks any tendency to chase when they take wing; using a cord when necessary, to bring the dog up suddenly when he runs the length of it; and punishing with the whip, using it as little as possible, however. Firing a pistol at some distance from feeding puppies will often prevent the dogs becoming gun-shy, a serious fault. If a heavy load is fired over a young thoroughbred dog before he is accustomed to such noise, he may be ruined. A gun-shy dog is usually worthless. He may be cured, but is more often not worth the training. "Some teach their dogs to retrieve. It is a showy performance in the field and I like to see it. A dog should point the dead bird first and retrieve it upon an order to do so, handling it with great care. The danger is that a dog will sooner or later mouth and thus mutilate the birds."